INNOVATION WITHIN THE MODERN SHORT STORY THROUGH THE INTERACTION OF GENDER, NATIONALITY, AND GENRE: MARGARET ATWOOD'S WILDERNESS TIPS AND ALICE MUNRO'S OPEN SECRETS

BY

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ABSTRACT

INNOVATION WITHIN THE MODERN SHORT STORY THROUGH THE INTERACTION OF GENDER, NATIONALITY, AND GENRE: MARGARET ATWOOD'S WILDERNESS TIPS AND ALICE MUNRO'S OPEN SECRETS

Through its review of the evolution of the short story and its application of feminist, postmodernist, Reader-response theory, and New Historicism to the recent short-story collections of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, this thesis asserts that both late twentieth-century writers are innovators within the short-story genre. Short-story critics' continuous disagreement over definition due to the hybrid nature of the short story is seen as analogous to Canadian women writers' ongoing concerns with issues of identity related specifically to gender and nationality. In Wilderness Tips and Open Secrets, Atwood's and Munro's problematization of gender and national identity correlates with their choice of genre. In their hands, the ensuing interaction of gender, nationality, and genre becomes a transformative force for innovation within the modern short story.

Furthermore, Atwood's and Munro's innovations within the modern short story build upon Sandra Zagarell's description of the narrative of community, a genre which flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was written mostly by women, and focused on "expanding the story of human connection and continuity." Atwood and Munro use the communal narrative strategies of folktale, legend, and gossip, as well as the traditional narrative patterns of the Romance with its masculine concept of idenity, as departure points to the production of internal innovations that energize the short-story genre as it enters a new millenium.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches

This study focuses on two internationally acclaimed writers, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, and their use of the short-story genre to explore issues of identity related to gender and nationality. It is my belief that the intersection of genre, gender and nationality in their work creates a narrative energy that enables them to transform the modern short-story form. The result is a new, more flexible framework that challenges the modern short story's preoccupation with the single self caught up in a lonely struggle for survival. I will also argue that Atwood's and Munro's attention to a more open-ended narrative form, and a more creative and collective vision of self, yields a "new" genre that expands the possibilities of the human story, and is better equipped to deal with the complexities of life as we move from the end of the twentieth century into the new millennium.

My discussion is divided in four chapters: the first presents an overview of the short story's evolution into the twentieth century; the second and third chapters focus on Atwood and Munro, respectively, and explore the confluence of their critical theories with their short fiction; the fourth chapter looks at both writers together and explores how their use of the "collection" format signifies a new direction in the evolution of the short story.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will attempt to provide a theoretical and general context for my subsequent specific discussion of Atwood and Munro, devoting a brief section to each of the three main components on which I will be focusing--i.e., genre, gender, nationality--and showing how they generally interrelate. Following this, is a brief section outlining what various critics have said about the renewal of the short story. The final section attempts

to describe my methodology.

Genre

The history of the short story is filled with contradiction, a characteristic which can be seen to have a two-fold effect on the genre, at once imbuing the short story form with a kind of literary energy, while at the same time destabilizing its status in the literary canon. For example, one hundred years ago the short story rose dramatically in commercial success only to encounter critical resistance to canonical acceptance. The success derived from the way that Poe's theorizing led to a recognition of the short story as a definite literary type at the same time that his identifications of its components were turned into a formula employed by popular writers like O. Henry. This situation, in turn, led to the critical assessment of the short story as a lesser genre in comparison to poetry, drama, or the novel, just as no sooner did the short story acquire literary status than critics began to bemoan the "decline, the decay, and the senility" of the genre (May 6).

Today, a century after the laments of critics and the genre's continued existence in the shadow of the novel, drama and poetry, the short story is said to be experiencing a renaissance. "Literature has a way of adopting the forms that suit its time best" explains Patricia Hampl, in her preface to a 1989 anthology: "Our time has embraced the short story and found it wonderfully reliable. It is a small form, but not a minor genre these days" (xlvii). It may be, however, that this warm reception is more indicative of the short story's continuing instability than it is any sign of its easy settling into the canon. Perhaps the short story's real attraction in our time lies in its continued refusal of generic definition.

One such sign of resistance is the short story's hybrid quality, which is

apparent, argues Valerie Shaw, through the genre's "affinity with other art forms" (vii), such as the more conventional genres of poetry, drama and the novel. This generic shape-shifting contributes an elusiveness to the short story that early critics of the genre recognized and attempted to claim as a distinguishing mark of the "modern" short story. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, was impressed with the short story's ability to cross generic boundaries between lyric poetry and prose fiction, and Henry James was fascinated by the short story's pliability and variety: "By doing short things I can do so many. . . touch so many subjects, break out in so many places, handle so many threads of life" (Shaw 105-06). In their search for a definition of the short story, Poe, James, and others, succeeded in emphasizing the genre's indefinite and mutable qualities.

Perhaps, too, in his description of the literary possibilities of the short story genre, James's combined use of domestic and rebellious diction and his emphasis on the short story's capacity for diversity and innovation suggests why the genre seems well-suited to the woman writer. Indeed, Virginia Woolf viewed the form of the novel as not necessarily "rightly shaped" for women's use, so that the woman writer must discover "some vehicle, not necessarily in verse, for the poetry in her" (Shaw 134-35)

Gender and Genre

In her study of the works of Canadian women writers, including Atwood and Munro, Coral Ann Howells, finds that "the commonest feature of women's resistance to tradition is their mixing of genre codes--like those of gothic romance, history, gossip and Christian fable" (5), which has the effect of "registering a feminized awareness of dislocation within the very literary

traditions in which they are writing" (6). Of course, if one locates the origins of the short story in ancient storytelling forms like folklore, legend, and gossip, one might argue, as does Angela Carter in her work on fairy tales, that the genre has long been allied with women. Nevertheless, the "modern" short story genre emerged in the nineteenth century as defined by male authors' conscious shaping of short fiction as an art form. This aesthetic, influenced by Poe's theory of unity of effect, is based upon a narrative form characterized by an inexorable, monolithic movement toward closure. Adopted by Melville, Hawthorne, and James, the short story in this phase soon came to be identified, by such practitioners as Frank O'Connor, as "the" American art form.

Modern women writers, however, have, over time, developed a divergent pattern for the short story, which recalls its origins in the oral traditions of women's storytelling and highlights its evasion of the more traditional generic description. Further, modern Canadian women writers' experience of political colonization doubles the impetus toward divergence as they maneuver evasively between the narrative patterns of oral traditions and the more inflexible narrative form of the modern short story, as well as between the dominant culture's artistic traditions and the urge to create new traditions that incorporate a specifically Canadian identity.

Nationality, Gender, and Genre

In examining the intersection of women writers and Canadian nationality, Howells concludes that the colonial experience is both Canadian and female. Focusing on the image of the Canadian wilderness, Howells argues that it is experienced differently by women writers than by men; for women it is not only an alien and threatening space surrounding them, but "it is also internalized as

a private space for creativity" (11). This "doubleness of vision," is described by Atwood in relation to Susanna Moodie's perception of the Canadian wilderness, and the concept of doubleness echoes Julia Kristeva's and Elaine Showalter's awareness of women writers' unending dialogue with the male constructs of language and literary tradition. According to Showalter's discussion of gender, women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and dominant groups" (34). Similarly, Kristeva speaks of the "doubly privileged position" from which women, aware of their complicity with the male tradition, can call attention to this tradition as a power construct (113).

Canadian women writers are in much the same position; they are aware of their complicity with their colonizers, while at the same time pointing out the power structures in which they are caught up. With this complicity in mind, Howells describes the effects of being Canadian and women on the literature such writers produce:

> It might. . . be argued that women's stories could provide models for the story of Canada's national identity. The feminine insistence on a need for revision and a resistance to open confrontation or revolution might be said to characterize Canada's national image at home and abroad, while women's stories about procedures for self-discovery, which are as yet (as always?) incomplete may be seen to parallel the contemporary Canadian situation. (3)

Nationality and gender have an impact on the writers' challenge to the conventional unwavering unity of effect and inexorable movement toward closure. National image and gender operate in Canadian women writers' imaginations as forces that produce a sense of narrative incompleteness and

discontinuity, which subverts the conventional narrative movement toward closure in a unique way.

Renewing the Genre

In her recent anthology of women's short stories, Regina Barreca argues that "women have different stories to tell than do their male counterparts" and that they "reflect a vision of the world that is particular to the woman writer" (1). In particular, she discovers an intricate web of interconnections between women short-story writers' rendering of experience, language, form, and subjectivity in their art. These qualities are not easily studied separately; rather, they interact in a way that a change in one influences the others. As a result, a writer's transgression of the traditional boundaries of a single area disrupts the conventions of the others as well. "In this way," Barreca asserts, "the personal and the political become inextricably entwined" in the stories themselves (13). She further maintains that women writers' concerns with experience, language, form, and subjectivity result in stories that present a particular framework for facing the world:

> Through intricate weavings of politics, aphoristic commentary, romance, and narrative, these short stories gain their profound power from small and large transgressions. The stories. . . expose the myths that have helped keep women "in their place." By understanding the social and economic bases for women's exclusion from the power structure, women can begin to undo the system by refusing to play their assigned roles. (13)

Of course, the boundaries transgressed and the myths exposed include those that have developed from the traditional theories about the short-story

genre. Those theories are based on the evolution of the modern short story over the past one hundred-fifty years, with its inception in Poe's definition of a narrative short enough to be read in one sitting, and producing a single, unitary effect. The "lineage" of the modern short story is distinctly male, moving, as it does, from its "fathers" (Poe, Hawthorne, Irving, Chekhov,and Maupassant) to its "sons" (Hemingway, Conrad, Faulkner, Lawrence, O.Henry, and Joyce).

This tradition, however, offers only one version of the world: that universal truths and values are inextricably linked to male experience. Barreca suggests that women writers of the short story "have their own rich and important tradition," which she describes as "a shared fund of secrets, silences, surprises, and truths belong[ing] to those who have experienced growing up female in a world where the experience is erased, written over, or devalued" (2). Women's experience of the world and of storytelling draws not necessarily on formal courses about modern short-story theory, but rather on childhood experiences of the stories told by women. Labeling such stories as womens' tales diminishes the value of them. Virginia Woolf notes how women's experience, as related in women's stories, is often belittled by the critics: "This is an important [story], the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing room" (qtd. in Barreca 2, 9). Thus, we are exhorted to acknowledge the value of past contributions made by women's daily work and art, "so that women will not feel like the first to set up camp on a territory that in fact is already richly explored" (Barreca 12). Women experience the world differently from men, and this experience, while uniquely valuable to story writing in itself, also makes a difference in women writers' attention to language, form and subjectivity.

Their attention to language may best be explained by women writers' familiarity with silence and devalued experience. Just as Woolf understands that women's experience is often dismissed as not universal in nature, Monique Wittig perceives the gender power struggles over language: "One must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal, and that women are not all reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is, continually at every moment, appropriated by men" (qtd. in Showalter, Speaking of Gender 1). The precarious relationship of women writers to a language that erases and devalues their experience can be observed in many women writers' acute awareness of the importance of naming, in particular, *who* defines the world through words and *how* that defining produces an ambivalence in women.

Uncertainty about the reliability of language to represent their experience is compounded by the addition of women writers' unease with the short story's traditional form. The energy generated by the interplay between women short-story writers' ambivalence with language and their attempts to represent experience that is considered insignificant, "systematically revise[s] and refigure[s]" the "boundaries of what has been considered the feminine world" (Barreca 5); as well, this energy disrupts the boundaries of what has been considered the traditional short-story form. Just as the words help form a specific reality, and every word contributes to recreating that reality, the recreation of women's shared fund of experience ultimately revises and refigures the short story's traditional form by challenging the fundamental rules of "an unwavering unity of effect and an inevitable movement toward closure" (Barreca 6). Moreover, according to Barreca, the short story can be transformed by subtle subversions of traditional narrative conventions and

affirmations of "the multiplicity of non closure" (10). Bypassing the conventions of the short story, and, instead, calling upon the short story's ancient roots in oral traditions such as gossip, legend, nursery and old wives' tales, enables women writers to stretch the prescribed form of the modern genre.

In order to subvert the traditional assumptions of shared narrative values, of course, women writers must work from within the traditional conventions, including the concept of the monolithic self. The acceptance of this order, even while they are challenging it, is explained by Linda Hutcheon in these terms: Women "cannot reject the subject [the notion of a fully integrated identity and authority] wholesale, mainly because they have never really been allowed it" (A Poetics of Postmodernism 68). Women writers' participation in both discourses, suggests Hutcheon, should remind these writers that their authority lies not in creating a new myth that creates a new system of dominant values by relating universal values to the female. Instead, their authority lies in their refusal to finalize the issue of identity, through their understanding that subjectivity is always gendered and through their articulation of this awareness in their writing (68).

Looking to the tradition of women writers and building a sense of community through sharing their stories is the strategy that Barreca follows in compiling her anthology of thirty modern short stories by women writers. She quotes poet Adrienne Rich as her inspiration for this approach: "today women are talking to each other. . . reading aloud to one another the books that have moved and healed us, analyzing the language that has lied about us, reading our own words aloud to each other" (13).

Both women readers and writers feel the impact of the interaction of genre and gender. Moreover, the authors' attention to the interplay between

their rendering of experience, language, form and subjectivity in their stories affects the readers' perceptions of the interaction of these qualities in their own lives. Thus, the successful transaction between writer and reader has transformational possibilities:

> These stories are successful attempts by the writers to broaden the sense of self, to reach an unrecorded past, to extend the limits of the possible, and to escape the bonds imposed by the routine allotted to women in society. With their blessing and informed by their paradoxically wise wickedness and reassuring distrust of the world,we are permitted to review, revise, and renew our own lives. (Barreca 45)

Rich's concept of a communal approach to shaping women's stories through the writing and reading of them corresponds to Sandra A. Zagarell's notion of the narrative of community deriving from "women's connections to preindustrial life" where women, who were excluded from the power of a public life and identity, developed a "strong. . . relational orientation" (259).

In response to the threat of "the social, economic, cultural, and demographic" erasures caused by "industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism," Zagarell proposes a regional tradition, which she calls narrative of community. One example, Sarah Orne Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs, is analyzed closely for its depiction of "the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself as an entity" (250). In contrast to privileging the individual, which is characteristic of the novel, the subject matter of the narrative of community is the life of a community; consequently, "the self exists here as part of the interdependent network of community" (250), sustained by "continuous small-scale negotiations"

necessary for the survival of small, diverse community living under the pressure of homogenization.

Such small-scale maneuverings are employed by Canadian women writers as they constantly negotiate between an awareness of their complicity with their colonizers and a need to call attention to the power structures in which they are caught up. This doubleness of vision also promotes a subversive disarrangement of narrative patterns in order to "throw the storyline open to question."

Devising a Methodology

The crucial first step to approaching literary texts is to understand how one's critical perspective shapes the discussions of the texts in question, which involves the need to position oneself in the critical discussion as demonstrated by Hutcheon's

analysis of the existence and evolution of her own critical situation in her essay, "The Particular Meets the Universal." As teacher, critic, and theorist, Hutcheon discloses how her educational experience in Canadian schools and universities, characterized by "a predominantly male WASP, middle-class academy," offered her a "liberal humanist education" in which " 'Literature' and its values were eternal and universal" (148). This public education, however, contrasted so sharply with Hutcheon's private experience as a woman of immigrant working-class origins that, after a time, she became more aware that "issues like class, gender and race. . . today underpin that particular definition of 'universal,' 'human' values" (149). What resulted for Hutcheon is a specific strategy to reading and teaching literary texts that includes bringing to light all the preconceived notions of both her private and public education in an attempt

to "situate" herself for her readers and students. She feels it is necessary to identify her subject matter (Canadian literature), its non-canonical status, and her approach to it:

> . . . what I specifically taught was the literature written by women--not only out of feminist principle, but because Canadian literature has been very much dominated by its women writers in the last twenty years. . . .Their texts, combined with the rapid rise of feminist critical practice, made me very aware that I had to learn to understand. . .cultural practices in general--not only literature--in the context of gender (that is, power) relations: how they are constructed, then reproduced, and then. . .challenged. I learned to think about how gender is less biological than socially produced and--happily--therefore open to historical change. (150)

Reviewing Hutcheon's approach to literary texts heightens my own awareness of specific patterns of reading and understanding literature and other "cultural practices" in the contexts of gender relations and national identity. Thus, I must situate myself as a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman of U.S. citizenship, exposed in my higher education to the same "eternal, universal value[s]" as described by Hutcheon, while at the same time exploring what has become hard to ignore in my research: feminist theory. Upon entering a Canadian university for my doctoral work, and studying postmodernist theory and Canadian literature, I soon became aware of my new externally imposed identity as an American among Canadians. What then became obvious to me was the particular energy generated by the interaction of feminist theory, postmodernist theory, and Canadian literature through their mutual explorations of identity issues.

Postmodernist Theory

A vital force behind postmodernism is deconstructionist theory. In her impressive study of postmodernism, Hutcheon discusses the contradictory nature of the attempt to define eternal, universal values: "Most theoretical discussions of difference owe much to the work of the differential system of language and its signifying processes by Saussure, Derrida, Lacan, and others. Meaning can be created only by differences and sustained only by reference to other meaning" (A Poetics 5). Deconstructionist critics insist that literary works do not yield fixed, single meanings. They argue that there can be no absolute knowledge about anything because language can never say what we intend it to mean. Language is not a precise instrument but a power whose meanings are caught in an endless web of possibilities (Derrida's notion of "differance") that cannot be untangled. Deconstructionism seeks to destabilize meanings instead of establishing them. Accordingly, deconstructionists try to show how a close reading of the language in a text (a strategy employed also by New Critics to a very different end: an attempt to resolve the text's meanings into a unified whole) reveals conflicting, contradictory impulses that "deconstruct" or break down its apparent unity. In this way, deconstructionist strategies contribute to the postmodernist concern for questioning and extending the meanings of a text. With this view in mind, the nineteenth-century aesthetic of the "modern" short story's "unity of effect" can be deconstructed through recalling the short story's resistance to generic description and its origins in ancient oral traditions. I am especially interested in the deconstructive strategies employed by Atwood and Munro in order to subvert the short-story aesthetic of unity of effect. The oral tradition is used by both authors working within the short-story genre as a way to show how a story is

transformed in its retelling, a tactic which both questions and extends any initial impetus toward an aesthetic of unity of effect.

Feminist Theory

Feminist criticism employs some of the strategies of the deconstructionist argument. In her analysis of the relationship between postmodernism and feminist theory, Jane Flax argues that "the single most important advance in feminist theory is that the existence of gender relations has been problematized. Gender can no longer be treated as a simple, natural fact" (73). Elizabeth Abel similarly contends that "gender informs and complicates both the writing and the reading of texts" (1), and she suggests the way that a feminist, deconstructive approach to literature challenges the eternal and universal values of the Western, middle-class, white, heterosexual, male:

> Aware that women writers inevitably engage a literary history and system of conventions shaped primarily by men, feminist critics. . .strive to elucidate the acts of revision, appropriation, and subversion that constitute a female text. The analysis of female talent grappling with a male tradition translates sexual difference into literary differences of genre, structure, voice and plot. (2)

A postmodernist focus on language as a power system rather than a precise instrument of meaning is a primary concern of feminist criticism. Additionally, this approach employs such sociological challenges as Luce Irigaray's feminist interrogation of literature: "the maxims that pass for the truth of human experience in literature, are organizations, when they are not fantasies, of the dominant culture" (qtd. in Jacobus 39). Feminist critics seek to correct or supplement what they regard as a predominantly male-dominated

critical perspective with a feminist consciousness. Consequently, feminist critics' approach to literature is characterized by the use of a broad range of disciplines, including history, sociology, psychology and linguistics, to provide a perspective sensitive to feminist issues. In her well-known discussion, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Showalter lists four models of difference that are most often used when theorizing about women's writing: "biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural" (16). The cultural model is preferred by Showalter because it "acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race, nationality and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole," (27) which draws women writers closer through their experience of living "a duality--as members of the general culture and as partakers of women's culture" (29). For women writers of the short story, writing within the dominant tradition of the genre, Showalter's conceptualization of these women as writing "inside two traditions simultaneously" is much like Hutcheon's explanation of the postmodernist writer's function of "underlining and undermining" literary tradition, which brings us back to the deconstructionist strategy of questioning *and* extending meaning in a text. Of particular importance in this study will be my attempt to explore how both authors use the narrative conventions of romance as departure points for their explorations of gender relationships.

New Historicism

Another critical approach that is valuable in dealing with women's writing is New Historicism. By shifting the emphasis from the work to the period, such critics move beyond both the facts of the author's personal life and the the text

itself to the social and intellectual context in which the author composed the work. Such an approach can be used to examine the evolution of the short-story genre in relation to its unequal successes commercially and critically. An overview of the evolution of short-story form and theory will naturally focus on genre theory, and more specifically, on literary historians' understanding of the development of a genre through examining short stories for evidence of changing cultural trends. New Historicists, however, attempt to read a period in all its dimensions, including political, economic, social, and aesthetic concerns. Finally, New Historicists sensitize us to the fact that the history on which we choose to focus is colored by being reconstructed from our own present moment and this reconstructed history affects our writing and reading of texts. When, at the end of the twentieth century, we read the short stories of Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and James, we bring to our readings our own present "situations," which are invariably different from those produced by the nineteenth-century context of the accepted notions of universal values and a unitary text. My analysis of both Munro's and Atwood's treatments of the archetypal story of the "lost girl," reveals that in retelling stories of girls or young women disappearing into the wilds or being abducted, the accepted patterns of women's helplessness and victimization are subverted.

Reader-response Theory

New Historicism's reconstruction of history in the context of the present moment is a critical strategy employed by reader-response critics as well. That is, the reader's response to the text is believed to be as crucial to the production of a text as the writer's intentions. Although many critical theories inform reader-response criticism, all reader-response critics aim to describe the

reader's experience of a work. In ""Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," Patricinio P.Schweickart describes how this approach may affect a woman reader: "a literary education may very well cause her grave psychic damage: schizophrenia. . . .For the male reader, the text serves as the meeting ground of the personal and the universal. . .he is invited to validate the equation of maleness with humanity" (26). Obviously, this invitation is not extended to the female reader, who then feels "odd woman out." Consequently, Schweickart extols the union of feminist criticism with reader-response criticism: "Both dispute the fetishized art object, the 'Verbal Icon' of New Criticism, and both seek to dispel the objectivist illusion that buttresses the authority of the dominant critical tradition" (24). Reader-response critics do not assume that a literary work is a finished product with formal properties, as, for example, formalist critics do. There is no single definitive reading of a work, because the critical assumption is that readers create rather than discover meaning in texts. Just as postmodernist and feminist approaches to literature attempt to produce a plurality of meanings, reader-response criticism encourages an exploration of the possibilities for a plurality of readings shaped by the readers' experience of the text. This sort of strategy can help us to understand how our responses are shaped both by the text and by our present reality.

In particular, my close reading of individual stories by both Atwood and Munro reveals how both writers' acute awareness of the makeshift quality of the short story in the hands of its writer and reader produces a short-story form more fluid and adaptable than the traditional aesthetic.

A Theoretical Approach for Our Time

"Western culture, according to Flax, is in the middle of a fundamental transformation: a 'shape of life' is growing old'" (67). In response, Flax proposes three categories of thought that "best present (and represent) our own time 'apprehended in thought': psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and postmodern philosophy" (68). Certainly, Freudian psychoanalytic theory has been rendered problematic in its presentation of the male psyche as the norm for human psychological development, and to address the issue, Flax calls on the feminist theories of Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Judith Kegan Gardiner, and others who take issue with Freud's "male" model of psychoanalysis and posit their own insights into the differences between male and female identity structures. Rather than focus on girls' developmental difficulty in identifying with their fathers (as is the developmental course for boys), Chodorow and company emphasize the mother-daughter relationship and its fluid and processual nature of female development.

In "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," Gardiner proposes that "the concept of female identity provides a key to understanding the special qualities of contemporary writing by women" (178). Gardiner sees a connection between feminist reader-response theory and female identity theory: "This perspective. . .helps us to analyze some typical narrative strategies of women writers--the manipulation of identifications between narrator, author, and reader" (179). As well, this perspective aids in the production of a plurality of meanings and readings.

In her famous essay outlining a feminist, pluralist approach to literary criticism, Annette Kolodny cautions against creating a new monolithic theory: "Adopting a 'pluralist' label does not mean. . .that we cease to disagree; it only

means that we entertain the possibility that different readings, even of the same text, may be differently useful, even illuminating, within different contexts of inquiry" (185). Flax echoes this view: "Feminist theories, like other forms of postmodernism, should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs may be" (89).

My choice of a pluralist approach to this study of Canadian women writers of the short story is certainly influenced by Kolodny's cautionary statement: "just because we will no longer tolerate the specifically sexist omissions and oversights of earlier critical schools and methods does not mean that, in their stead, we must establish our own 'party line' " (185). I also fully accept Kolodny's suspicions that "most critics are really structuralists. . .because what we are seeking are patterns (or structures) that can order and explain the otherwise inchoate," (184) and I admit to using this paradoxical approach in my examination of the interaction of genre, gender and nationality in the short stories by Canadian women writers.

My hope is that in keeping with Atwood's and Munro's imaginative and transformative deployment of the combined forces of genre, gender, and nationality in their work, the energy generated by my use of a variety of critical approaches including feminist, New Historicist, reader-response, and postmodernist theory will produce a challenging interrogation and extension of meanings in the texts of Canadian women writers of the short story. I trust that this exploration of the marked suitability of the short story to Canadian women writers will unearth at least one secret to the success of this alliance on all accounts: an ability to resist conventional definition and categorization and,

thus, as Munro has imaginatively suggested, to "demand new judgments and solutions and throw the windows open on inappropriate and unforgettable scenery" (Who Do You 172-73).

Chapter One

Overview of the Short Story

In order to appreciate Atwood's and Munro's innovative treatment of the short- story form, it is important to recognize that their explorations of personal identity can be linked with questions of the short-story's own generic identity. Moreover, theorists' confusion over story definition lends itself to my argument that the short-story genre is well-suited to Canadian women writers' concerns with issues of identity. Thus, clear discussion of the impact of gender and nationality on the modern short-story genre first requires an overview of its generic identity. Therefore, my review of the evolution of the short story will focus mainly on issues of definition that relate to shape and theory, and the particular issues of short-story shape and theory that will be introduced here are: problems of definition, commercial success versus scarcity of critical support, roots in oral tradition, and generic confusion.

As a relatively new genre in contrast to poetry, drama, or the novel, the short story seems to have an uncertain position within the literary canon. Questions of its generic identity abound; as well, compared to other genres, there is a marked lack of short-story theory. Perhaps the generic elusiveness is due to the short story's hybrid ancestry, including its origins in the oral traditions of folk tale, legend, and gossip, which tend to deter any official aesthetic classification. Another factor may be the short story's kinship with other art forms. Indeed, as Valerie Shaw observes in her critical introduction to the short story, it was "by crossing generic boundaries and applying thoughts about lyric poetry to prose fiction" (vii), that Edgar Allan Poe attempted to define features

of the short story, and his subsequent theorizing continues to influence attempts at generic definition.

The modern short story, however, owes its most accepted working definition to Poe, who, in his 1842 review of Hawthorne's, Twice Told Tales, claimed that the tale (or the short story) is capable of being perused at one single sitting by the reader, and that it provides a unity of impression or effect which is planned and produced through the artist's conscious shaping of events in the story. To Poe's theorizing on the shape of the modern story, Shaw adds that his transference of the characteristics of lyric poetry to the short story strengthens the theory of hybridization of the modern short story. Moreover, if one locates the origins of the short story in folk-tale, legend, and gossip, as do short-story theorists, Angela Carter, and Ian Reid, who also points in his study to the genre's origins in the sketch, anecdote, yarn, parable, and fable, then one can theorize the evolution of the modern short story's shape (the story's length and arrangement of parts and overall unity of effect) as well as it history of hybridization.

Problems of Definition

If identity begins with definition, and if, as Reid suggests, the designation of a unique literary genre with the label "short story" did not appear officially until the OED Supplement of 1933, then anyone who undertakes to define the modern short story will first concede the short story's "problems of definition" (1). These problems include the fact that "the history of the modern short story embraces diverse tendencies, some of which have stretched, shrunk or otherwise altered previous conceptions of the nature of the genre" (Reid 3). Because it often wears the "hand-me-down" garments of other literary

categories, the undisguised nature of the short story is difficult to represent, although through the years clear identification has been attempted.

Short-story definitions commonly focus on shape and theory, of which the main features seem to be shortness and hybridization, respectively. The problem of definition, however, rests in the short story's diversity and flexibility. These characteristics raise such questions as why the commercial popularity of the short-story genre remains in marked contrast to the dearth of critical theorizing on the genre; how a genre that is considered "modern" can be rooted in ancient oral traditions such as folk and fairy-tales, gossip, legend, anecdotes, and jokes; how the short story can use the methods of more "established" genres, such as poetry, the novel, and drama and remain a distinct genre, and even what constitutes "short" and what constitutes "story" in relation to the short-story genre. These particular questions can be traced to the problem of generic identity, and, as such, have been addressed by many short story writers and critics.

This identity confusion, however, in part, caused by the hybrid quality and flexibility of the short-story genre is attractive to Canadian women writers whose concerns with gender and national identity compel them to challenge the conventional definitions and roles. Atwood's and Munro's recent short stories are clearly rooted in the geography and psyche of Canada. Drawing heavily on the oral traditions of storytelling as well as on the methods of more established genres like novels, poetry and drama, both writers create stories whose shapes and patterns defy Poe's theorizing on the shape of the modern short story, at the same time that they fall within the short-story tradition.

Commercial Success and Scarcity of Critical Support

The short story was practiced as a "modern" genre by such nineteenth-century writers as Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne, who also inadvertently facilitated its reputation as a "popular" genre through the publication of their stories in magazines of the day. Reid explains the resulting contradictory position in which these writers found themselves: as "magazine publication expanded hugely during the nineteenth century," it advanced public acceptance of "stereotypical, formulaic stories" which resulted in critics' reluctance to "take the short story seriously as a substantive genre" (1). A further explanation of the lack of serious critical attention paid to the relatively new short-story genre is offered by short-story theorist, Suzanne Ferguson, who reminds us that compared to the novel, the "economies" of the short story are more complex: "Like short poems, short stories must be printed with something else to make their circulation profitable. What they come with--other stories or other kinds of printed material--may distract readers from perceiving them as discrete works of art" (178).

According to noted theorist, Charles E. May, however, the inferior status of the short story is the disastrous outcome of the coincidental combination of theorizing by Brander Matthews and O. Henry's commercial success at about the same time (5). When Matthews's The Philosophy of the Short Story appeared at the turn of the nineteenth century, rather than moving short-story theory beyond formula, according to May, it tended to reinforce the view of the short story as simple, formulaic writing. Matthews emphasized the short story's generic distinction from the novel and attempted to create certain rules based on Poe's earlier theories of short fiction (5), including an emphasis on totality of effect, controlled plot, and symmetry of design. May observes, however, that

"whereas Poe aimed at a 'patterned dramatization of life'. . .O. Henry and those that followed him made this dramatic pattern mechanical" (7). The critical success of Matthews's theory and the commercial success of O.Henry's stories prompted other critics and writers to imitate the respective efforts, but usually with less artistic effect. The reason for this failure, suggests Shaw, is that "Poe's intention of transmitting an idea 'unblemished, because undisturbed' actually encourages the writer to manipulate his audience so thoroughly that it becomes hard to draw the line between artistry and tyranny" (51). The ensuing efforts in this direction frequently gave rise to a systematic kind of writing that resulted in the short story's growing reputation as a lesser genre. "The serious readers and critics called for an end to it, filling the quality periodicals with articles on the 'decline, the decay, and the senility' of the short story" (May 5-6).

Matthews's popular formula--totality of effect, control of plot, and symmetry of design--all contribute to short-story shape. Matthews's theory begins with the assumption that "English writers of the late nineteenth century lacked a tradition of storytelling as a distinct literary art, and that the main reason for this was the supremacy of the Victorian novel" (Shaw 4). However, Matthews's attempt to elevate the status of the short story through creating a poetics of this overlooked genre had more effect on story shape than on story theory. His rules isolated the short story and solidified its form with little regard for its hybrid nature, and the wholehearted embrace of these rules by other writers, readers, and critics was instrumental in shaping the commercial, formulaic story.

Matthews's first rule echoes Poe's opinion "that the length of a story was relative to its central motive" (Shaw 11). The call for a single impression left on the reader during the brief period of perusal seems to make brevity a necessity.

The impact of "'totality of effect" on story shape is borne out by contemporary critics like Neil Besner and David Staines, who maintain that "such uninterrupted communion between writer and reader allows for the 'unique or single *effect*' of the story's concentrated focus" (ix). It seems clear that an emphasis on "concentrated focus" will affect a story's shape, namely its length. It also seems clear that in constructing a "single *effect*," a less than skillful writer may resort to a formula rather than to artistic imagination. In his investigation of the short story as a lesser genre, Thomas A. Gullason remarks that the "word 'formula' has been so often attached to the short story that it suggests a robot-like, unimaginative craft" (20), and he, too, believes that "the O.Henry plots have added to the mechanical charge" (21).

Matthews' second rule for the short story calls for "control of plot," and most likely contributed to Gullason's "mechanical charge." According to Poe, plot is secondary to effect: "having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, [a skillful literary artist]. . .combines [invented] events as may best aid. . .in establishing this preconceived effect." Whereas Shaw believes that the short story gains literary status from Poe's demand that the writer take complete artistic control (9-10), Gullason sees Poe's theory of combining events to establish a preconceived effect as a "formula" that is as destructive as "Aristotle's theory of the beginning, middle and end, something whole and complete, which he related to tragedy and which has been applied by others to all imaginative literature" (21). Reid also views the Aristotelian notion that the tripartite phases of plot determine a story's wholeness as ultimately insignificant for short fiction: "Fiction can be as disjunctive, yet as emotionally compelling as a weird dream" (7). The formula story with its controlled plot, nevertheless, gained recognition and still holds a

measure of commercial success. O. Henry's stories are, of course, seen as the prototypes, but Shaw warns about the drawback of such single-minded plotting that creates "narrative compression by making plot serve a single realization," and she cautions that even though irony may be produced, the original effect of surprise can never be repeated (57).

The concept of narrative compression operates in Matthews' third "rule" for the short story: symmetry of design. The idea of narrative order and balance correlates with the demand for a discernible plot, and both notions certainly have an impact on the short story's shape. Shaw, however, takes exception to this formulaic scheme: "Brander Matthews. . .was so anxious to prove that the short story is a sharply defined form that he undervalued anecdotal and episodic fiction in preference for stories with a symmetrical design" (8). The privileging of some methods of unity (symmetry of design) over others, Shaw believes, neglects the opinion that concision should be used by the short-story writer primarily to express the limitless possibilities of human experience (8). Thus, Matthew's theory of symmetrical design in the short story seems to prescribe a narrative manipulation that produces a formal, walled-in constriction rather than a more open framework for viewing the inexhaustible human vista.

Matthews's popular theory for attaining concision through totality of effect, plot control, and symmetrical design attracted many American short-story writers concerned with attaining for the lowly short story the elevated status of the more established genres of the novel, poetry, and drama. These writers were also determined to distinguish American writing as equal to but distinct from its European predecessors. Often, however, this preoccupation with shaping the short story's autonomy denied some of its most important qualities:

the hybridization and flexibility of the short story. The effect, in this case, could be one of constriction rather than concision.

Emphasizing the short story's hybrid and flexible characteristics has been one strategy employed by Canadian women writers whose experiences with questions of identity prompt them to challenge the conventional notion of autonomy rather than to pursue it. In my discussion of Atwood and Munro I will attempt to show how their stories recall the genre's relationships with other storytelling traditions and genres. In doing so, I will argue that they open the short-story framework to include a vast array of human experience, thus, emphasizing another important generic quality: concision.

Roots in Oral Tradition

A major problem in story definition is that while some inroads to story theory have been made over time, the genre seems stuck in the old designs and schemes of commercially popular story writing that have affected the shape of the modern short story. Identifying a further problem of definition in his critical survey of the modern short story, H.E. Bates notes that story shape is also affected by "the hybrid nature of a genre which owes. . . something to virtually every other kind of literature" (Shaw 9). The hybridization of the short story is traced by Carter beyond the written tradition to the oral tradition of story telling: "For most of human history, literature has been narrated not written--heard, not read. So fairy tales, folk talks, stories from the oral tradition, are. . .the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our world" (ix). These important storytelling traditions have prompted story critics, generally focused on the written word and the short story's affinity with other literary genres, to pay more attention to

the modern short story's ancestry in oral tradition.

Most contemporary studies of the short story trace its evolution from a simple beginning when ordinary people spun their tales for their audience, be it their family, their friends, or their tribe. For ages, this was how story was made, yet most critics prefer to mark the beginning of the short story as recently as two or three hundred years ago. The focus on the artistry of the short story, and on its creation in the artistic imagination of oral story tellers, leads ultimately to the idea of a literary genre of fiction. In support of this idea, Carter reminds us of Vladimir Propp's observation that, "in most languages the word 'tale' is a synonym for 'lie' or 'falsehood.' 'The tale is over; I cannot lie anymore'--thus do Russian narrators conclude their stories" (xi). The point is that oral storytelling is as much a fictionalizing as are written stories; and therefore, oral tradition is a legitimate part of the tradition of the modern short story aesthetic.

The nineteenth-century impulse to record in writing the oral folk tradition of storytelling, Carter explains, results from the establishment of "the nation state with its own exclusive culture; with its exclusive affinity to the people who dwelt therein" (xv). In this way, tales recorded by folklorists like the Grimm brothers entered nineteenth-century German literature; however, in making the transition from an oral to a written tradition, coarse expressions were removed as folk entertainment was refined to make it acceptable to the middle-class sensibility (Carter xvii). Carter further maintains that because most folk and fairy tales revolve around relations between men and women, filtered through either "magical romance or coarse domestic realism" (xviii), these tales have evolved into the twentieth century's romantic fairy tale or dirty joke, a more direct and vigorous form than the fairy tale (xvii). The accessibility of the fairy or folk tale, however, with its pure motivation to entertain and its simple

narrative drive, which Carter suggests is itself propelled by the audience's question: "What happened then? . . .survives today because it has transformed itself into a medium for gossip, anecdote, rumour" (xxi).

The idea that narrative is driven by the ancient question, "What happened then?" is considered by Reid as central to the evolution from oral tradition's anecdote to modern literature's short story. He theorizes that oral tradition's anecdote has evolved into the yarn and the tale, in the form of fairy tales and tall tales; nevertheless, the anecdotal short story remains a popular mode in American fiction. Often the anecdote is humorous in nature, and Reid suggests that the humorous local story is parent to the short story (27). One of the most famous practioners of the humorous local story, Bret Harte, offered his own theories on its origins and American characteristics. According to him, such stories were told in public meeting places in the particular dialect and storytelling habits of the people, and were about topics of specific interest to them (Shaw 88-89). The important role of oral tradition in shaping the modern short story cannot be ignored. In his study of the evolution of oral tales into modern short fiction, Reid divides them into two sorts: fairy tales about magic, and yarns, or "anecdotes, narrated in the colloquial and the casual tones appropriate to. . . oral tradition" (33).

In his discussion of the yarn, "sailor's slang in which rope-making becomes a metaphor for story-spinning" (33), Reid emphasizes a major characteristic of the oral tradition: its implied audience. Obviously, a group activity such as rope-making suggests a ready audience for the entertainment that accompanies the labor, and the better the entertainment the more enthusiastic the audience, and, one hopes, the more enthusiastic the audience the more labor is accomplished. Perhaps as the audience became more

demanding, the yarns became more extravagant, at which point, Reid maintains, they evolved into tall tales, characterized by "fantastic content, broad comedy, narrator's presence and colloquial idiom," the type of story told so well by Mark Twain (33). We often think of Twain as "telling" his stories rather than writing them because he incorporates so skillfully the characteristics of the tall tale. Twain's invocation of the narrator's presence and his use of colloquial idiom contribute specifically to the oral quality of his stories, which, suggests Shaw, "keep[s] us constantly aware of a human personality pervading the material. . .create[ing] a strong illusion of a listener who wants to know" (82). The ancient question, "What happened then?" drives this narrative.

As critics look to the oral tradition as a forerunner of the modern short story, additional narrative techniques like dramatic monologue or confession also suggest the illusion of an audience (Shaw 82), and certainly, both techniques imply a distinct human voice narrating. Bates contends that the short story is shaped more by the perceived reader (listener) than by plot, through the writer "relying on the attuned. . .audience." Bates's description of the creative exchange between audience and writer recalls reader response theory. They are dependent on each other for the creation of story, and although audience becomes increasingly important, "more important still. . . becomes the attitude of writer. . .towards that audience" (77). Stories that recall the teller and the audience and the atmosphere of ancient storytelling (the campfire, the shipyard, the kitchen, the bar-room, the confessional), are stories, nevertheless, strongly shaped by the narrative impulse.

The question "What happened then?" is a continual pressure on the story's shape, whether it be loose and episodic or compact and continuous. The infusion of various narrative techniques from oral tradition serves to open

up the short-story form to new possibilities rather than to confine it to a set formula. The oral tradition plays a prominent role not only in the evolution of the modern short story, but also in its present day potential which Shaw delineates: "The permanent capacity of short fiction [is] to return to its ancient origins in folk tale and legend; its ability to make completely new uses of apparently unsophisticated literary conventions; its recurrent concern with an audience thought of as an intimate group or community; and its frequent tendency towards the instinctual rather than the intellectual" (vii).

Its affinity with ancient storytelling traditions is just one example, although I would argue a very important one, of the hybridization of the modern short story, which, Shaw explains, "owes. . .something to virtually every other kind of literature. . . . Each age adds more possibilities and these remain opportunities for short story writers in perpetuity" (9).

Engaged in an on-going dialogue with past storytelling traditions and conventions, Atwood and Munro exhibit this tendency to challenge certain traditions while working within them. Their attraction to the oral traditions of fairy tales, legends and folk tales, as well as their fascination with such literary traditions as romance, includes an acute awareness of the seductive power that these past traditions wield in shaping our ideas about identity.

Generic Confusion

Short-story critics agree that the genre is muddied. "This genre has no monotypic purity" (8), claims Reid. The short story's hybrid quality is further described by Ferguson as the result of "persistently trying to move into the prestige circles of the genres. . .by marrying characteristics of several sub genres of the short story with characteristics of [the major genres] poetry, drama

and the novel" (192). Although Ferguson maintains that such unions "brought the short story into its own 'social' success" (192), the short story still ranks as a lesser genre behind its older, influential, and more accepted canonical forerunners. According to Shaw, however, the short story's inferior generic status is its strength: "Precisely because it has not been highly regarded in comparison with poetry, the novel or drama, the short story has lent itself to continuous experimentation--and to playfulness" (22). This "playfulness' is evident in the short story's circular route to generic identity. Through its evasion of a particular generic identity, which is characterized by its sporadic connections with other genres, the short story has staked out a small literary space that provides it with a flexibility of shape and a wide range of subjects, which, in turn, contribute to the difficulty of defining the short story.

The Short Story and the Novel

One of the more direct critical paths to short-story identity is to define it "against" the accepted genres. How the short story differs from the novel is a common topic in generic discussion and prompted early theorists like Matthews to insist that the short story "is a genre" (May 57) with different concerns, than has the novel, about form and style and subject. Despite such attempts to divorce the two genres, however, critics like Shaw have noted the way that the historical evolution of the short story has been closely tied to that of the novel. She recalls that because of the popularity of the serialized novel, "in the nineteenth century it was not thought at all odd to serialize short stories as well" (31). Short-story writers and critics, however, who felt strongly that the short story was a distinct genre, protested the novelization of the short story. The frequent appearances of essays on the short story's identity during the first two

decades of the twentieth century, particularly in America, are cited by Reid, who summarizes their main points: "These repeat unanimously the view that it is a distinctive genre whose uniqueness rests in three related qualities: it makes a simple impression on the reader, it does so by concocting a crisis, and it makes that crisis pivotal in a controlled plot" (54). The short story developed these distinct characteristics and gained in popularity, and short-story theory developed simultaneously (Shaw 3), and as further artistic experimentation and hybridization of the developing genre progressed, existing descriptions and attempts at generic definition were stretched and altered to fit the ongoing evolution of the short story.

Moving into the twentieth century, the short story embodied the mood of the new era. In a break with the novel's inexorable and ideological movement toward a unifying resolution, the popular nineteenth-century formulaic story was disrupted by the rise of the open-ended story. Short-story critics, Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Cleary, differentiate between the two: "Some critics, having come to respect. . .the story that does not 'resolve,' now saw closure as the key to story aesthetics. . . . [they] seized upon its clear distinction from the novel" (110). According to Thomas M. Leitch, a major characteristic of the modern short story became greater open endedness, a movement away from a foregrounding of the end itself, to a focus on the audience's anticipation of closure. As Leitch explains, "short stories are. . . shaped by our expectation of an imminent teleology, but it does not follow that they will display such a teleology" (132). This development in the short story debunks the novel's tradition of resolution. The theoretical tendency to define the short story against the novel persists, however, in the "widespread notion that unless it can be seen as useful apprentice work for budding novelists, short-story writing must

be a compromise" (Shaw 2).

Its capability to accommodate an infinite variety of human experiences, nevertheless, makes the short story decidedly attractive to novelists who wish to escape the restraint of novelistic resolution. It was, after all, the short story's pliability and variety that fascinated novelist, Henry James, who believed that "by doing short things I can do so many. . .touch so many subjects, break out in so many places, handle so many threads of life" (qtd inShaw 5-6). Of course, James, himself, was hard pressed to create a "short thing," and his greatest success with short fiction was in the novella form. He proposed, nevertheless, to "project. . . [his] small circular frame upon as many different spots as possible" (Shaw 5), and in his stories, this intense focus centers upon one revelatory moment in which a character sees or has forced upon him a truth that changes his life. A single intense focus on the "moment" is what short-story writers aspire to, according to Nadine Gordimer: "A discrete moment of truth is aimed at--not *the* moment of truth, because the short story doesn't deal in cumulatives" (11).

Both James's and Gordimer's descriptions coincide with James Joyce's concept of the "epiphany." Besner and Staines identify Joyce's concept of epiphany as the "most enduring modern incarnation of Poe's definition" of a story's "unique or single effect" (xi). According to Reid, the short story is suited to rendering the epiphanic moment: "by virtue of its brevity and delicacy it can. . .single out with special precision those occasions when an individual is most alert or most alone" (28). The short story's capacity to render a single moment of an isolated individual has been seized on by short-story critics who contrast this subject matter with that of the typical nineteenth-century novel's concern with the establishment of the individual's role in a larger community, generally

though "manners, marriage, and money" (Reid 29).

Elizabeth Bowen, concerned with how this capacity for the epiphany distinguishes the short story from the novel, comments on the short story's greater ability to focus on the solitary individual and to resist the novel's tendency toward a unifying resolution, in order to more effectively "approach aesthetic and moral truth" (10-11). Frank O'Connor maintains Bowen's focus on the solitary individual by foregrounding the "submerged population group," a marginalized group, living on the fringes and reacting to its isolation from the larger community. Like Reid, O'Connor believes that the short story is a genre well-suited to voicing "an intense awareness of human loneliness" (11). Out of all this short-story theorizing, by critics and practitioners alike, however, no single, clear definition of the short-story genre appears; what it *is* clear is that the short story, when it is defined against the novel, is distinguished as a separate genre, one more flexible and open to experiment.

I believe it is this flexibility that attracts writers like Atwood and Munro to the short-story genre. Their interests in a more fluid process of identity formation accords well with a genre open to experimentation.

The Short Story and Poetry

Shaw maintains that it is impossible to provide any definitive description of the short story: nonetheless, she attempts one: "the only constant feature seems to be the achievement of a narrative purpose in a comparatively brief space" (21). This conception of the short story as a brief narrative impulse appears to be the result of crossing definitions of the novel and the lyric poem. Generally, theorists have defined the short story *against* the novel; in contrast, they have tended to point out the short story's *affinity with* poetry (from Poe).

According to Reid, the short story appeared as an accepted genre in Europe and America in conjunction with the rise of Romanticism, and it adopted some characteristics of Romantic poetry, especially the lyric poem's focus on a single moment in an individual's inner life (28). The subjective orientation of the short story is successful, Shaw believes, because a short story's brevity can better express a final sense of the unwritten or the unsaid, a silence, that is at the core of both the lyric poem and the short story.

It is ultimately the operation of language that provides such compression, that gives the short story, Shaw claims, its capacity to "poeticize prose" (233). Similarly, according to Richard Kostelanetz, "contemporary writers of short stories. . . use. . . figurative language, metaphor, the evocation of sharply symbolic (rather than comprehensive) details. . .in order to create a fiction not of surfaces and clarity but of depth and complexity" (216-17). The lyric short story, which is recognized by Eileen Baldeshwiler for its reliance on the open ending and its expression "in the condensed, evocative, and often figured language of the poem" (202), does not entirely displace plot by bringing pressure to bear on language in attempting to convey a shift of inner mood, but it does liberate plot from the restrictions of convention and, Kostelanetz suggests, "trace[es] complex emotions to a closing cadence utterly unlike the reasoned resolution of the conventional cause and effect narration. It is here that we observe the birth of the "open' story" (206).

"Open" is a good term for the modern short story's rejection of the novel's linear plot in favor of a less ordered narrative and a final inconclusiveness that opens the story to the readers' interpretations as filtered through their specific lenses of experience. My discussion of Atwood and Munro will examine how the unique lens of experience (gender and nationality) through which they view

the world enables them to voice a sense of a reality that has long remained silent. Using the evocative language of poetry, and a final inconclusiveness shaped by the emotion of the moment, their stories communicate an experience of identity that is provisional and unstable.

The Short Story and Drama

The immediacy of the modern short story may be a quality that prompts critics to align it with drama. Shaw seems drawn to this quality in Poe's stories, when she describes "Poe's theatricality, his disposition towards portentous atmospheres and melancholy presages, his tendency to. . .decorative cadences. . .his insistence on precise facts" (41). Of course, Poe's insistence on a story's single impression gained in a single sitting also corresponds to dramatic immediacy. While most critics are more concerned with the influences of the novel and poetry, drama does exert its influence on the short story. James was especially taken with its possibilities as is illustrated in his admiration of Maupassant's tendency to compress and heighten narration. In this light, James attempted to project his own "small circular frame" upon one revelatory moment, in what he came to call "the scenic method of narration. . . framing the entire narrative sweep within [several] similar scenes" (Shaw 75). For James, this dramatic technique permitted the effects of the action to touch all the characters, but in a very compressed manner that could actually "rival the novel in complexity" (Shaw 65) .

Another characteristic of drama that operates equally well in the short story is the use of an unreliable narrator who confirms that our perceptions of reality are unstable and inconstant. The short story's capacity to render a fragmented and unstable perception of "reality" through the exportation of the

unbalanced psyche is evidenced in Poe's narrations, and the ability to register shifts in inner moods or perceptions marks the epiphanic stories of Joyce.

In the case of Atwood and Munro, their use of unreliable narrators parallels the authors' recognition of the impossibility of any definitive representation of the "true" story, just as their fascination with the fluctuations within their characters' sense of self coordinates with the short-story genre's capacity to communicate complexity through dramatic compression.

What Constitutes Short?

In discussions of definition, two questions most often asked in relation to the genre's name are: What constitutes "short" and what constitutes "story"?

When we theorize what it is that makes a story short, we must be aware that the shift of focus from larger scale social patterns to individual perceptions of reality marks not only the short story's break from the novel's subject matter, but also the advent of the modern short story. The characteristic shortness can also be seen in light of Nadine Gordimer's analogy of human experience to "the flash of fireflies . . . in darkness. Short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of . . . the present moment. Ideally, they have learned to do without explanation of what went on before, and what happens beyond this point" (180). The presentation of the individual's alienation from the surrounding community, the fragmentation of a continuous reality represented in the novel, and the intense focus on one component of the novel's larger scale, all contribute to the modern short story's brevity.

A discussion of the short story's brevity should begin with Poe's 1842 declaration that a tale is capable of being perused at one single sitting. Reid, however, pragmatically suggests that instead of the "reader's span of

concentration" determining story length, it is decided as much by editorial necessity: "Henry James mentions the 'hard-and-fast rule' among contemporary magazines of keeping inside the range of six and eight thousand words" (9), a range that has shrunk since his time. Putting aside such editorial exigencies as "space limitations, restrictive house styles and editorial stipulations" (Shaw 7), James and Poe were responding to the idea that a story's length should correspond to the writer's "preconceived effect" (Shaw 11). Poe's theory also operates in Shaw's own working definition of the short story, which she describes as "a stretch of fictional prose. . .shaped and controlled so as to. . .create. . .a pleasing, unified impression on the reader's imagination" (22). Furthermore, according to Shaw, in order to achieve this impression, the story's movement should be swift, which means it can only suggest for the readers all the small halts and digressions they are accustomed to in "real" life (46).

Adjusting form to subject is another possible explanation for what constitutes shortness in the short story. The compression resulting from its "singleness of focus" attracted Henry James to the short story because its "brevity necessitated a 'science of control'. . .about how to adjust shape to ideas" (Shaw 11). Whether the ideas exist within the story or outside it, theorists expound on how such ideas influence the short story's shape, including its length. May believes a story's theme is related to its structure, and he develops this idea through his "basic proposition that the short story is short because it deals with a special, brief sort of experience and that this experience is most suited to the short story" (Lohafer and Clarey 22). This brief experience has been termed, among other things, the epiphany, the moment of crisis, or, as Gordimer calls it, "the only thing one can be sure of--the present moment" (7).

This moment provides a crisis point within the story that adds intensity and tension which result in compression of the story's shape. Such "brevity of form." wrote Chesterton in 1906, "is directly imitative of the modern experience of being alive" (qtd in Shaw 17).

Modern literary theory also has had its effect on brevity of form. It has been claimed that New Criticism brought attention to the short story through its interest in the "features of compression, economy, irony and tension (Lohafer and Clarey 5). Some theorists, however, refuse to look to outside influences for explanations of shortness. Norman Friedman, for example, goes directly to the material of the short story for his analysis: "A story may be short. . .for either or both of two fundamental reasons: the material itself may be of small compass; or the material, being of broader scope, may be cut for the sake of maximizing the artistic effect" (133). Friedman provides an elaborate discussion of methods for dealing with story material in order to achieve an aesthetic effect, which culminates in his conclusion that "why an author makes a certain initial choice regarding size we can only guess. . .he probably senses that he has a whole and complete action in itself" (134).

The notion of "action" in story harks back to the Aristotelian characteristic of achieving narrative shape by tracing an action through its beginning, middle and end. According to Susan Lohafer, the "study of endings" is "one promising direction" for short-story theory to take "in that it attempts to derive structural distinctions from structural principles" (24). Such a study echoes Poe's principles that unity of impression is gained in a single sitting and that every part of a story is controlled by this final impression. Lohafer's approach also calls on reader-response theory by asking "what the imminence of the end in a short story does to the readers' experience of the work as they move through it"

(25). She concludes that just as knowing the end influences the writer's composition, so too does its understood imminence influence the reader's experience of it. Brevity contributes to our ability to "enter, move through, and leave story without interruptions and thus. . . build the story world as we read, apart from other claims on our attention" (27).

In the modern short story, however, Reid reminds us, a discernible or completed pattern is not at all necessary (62), and he points to Chekhov's ideas on structure as having influenced a "growing tendency during the present century for short stories to be 'all middle,' to avoid structural complications in general and terminal climaxes in particular" (63). Chekhov is, of course, famous for his suggestion "that when one has finished writing a short story one should delete the beginning and the end" (qtd in Reid 62-63). Perhaps this advice goes beyond the influence of a story's structure on its shape, to include the influence of subject matter within the story as well as the pressure that external ideas and realities put on story form. Put another, more concrete way, Robert Creeley declares: "Its shape. . .is a sphere, an egg of obdurate kind. The only possible reason for its existence is that it has, in itself, the fact of reality and the pressure" (qtd in Reid 63).

For Atwood and Munro, however, this egg-shape may be the intitial or core stage of the story, but its shell is less obdurate than Creeley may imagine. Instead of resting permanently in this phase, the embryo-story evolves into a creature of indeterminate size and shape, and breaks through the shell, becoming a whole new story.

What Constitutes Story?

A final key to the problem of defining the short story lies in the question: what constitutes story? Shaw maintains that "a firm definition of the short story is impossible. . . the only constant feature seems to be the achievement of a narrative purpose in a comparatively brief space" (21). In turn, "narrative purpose" is thought to manifest itself in the combination of "three events or phases of development . . . patterns of three are constantly evinced in short stories. . . from fairy-tales. . .upwards" (Shaw 217). Similarly, Gerald Prince has argued that no "story exists. . .until three or more events are conjoined. . .and causally linked" (qtd in Reid 6). Story's "deep-rooted aesthetic preference" for "tripartite sequence" is connected, by Reid, to Aristotle's proclamation that a plot must have a beginning, middle and end in order to be whole. To many writers and critics, the notion of "wholeness" seems closely tied to the notion of story. Herbert Gold asserts that "the story-teller must have a story to tell, not merely some sweet prose to take out for a walk" (5). In pondering the insistence by many critics on the necessity of causal connection to story, however, Reid maintains that story can cover "disjunctive" moments and sensations, as well as logical sequences, and that "an inclusive theoretical view has to be taken" (7).

In "The Art of Fiction," Henry James views action in fiction as "inseparable" from character; he asks "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (qtd in Shaw 119). Shaw agrees with James that "storyness" can come from character rather than plot, especially in "stories which approximate to recitations in the way they are written" (108). Such stories, rooted in oral tradition, according to Shaw, take advantage of the storytelling voice and are shaped by tone: "The human

personality. . .is evident and kept steadily before us. . . the effect can be to give written words the flavour of speech" (86). Thus, the written words bring to mind narrative's beginnings around the "hearth and the fire" (Shaw 83). Drawing the reader into the storytelling is a primary concern of short-story writers and theorists, and Shaw suggests that accomplishing this purpose makes it possible to see the short story's construction in new ways: "Instead of the story's meaning being something to be marshalled into paired contrasts, or else to be withheld until the climax, it can be diffused throughout the story and made to inhere in the fabric of the prose rather than in the order of fictional events. Plot is not to be entirely dispensed with, but attention to it ceases to be paramount" (59).

Reid also questions how precise an interpretation of the term "story" should be. He wonders if it must include "some sequence of narrated actions, or if it is possible for a "story" to be "purely descriptive in a static way?" (4). Virginia Woolf, for example, admired the "effects of inconsequentiality and inconclusiveness. . .in Chekhov" and incorporated his method of writing stories from shards of experience which "have the air of having come together by chance and which provide a narrative of sensation and sense-impressions instead of narrative events" (Shaw 231). This method develops the sense of literariness through a resistance to "telling" and a foregounding of "showing." While "sensation and sense-impressions" take precedence over plot in this kind of story, and its unity does not come from the felt presence of a narrative consciousness, nevertheless, a "wholeness" is achieved through a carefully styled prose (Shaw 231), which calls to mind snapshot photography, a process contemporary with the modern short story. The idea of showing rather than telling corresponds to the snapshot's "seeming casualness, its subject caught. .

.in a moment of. . .unselfconsciousness, creating the illusion that the photographer. . .is included in the artlessness he captures" (Shaw 15). This is only an illusion, of course, produced with artful care. The framed effect of the snapshot and the "purely descriptive. . .static" story is to conceal their contexts, which excludes beginnings and endings. In such narratives, William James recognizes a mysterious quality:

> An impression like that we often get of people in life: their orbits come out of space and lay themselves for a short time along ours, and then they whirl again into the unknown, leaving us with little more than an impression of their reality and a feeling of baffled curiousity as to the mystery of the beginning and end of their being. (qtd in Reid 65)

Perhaps our wondrous response to such mysterious stories has the effect of satisfying our primal need for a sense of "wholeness." Eudora Welty also addresses the mysterious quality of stories when she writes that "the first thing we see about a story is its mystery. And in the best of stories, we return at last to see mystery again" (164).

In my discussion of the stories of Atwood and Munro, I am especially interested in the way these writers portray their characters' identities as indeterminate and in process. "The mystery of the beginning and end of their beings" is often the subject matter of these stories.

Reader and Writer Reciprocity in the Short Story

Eudora Welty is well aware of both her own and the reader's role in the creation of a story when she writes: "Direct connection is all we have with short stories--reading and writing them. It is not ours to note influences, trace

histories, and consider trends. We are in the thick of stories by being personally and directly concerned with them" (160). Welty understands that the human need for story is what drives the relationship between writer and reader. Similarly, Mary Rohrberger speculates that "the artist . . . needs a kind of co-creator, a reader, who participates in the story with an art kindred to that of the author" (36).

Theorists and practitioners of the short story seem to recognize the necessary partnership between writer and reader, even if their critical emphases fall on one or the other. Shaw is quick to note that A.E. Coppard's opinion that "the short story is a totality which the writer . . . 'possesses' before he writes the first sentence" (3), has evolved from Poe's notion of a "certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought." Shaw also points out, however, that Poe was well aware of the reader's enjoyment at experiencing "the image whole" (10). Moreover, Nadine Gordimer explains the circular transfer between the "reader who sees the image whole" and the writer, who can hold a concept of the short story "fully realized in his imagination at one time" (qtd in Besner and Staines xiii).

Theorists Besner and Staines contend that both short-story writers and readers are attracted to the genre for its "singleness of focus amid the seemingly infinite variety of its forms" (xiii). One such form is the epiphanic story which deals with a single moment of revelation, the epiphanic moment. Shaw describes this as a threshold moment or "frontier experience . . . often inherently dramatic, yielding conflicts which can be concentrated in a brief narrative" (193). Form adjusts to content in a particularly concentrated and reciprocal way in such stories, because in experiencing a character pass over a threshold (physical or emotional), readers recall that same heady sense of

discovery or disruptive sense of alienation from their own experience (Shaw 193).

In my discussion of the stories of Atwood and Munro, I will analyze the themes of discovery of self as well as alienation from self, topics particularly appealing to Atwood and Munro and their readers. Just as Gardiner sees women's identity formation as a fluid and relational process, so Atwood's and Munro's stories about women's lives are constructed through their conscious awareness of the changing relationships between writer and readers. This innovative storytelling harks back to and expands on the oral traditions of legend and gossip as ways to make sense of our world.

A Frame for Human Experience

What is this primal urge for story-making that human beings are so drawn to? Lohafer explains that psychologists and discourse analysts see "storying" as a form of cognition, and they further suggest that it is probably most "highly privileged and discrete in the set of human adaptations to experience" (210). Flannery O'Connor, has long understood this primal connection: "The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. . . .When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing is to tell him to read the story. The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning" (qtd in Shaw 191).

In her article, "Preclosure and Story Processing," Lohafer discusses human cognition as a matter of "framing" incoming information. According to her, "story is the human frame for experience," and she answers her own question as to why frame theory is so attractive to her: "I think it is because it is so new--and so old. One of the enduring themes in short fiction studies is the

unified, irradiating, and finally ineffable salience of story" (211-12). In essence, Lohafer feels that she is exploring with new terms the same old territory of the effect of brevity and wholeness on the reader's experience of the short story (213). When she teaches a story, Lohafer uses frame theory by asking students to look for earlier, possible endings in the story "so that the false ending highlights the true ending" (249). Most of the time, Lohafer finds, the students' choices "have some of the same features as actual closure" (249). In one instance, Lohafer quizzed one hundred-eighty students as to earlier, alternative endings in one short story, and found their "preclosure choices" to cluster at points in the character's experience that the students perceived were "rounded out by desire and fulfillment," which "tells us that readers. . .sense 'storyness' in those [desire and fulfillment] phases" of completion that are familiar to human experience (262). In turn, the sense of completion in desire and fulfillment as represented in story is translated into the search for this in our lived experience. Lohafer explains that "readers, left to their own devices, 'chunk' a story in this way" (263). This tendency to "storying," or encoding actual or fictive experience as a story, is a basic method of managing experience (Lohafer 272).

Such theorists' belief that story is the human frame for experience corresponds to Flannery O'Connor's advice that we can find the "meaning of fiction in experienced meaning." The notion that experience constitutes story and that story constitutes experience becomes as circular as any theory of the short story. Virginia Woolf explains the mysterious circular relationship between life and story in The Waves:

> But in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story--and there are so many, and so many--stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death and so on; and

> none of them are true. Yet like children we tell each other stories, and to decorate them we make up these ridiculous, flamboyant and beautiful phrases, that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground.

Perhaps, because our ancient human compulsion to share our lives with others refuses to die, the short story, with its roots in ancient oral traditions, lives on. As we enter the unknown realm of the next millennium, our need to give meaning to and transform our lives through story endures in the same way that the short-story genre, as theorized by Poe and others, has transformed itself and endured for well over a century. If its position within the literary canon still seems uncertain, what I hope this overview of the short story has accomplished is to highlight its instability as its main strength, which in turn is why the genre is so attractive to practitioners well-acquainted with challenging literary tradition: Canadian women writers.

Chapter Two

Part I

"An Inescapable Doubleness of Vision": Margaret Atwood's Views on the Colonizing Effects of Gender and Nationality

The themes of women's search for recognition amidst a dominant culture that erases and devalues female experience, and Canada's search for a national identity amidst the dominant cultures of Great Britain and the United States intertwine and permeate Atwood's critical and creative writing. The exploration of such motifs came easily to a woman whose childhood summers were spent traveling in and out of the Canadian bush with her family while her entomologist father did his field work. Her later experiences of high school in Toronto, college at the University of Toronto studying under the celebrated Canadian critic, Northrop Frye, upon whose theories of Canadian identity and literature Atwood modeled her writing, and graduate work at Radcliffe further influenced her exploration of her identity as a Canadian writer. Her association with new Canadian presses such as Anansi, brought her into contact with like-minded Canadian writers.

Atwood developed as a writer during the same time that a growing cultural nationalism developed in Canada and the Women's Movement expanded in North America. She has often told the story of how her nationalist and feminist consciousness was raised while attending graduate school in the United States in the early 1960s. Unable, as a female student, to gain access to Harvard's contemporary American poetry resources, she found herself in the library's basement collection of folklore, which included Canadian literature.

There, she discovered that her country had a national literature: "It was at Harvard then that I first began to think seriously about Canada . . . . Unknown to me, other members of my generation were beginning to do the same thing . . . instead of becoming part of the brain drain, we went back to Canada . . . . we started thinking in terms of Canadian publication for a Canadian audience" ("Canadian-American Relations" 384).

Upon her return to Canada in the mid 1960s, Atwood published several books of poetry and two novels; with the publication of Survival, her thematic study of Canadian literature, she also achieved her first commercial success. She attributes this success to Canada's growing cultural nationalism of the early 1970s, which, she claims, "was not aggressive in nature. It was a simple statement: we exist. Such movements become militant only when the other side replies, in effect, No you don't. Witness feminism" (385). She witnessed and took part in both movements, and her art reflects her personal involvement with the effects of colonization in both the national and gender spheres.

Perhaps because of this conjunction, Atwood is also irritated by critical categorization that separates her into woman and artist: "Time after time, I've had interviewers talk to me about my writing for a while, then ask me, 'As a woman, what do you think about--for instance--the Women's Movement' as if I could think two sets of thoughts about the same thing, one set as a writer or person, the other as a woman" ("On Being a Woman Writer" 195). The misperception arises from the way that men's personal experience has long been considered the norm for literary subject matter and, thus, has been "naturally" correlated with the "universal" in literature. No one asks a male writer what he thinks "as a man," for what he writes and what he thinks are regarded as synonymous. Moreover, men have been given a much wider range of what

is considered normal behavior to choose to write about, so that again the gap between writer and person is perceived to be minimal.

Atwood is well aware of the struggle of the Women's Movement to change the range of options open to women and especially to women writers. Her personal struggle to become a writer was similar to that of many of her contemporaries, and she recalls the advances being made at the time she began her literary career:

> Looking back on. . . the early and mid-seventies, I remember a grand fermentation of ideas, an exuberance in writing, a joy in uncovering taboos and in breaking them, a willingness to explore new channels of thought and feeling. Doors were being opened. Language was being changed. Territory was being claimed. The unsaid was being said.
>
> ("If You Can't Say Something Nice" 20)

She also, however, goes on to remind us that the effect of change was not completely positive, for, even though it was okay to speak and write negatively about men, women were not supposed to express negative feelings about women, except for Mothers. "It was okay to trash your mother," she remembers sardonically (21). In turn, she questions recent restrictions put on women writers by present day feminists: "Are we being told yet once again that there are certain 'right' ways of being a woman writer, and that all other ways are wrong?" (24). For Atwood, this new policing is just as damaging to women writers as the cultural taboos that had to be overcome earlier: "Women of my generation were told not to fly or run, only to hobble, with our high heels and our panty-girdles on. We were told endlessly: *thou shalt not.* We don't need to hear it again, and especially not from women" (24). Such sharpness of tone

does not mean that in the 1990s Atwood dismisses feminism as a derailed movement; rather, she points out that the original and the most important track for women writers is "the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights" (24).

In addition to her belief in the intrinsic connection between being a writer and being a woman, Atwood strongly argues that her nationality cannot be separated from her art. "No one comes apart this easily; categories like Woman, White, Canadian, Writer are only ways of looking at a thing, and the thing itself is whole, entire and indivisible" ("On Being a Woman Writer" 195). Atwood has spent a good deal of artistic energy studying the effects of nationality on her art and on the writing of her Canadian predecessors, contemporaries, and emerging writers. She argues that many established countries or cultures have "a single unifying and informing symbol at [their] core. . .which functions like a system of beliefs. . .which holds the country together" (Survival 31), and that while America's cultural symbol seems to be "The Frontier" and England's "The Island," "the central symbol for Canada. . .is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*" (32). According to Atwood, such core ideas generally foster positive emotions about one's national identity, such as a sense of adventure or security, whereas, the primary emotion generated by "Survival" is anxiety, an ambivalent emotion, at best:

> Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it but of those who made it back, from the awful experience--the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship--that killed everyone else. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival; he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except

gratitude for having escaped with his life. (33).

In an interview with Atwood, Hancock identifies the Canadian imaginative space as "North," and Atwood agrees that North is a constant threatening presence in the Canadian psyche. Earlier writers dealt with the North as an external, physical obstacle to survival, explains Atwood in Survival, but subsequent writers see the hindrances to survival as "more internal. . .obstacles to what we may call spiritual survival, to life as anything more than a minimally human being" (33). She further believes that each generation of writers reinterprets this concept of internalizing the North "region by region," and that "when Americans send ice-breakers through the Northwest Passage," Canadians experience an almost physical reaction to this "violation of their mental space" (Hancock 192).

If the concept of North produces relentless anxiety in the Canadian consciousness, the notion of South does not relieve this anxiety. When asked about how the Canadian experience might differ from that of an American -- "Would you say there was anything, any dimension, growing up as a Canadian gave you what you wouldn't have got, say, growing up in the United States?" -- her pointed response was: "I guess one of the main things is that south of you you have Mexico and south of us we have you" ("Nationalism" 83). Clearly, the Canadian consciousness is shaped by the presence of both North and South and by the country's experience of past and present colonization. Canadians have felt colonized by their past in the forms of French and then, lengthy British rule, and current American imperialism imposes a similar threat. The long French and British rule of Canada is known even to Americans, but Atwood reminds Americans of their own "colonization" of Canada after World War II:

The Canadians. . .overextended themselves so severely through

> the war effort that they created a capital vacuum in Canada. Nature and entrepreneurs hate a vacuum, so money flowed up from the United States to fill it, and when Canadians woke up in the sixties and started to take stock, they discovered they'd sold their birthright for a mess. ("Canadian-American Relations" 376)

United States' imperialism, as much as the geographical North or the country's experience of colonization, has contributed greatly to Canada's sense of victimization.

In Survival, Atwood takes measures to resolve Canada's sense of collective victimhood by suggesting that Canadians should pay attention to the four "Basic Victim Positions," which "are the same whether you are a victimized country, victimized minority group or a victimized individual" (36). As she moves through the list of these positions, it becomes clear that what is important to Atwood is subverting the sense of victimhood:

> Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim. . . .the Basic game in Position One is "Deny your victim experience. . . .Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea . . . The basic game in Position Two is Victor/Victim. Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable. . . . The basic game of position three is repudiating the Victim role. Position Four: To be a creative non-victim. . . .In Position Four, Victor/Victim games are obsolete. (36-39).

Atwood deplores "the willingness to see one's victimization as unchangeable" (41), and she guides us through the steps toward freedom from a collective sense of victimhood by tracing gradual progress towards consciously subverting the role of victim.

Through a depiction of her experience of British and American colonization, Atwood personalizes the experience of erasure of national identity. She describes herself as a young, Canadian, public-school student "singing Rule Britannia and drawing pictures of the Union Jack under the eyes of teachers who still believed in the Empire, and after school, reading comic books imported from the United States, "news bulletins of the action going on across the border which we could watch but not join" ("Nationalism" 84, 85). The erasure of her Canadian identity began early, and, she explains, it was not until graduate school in the United States that she and other Canadians "found ourselves engaged in an unhappy scramble for our own identities" (86).

What national identity means to the colonized is very different from what it means to the imperialist. Northrop Frye's famous theory that when Canadians begin the search for their identity, they must ask "Where is here?" rather than "Who am I?" is developed by his former student, Atwood, who agrees that one's origin is tied to geographical place: "Refusing to acknowledge where you come from. . .is an act of amputation: you may become free floating, a citizen of the world (and in what other country is that an ambition?) but only at the cost of arms, legs or heart. By discovering your place you discover yourself" ("Travels Back" 113). Upon being asked about the effect of being Canadian on her writing and, subsequently, how to transcend one's region, Atwood resists denial of one's geographical origin: "I don't think you transcend region, anymore than a plant transcends earth. I think that you come out of something,

and you can branch out in all kinds of directions, but that doesn't mean cutting yourself off from your roots and from your earth" (Brans 143). For Atwood, subverting the psychological effects of being a Canadian writer involves reinforcing the connections to one's roots rather than denying them. Embracing one's Canadian identity is more subversive than attempting some sort of transcendence, which Atwood sees inversely as a kind of self-amputation. By repudiating the victim role (position three) and perhaps even by taking the position of a creative non-victim (position four) one can escape victimhood. These creatively subversive tactics can be used by Canadian writers and by women writers, and can be doubly effective for Canadian women writers.

In starting out as a writer, Atwood believes that she probably began in position one (to deny the fact that you are a victim) but found herself evolving: "I began as a profoundly apolitical writer, but then I began to do what all novelists and some poets do: I began to describe the world around me" (Second Words 15). The vantage point from which she described the world was both that of a Canadian and a woman, resulting in the same "inescapable doubleness of vision" that Atwood found operating in the work of Susanna Moodie. Moodie's integration of her paradoxical situation as both a stranger to and a settler of Canada results in her ambivalent treatment of the themes of dislocation and alienation. This approach is expanded by Atwood through the integration of gender and nationality as part of her artistic identity. The awareness of herself as both a woman and a Canadian operating in a world where these two important aspects of her identity as a writer are subsumed under the dominant literary tradition of the male, Anglo-American writer, contribute to Atwood's innovative and subversive treatment of the same themes of dislocation and alienation.

Atwood suggests that the writer does not have to "repeat [her] tradition unaltered. [She] can explore it further. . .play variations on it, even make departures from it which will gain their impact from their measurement against the basic ground of the main tradition" (Survival 241-42). Thus, the writer's doubleness of vision can be transferred to the reader: "Readers [can] learn to read the works of their tradition in terms of the tradition itself; and this act [will] seem to involve a double perspective or vision" (Survival 245). Growing up reading and studying literature from the patriarchal British and American traditions has served Atwood particularly well in producing a uniquely counter-traditional writing, and she recognizes this fact: "A tradition doesn't necessarily exist to bury you: it can also be used as material for new departures" (246). She maintains that both gender and nationality influence her writing, and that by reading Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontes, "I didn't get the idea that women couldn't write novels. I got the idea that Canadians couldn't write novels and that's a lot easier to over to overcome, because I think nationality is secondary to gender." She further explains how it is easier, at least nominally, to change one's nationality by moving to another country, "but unless you have a sex change operation you can't change from one sex to another" (Lyons 224).

Arguing strongly for maintaining the "basic ground of the main tradition" because it provides the means to measure "new departures" for Canadian writers, Atwood equally feels that rejecting old gender stereotypes is a subversive and tricky operation: "Any woman who began writing when I did, and managed to continue, did so by ignoring, as a writer, all her socialization about pleasing other people . . . and every theory then available about how she wrote or ought to write. The alternative was silence" ("If You Can't Say

Something Nice" 18). Atwood's refusal to deny her origins through transcending gender and nationality operates in tandem with her acknowledgement of their colonizing aspects, and thus creates in her writing the subversive "doubleness of vision" of a creative non-victim.

This position, however, does not come without an emotional cost. According to Atwood: "If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia. Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle . . . . Perhaps this is the way we still live . . . . This country is something that must be chosen--it is so easy to leave--and if we do choose it we are still choosing a violent duality" (The Journals 62). The choice between succumbing to a sense of collective victimhood brought on by colonization or recognizing one's complicity in that victimization plays havoc with one's sense of identity, and Atwood incorporates this major theme in her own writing.

The colonizing effects of nationality and gender operate in Atwood's writing as disruptions to any sense of a continuous and unified identity for herself as an author, or for her fictional characters. In turn, the issues of Canadian nationality and gender identity act as lenses through which many of Atwood's critics view her work. The integrative manner in which her art re-imagines these characteristic splits in identity is what fascinates many critics, who respond positively to the creative pressures that gender and nationality have put on Atwood's literary imagination.

A Canadian like Atwood, Sherill Grace takes up this matter in her study, Violent Duality. According to Grace, "Victimization is a common Atwood theme treated with. . . subtlety," and that while "there are a bewildering number of ways to be a victim" the struggle not to be victimized is more important and

"becomes a moral imperative; passive acquiescence does not absolve guilt or remove responsibility" (3). This split, however, is handled not by trying to patch together the duality, but through Atwood's acceptance of duality within the process of her writing. She chooses to live with the schizophrenic situation of pointing out the victimization and at the same time condemning the victim's responsibility for being victimized. As Atwood herself explains: "In [Canadian] literature, there are elements which. . .transcend [negativity] . . .the halting but authentic break-throughs made by characters who are almost hopelessly trapped, the moments of affirmation that neither deny the negative ground nor succumb to it" (Survival 6). Grace approves this view: "It is typical of Atwood. . .to portray our national schizophrenia not simply as illness or weakness but as our greatest potential strength--accepted and controlled it provides the wisdom of double vision" (33).

The wisdom of this inescapable doubleness of vision is a powerful subversive force produced by contradiction and paradox, whose energy compels the "re-vision" of old ways of writing. In her study of Canadian women writers, Mickey Pearlman asks a key question about the literary pairing of gender and nationality: "How [do] Canadians. . .mirror in their work the usually debilitating effects of enclosed or limited emotional and physical spaces in the lives of women? (3), and she cites Lorna Irvine's conclusion that "the female voice politically and culturally personifies Canada" (10).

Especially among feminist critics, Irvine's observation is supported. Kathryn VanSpanckeren, for example, writes: "Feminists. . .have welcomed Atwood's Survival because it clearly identifies the victim role and outlines concretely how female and Canadian cultural identities have been repressed over the years" (xxii). Similarly, Jane Schlueter's essay, "Canlit/Victimlit,"

affirms the power of the combined forces of gender and nationality that shape Atwood's artistic vision in Surfacing:

> But even as the protagonist personalizes Canada's position, it becomes clear that her view is not ideosyncratic. It is, rather, emblematic of a collective national mentality that, Atwood, contends, pervades and defines "Canlit." Like the protagonist of Surfacing--who emerges from the collapse of her civilized self and refuses to be a victim--Canada is vulnerable, consumable and oppressed. (2)

Atwood's creative handling of this paradoxical situation has been singled out by A.E. and C.N. Davidson, who describe her as "a writer who refuses to be pinned down, labelled, or dismissed" (9). Pearlman refers to W.H. New's reminder that although "Canada appears repeatedly as a place of exile. . .it is not so much that the country houses exiles. . .but that Canada is a society in which foreigness [sic] and familiarity are one" (10). Experiencing this kind of national ambivalence may explain Atwood's refusal to be labelled artistically, while it would seem to be her experience of being a woman that fuels her determination not to be dismissed as a writer. As she explains in a interview with Jan Castro Gardner:

> I think a lot of the energy in women's writing over the past ten years, and there has been a tremendous amount of energy, has come from being able to say things that once you couldn't say. And therefore, being able to see things that once you couldn't see or that you would have seen but repressed. (231)

As an artist, the things that Atwood is "able to see. . .that once [she] couldn't see . . .or that [she] would have. . .repressed," are traditional (male, British, and

American) literary patterns. An "inescapable doubleness of vision" (as a woman and a Canadian) benefits her artistic re-imagination of traditional literary patterns, but such writing does not come easily. The artistic struggle is difficult, and the crisis-point of self-awareness as a woman and a Canadian elicits a "violent duality."

The revision of traditional literary patterns, however, does not mean jettisoning them entirely and beginning all over by setting up new versions of literary imperialism. Atwood rejects such a project in favor of building upon and revising her literary heritage. In her essay, "The Where of Here," Sandra Djwa attributes this artistic strategy to Atwood's "Canadian literary nationalism" and, in part, to "the need to centre oneself in a tradition" (22). In addition, Djwa posits that Atwood's Canadian habit of questioning identity "may have uniquely equipped Atwood to describe the contemporary battle of the sexes" (22). Her writing about women's experiences revises the standard view of woman as victim, a view which Roberta White believes contributes to Atwood's unique ability to deal with traditional gender issues: "Six of Atwood's first seven novels are narrated by women who, even when cast into positions of victimization, respond creatively to life through rational self-understanding. Their memories, often presented in fully dramatized flashbacks, intertwine with present events, revealing the persistence and pressure of the past" (53). Atwood subverts the traditional gendered role of women not by ignoring the past but by centering her writing within it.

One literary tradition whose representation of women is called into question by Atwood is the sentimental novel and its roots in romance. This tradition, White observes, is given a fairly radical treatment by Atwood, who "implies that women must pay a price for survival." That price is the purgation of

sentiment from the voices of Atwood's narrators, for as White explains: "If a woman wants to become more than a walking two-dimensional reflection of social expectations, sentiment must be jettisoned, along with all pre-packaged romantic dreams, including--this is the hardest--the dream of love" (54). Atwood's creative imagination permits the traditional strains of Love and Romance to linger in her writing as ghostly reminders of a literary heritage that drastically distorts gender role expectations for both women and men.

Atwood's unique treatment of traditional literary patterns follows various paths. She is well known for her subversive dealings with the ancient myths ingrained in our unconscious minds. One of the many myths that Atwood takes on is that of Persephone, "the archetypal patriarchal version of feminine experience" (Djwa 20). Persephone, according to Djwa, operates in Atwood's art and the art of her contemporaries as an "anteroom" of the feminist movement in the sense that "once women begin to explore the received archetype. . .they also begin to register their acceptances and rejections of specific aspects of the myth" (20). This approach to ancient myths is characteristic of Atwood's subversive narrative strategy, which uses literary traditions as departure points for their own transformation. The understanding that the transformation of old narrative patterns can be accomplished more easily through an understanding of the strategies through which political movements effect change is also present in Atwood's art. Before both feminists and Canadian nationalists can effect any change in the old patterns of thinking, they must first identify the traditions in which they operate. Accordingly, in order to be a creative non-victim, the contemporary Canadian woman writer's search for identity amidst the traditional roles of gender and national colonization requires her to understand and work within the traditional roles.

This brings us to Atwood's insistence on the power of art to effect sociocultural change. The belief that art can be an agent of change in the world and that the artist has power to bring about change, is at odds with what she calls the "concept of self-expression, the writer as a kind of spider, spinning out his entire work from within." As she sees it, we cling to this belief because "it lets us off the hook" in the sense that "if it is not a true view of the world. . .we don't have to pay attention to it" ("An End to Audience" 342-43). Taking exception to this rationalization, Atwood agues that "writing is selfless in the same way that skiing is, or making love. . . .In writing, your attention is focused not on the self but on the thing being made, the thing being seen, and let us not forget that *poet* means *maker* and *seer* means *one who sees*" (344). She insists, furthermore, that writing "is not 'expressing yourself,'" rather "it is opening your self, discarding your *self* so that the language and the world may be evoked through you" by way of a "calling up. . .for the reader" and by way of the writer's "truth-telling" (347-48). From this creative position, Atwood reclaims the power to effect change through "truth-telling" which can result in self-examination and possibly in sociocultural change. She sees fiction as "one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society. . .through which we can see ourselves, and the ways in which we behave towards each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves" (346).

In her recent study, Margaret Atwood's Powers, Shannon Hengen quotes Atwood's view that "Power after all is not real, not really there. . .people give it to each other" ("Notes on Power Politics" 11), and after examining the evolution of Atwood's conception of the dynamics of power, Hengen describes how Atwood deploys this concept in her writing:

> Canada. . . .is a country often defined as that-which-is-North-

> American-but-not-American, and female is that-which-is-human-but-not-male; the difference between the terms is power. Atwood's writing in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s has complicated our understanding of relations of power by viewing them from the position of those who have participated least in their entrenchment: Canadian women. (12)

From this unique position, Atwood, as artist, explores power relationships between men and women as well as between colonizers and colonized. Aware of the power of literature to address the possibility for positive social change for Canadians, as well as the importance of the artist's role in making social change for women possible, Atwood outlines the writer's role in making social change: "The writer is both an eye-witness and an I-witness, the one to whom personal experience happens and the one who makes experience personal for others. The writer *bears witness*" ("An End to Audience?" 348). The political aspect of Atwood's writing, Hengen feels, becomes "a double burden in. . .her writing: to articulate not only a kind of Canadian socialism but also its obscurest form, a kind pertaining to women about whose lives and work little has been said" (13).

Atwood's interest in women's identity formation prompts Hengen to take a psychoanalytic approach to Atwood's treatment of power in relationships. According to Hengen, reintegration of self with others, or "progressive narcissism," is evidenced in Atwood's art by her movement in the 1970s, '80s and '90s from a focus on women characters' initial struggles to gain particularly Canadian and feminist identities "by which which they come to call themselves Canadian women. . .and to speak their own language" (20) to a later "return to selected male figures in her texts to reclaim them" (52). The goal of this sort of

progressive narcissism is "to enable [Atwood's] women to empower not only themselves but also others, often the men they love," and "this mutual enabling" according to Hengen, links Atwood's feminism with her quasi-socialism" (52).

Atwood's belief in literature as an agent of change, as a way to explore individual identity through examining our human connections, leads her to revise the traditional metaphor for realistic fiction: "Literature can be a mirror and people can recognize themselves in it and this may lead to change" (Sandler 24). Through her art, Atwood enables her readers to share in the "inescapable doubleness of vision" that resulted from her experiences with Canada's growing cultural nationalism and North America's burgeoning feminism and in this way to transform their own social realities.

Chapter Two

Part II

Wilderness Tips: "Only . . . the Beginning of Something Else"

In her 1993 short-story collection, Margaret Atwood records the reactions and reflections of mostly middle-class characters as they weigh their gains and losses at the reckoning point of "middle age." Set in and around Toronto in the last decades of the twentieth century, the ten short stories in Wilderness Tips are concerned with Canadian women engaged in such occupations as lawyer, newspaper columnist, freelance writer, fashion-magazine editor, talk-show host, business woman, and money manager. Often, the stories feature characters who are reflecting on where they have been and where they are going. The crisis-point of middle age is underscored in this collection by the fact that the lives of many of the characters are also balanced between two centuries, to say nothing of the fact of an approaching millennium, all of which emphasize the solitary and transitory nature of life. From this vantage point, and through the acts of remembering the past (sometimes from early childhood on) and projecting themselves into the future, their lives are reenacted through Atwood's use of third-person limited point of view and flash backs and flash forwards.

As the characters retrace their pasts and re-imagine their futures, their resistance to the temptation of following the old traditional paths becomes strong, with the result that their detours furnish Atwood with a model for departure from the conventional narrative patterns of the short story and provide the reader with new models for living. Through her disruption of the

traditional patterns of human isolation in Wilderness Tips, Atwood reinvents the modern short-story models of unity of effect and closure in order to accommodate the flux of women's lives, whose unique experiences of the world resist constraint. At the same time that Atwood's depictions of threshold moments in her characters' lives emphasize the disconnected and temporary nature of life, they also serve as points of departure towards a sense of human interconnectedness and the notion that the telling of one life story is "only . . . the beginning of something else."

Atwood's choice of the literary intersection of the short-story genre with the lives of Canadian women results in a powerful combination of undefinability and unconventionality that regenerates the genre. The regenerative power of these stories lies in the way that Atwood brings gender and nationality (particularly colonization) to bear on her representation of experience, language, form, and notions of subjectivity and authority, which results in her imaginative revision of conventional literary treatment of experience, language, form, and subjectivity in the short story. In my discussion of her work, I will select one or several stories to discuss each of those four interrelated aspects of the genre.

Atwood's Treatment of Experience

The treatment of experience is one aspect of the four-part interactive system suggested by Barreca for studying women's short stories in light of the fact that women's experience has traditionally been given a very limited artistic treatment in patriarchal narratives. Caroline Heilbrun, in Writing a Woman's Life, identifies the traditional narrative restraints imposed on women's lives: "Safety and closure, which have always been held out to women as the ideals

of female destiny, are not places of adventure, or experience, or life. . . .They forbid life to be experienced directly" (20). As a result, women need72 new stories to live by, stories that depart from the old narrative conventions:

> lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (Heilbrun 37)

Although Atwood does not seem to agree with Heilbrun's prescription emphasis-- "I write about women because they interest me, not because I think I ought to" ("If You Can't Say Something Nice" 22)-- the stories in Wilderness Tips do follow the realities of women's experiences, and by doing so, fashion narrative patterns that reflect a new version of the world.

Taking a metafictional approach to the narrative conventions of safety and closure, Atwood shapes a new version of the world and of women's experience in "True Trash," the first story in Wilderness Tips. The story moves in space between a Canadian summer camp for boys to downtown Toronto, as well as in time between the pre-sexual revolution 1960s and the post-sexual revolution 1970s. It involves the lives of a number of young women working as waitresses at camp Adanaqui and the young male campers, and in ultimately revealing missing pieces of information about several characters, the story disrupts the old narrative patterns of safety and closure.

The metafictional quality lies in the way that Atwood writes her story

around and over the old storylines of the *True Romance* magazines passed around by the waitresses at Camp Adanaqui. These young women (most of them off to college at summer's end) listen to a *True Romance* story read to them by one of the main characters, Joanne. Acutely aware of how little her experience resembles that of the heroines in the magazine stories, Joanne calls such stories "moan-o-dramas" (4), and is realistic about the predictable path that the struggling lower-class "heroine" must follow when faced with choosing between two conventional romantic interests: "One is dependable and boring and wants them to get married. The other one, whose name is Dirk, rides a motorcycle and has a knowing, audacious grin" (4). Joanne and the other waitresses offer knowing, sarcastic comments on the heroine's predicament: "'Maybe she should try out both of them, to see which one's the best," says Liz brazenly," while Joanne, "who has a bad habit of novelizing" (12) reminds them that "If she does that, she'll be a Fallen Woman, capital F, capital W. . . . She'd have to Repent, capital R." Instead, the heroine abandons herself to Desire, capital D: "*I felt myself lifted. . . .Feebly I tried to push his hands away, but I didn't really want to. And then. . .we were One*" (6-7). All the waitresses laugh in outrage and disbelief at this romanticizing prose except for Ronette, the "tartiest" of them, who is not headed for college, and whose silence and knowledge of "other things. . . older . . . more important" (12) intrigues not only the other waitresses but also the campers and counselors, boys from St. Jude's prep school. Moreover, Ronette's "power to give herself up, without reservation and without commentary" (18), much like the heroine of the trashy romance story, is secretly coveted by Joanne who views her own self-awareness as a liability in her life's direction. Joanne is coming to understand that safety and closure are more nearly possible through self-abandonment

than through self-awareness.

In "True Trash" Atwood uses the conventional narrative of the romantic heroine's self-abandonment as a departure point from the predictable conventions of the *True Romance* story. In the magazine story, the heroine gets pregnant, and "Dirk takes off on his motorcycle when he finds out . . . But luckily the . . . boring one, still wants to marry her . . . . Her life isn't exciting maybe, but it's a good life, in the trailer park, the three of them" (15). Joanne, however, is confused and disappointed with this ending. She does not see her own life going in this direction: "She has a long, though vague, agenda. Nevertheless, she feels deprived" (15). Although she still clings to the romantic notion of "happily ever after" through marriage that is offered in the *True Romance* story, she realizes that this is not the story for her to live by. Furthermore, Atwood suggests that it is not even the story for Ronette to live by.

Although by the summer's end Ronette, too, is pregnant by someone at Camp Adanaqui. Atwood's story subverts the conventions of the *True Romance* magazine story by reintroducing us to Joanne eleven years later, now a freelance writer who "still had the narrative habit" (27). After running into a former camper, Donny (now Don), Joanne surmises "the end of [Ronette's] story, or one end of one story. Or at least a missing piece" (29): it was the fourteen-year old Donny who impregnated Ronette that summer at Camp Adanaqui. Joanne, however, decides not to reveal the missing piece of information to Don: "the melodrama tempts her, the idea of a revelation, a sensation, a neat ending. But it would not be an ending, it would only be the beginning of something else" (30). Through Joanne's refusal of the old narrative conventions of romance and melodrama, Atwood also refuses a "neat ending" to her own story. Just as she resists closure for her story, so safety and

closure as the ideals of female destiny are refused and replaced with what Heilbrun terms a woman's "open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life which inevitably means accepting some degree of power and control over other lives" (13). In the same way that Joanne becomes aware of her power to change Don's life, Atwood accepts her authorial control over Ronette's and Joanne's stories.

Accepting some degree of power and control over other lives means repudiating the victim role and perhaps becoming a creative non-victim. Certainly the talented and successful protagonist of "Hairball" resists her role as a victim. This story revolves around the life of a "successful" career woman as she directs her affair with a married man and deals with a ticking biological clock. Kat, the thirty-five year-old editor of a Canadian women's fashion magazine, controls her life by transforming herself and her lover: "She had become a creator; she created total looks" (37). She rejects the old romantic narrative of self-abandonment, and instead, she consciously fashions herself and her lover, Gerald, through her own will-power and control. Heilbrun explains this tricky operation:

> Women of accomplishment. . .have had to confront power and control. Because this has been declared unwomanly, and because many would prefer (or think they would prefer) a world without evident power or control, women have been deprived of the narratives. . .by which they might assume power over--take control of--their own lives. (16-17)

In "Hairball" Atwood's metafictive power comes into play when she fashions a story of a woman's power and control at the same time that her character, Kat, fashions herself as a powerful creator: "It was she who

transformed [Gerald], first to Gerry then to Ger . . . . A lot of his current tastes--in food, in drink, in recreational drugs, in women's . . . underwear--were once hers. In his new phase . . . he is her creation. As she is her own" (36). Kat explains her self-willed transformation from childhood "romanticized Katherine" to high school "bouncy, round-faced Kathy" to "blunt . . . no bullshit Kath" at university to "street-feline, and pointed as a nail Kat" in her professional life. In place of a women's magazine story of desire and self-abandonment, Atwood offers a narrative of a woman's power over transformation. When Gerald offers Kat the editor's job, however, she is careful to mask her pleasure: "By now she knew better than to betray desire" (40).

Kat also knows better than to offer her women readers any real sense of power and control; instead, they are given only the illusion of control. To the magazine company's board of directors she explains: "You bombard them with images of what they ought to be, and you make them feel grotty for being the way they are. You're working with the gap between reality and perception" (42). The readers of Kat's magazine, *Felice*, are kept off balance by being made to think that they have the power to transform themselves if they buy the right products. "Nothing sells like anxiety" (42), explains Kat.

In her treatment of women's experience in "Hairball," Atwood makes concrete the anger that women are not allowed to express in conventional narratives. As Heilbrun suggests, "To denounce women for shrillness and stridency is another way of denying them any right to power" (13). Anger, in the form of a "hairball," Kat's name for her recently removed and carefully preserved ovarian cyst, is the emblem of anger that Atwood allows Kat when Gerald takes over her position as editor and spurns her as his lover. Kat's unusual revenge (on the occasion of a cocktail party hosted by Gerald's wife,

she wraps the hairball elaborately and sends it to her as a "gift") is accompanied by this message: "Gerald, Sorry, I couldn't be with you. This is all the rage. Love, K." (48). The story ends with Atwood's characteristic word play in her depiction of the power of Kat's "rage" to fuel her ongoing transformation from Kat to "K.": "She has done an outrageous thing, but she doesn't feel guilty. She feels light and peaceful and filled with charity, and temporarily without a name" (48). Ironically, Kat's marginal position fills her with a sense of power and well-being.

Heilbrun calls for women writers to "rewrite our ideas about what Nancy Miller calls a female impulse to power, as opposed to the erotic impulse which alone is supposed to impel women. We know we are without a text and must discover one" (44). Just as Kat is caught "temporarily without a name," Atwood is caught without an end to the story. Kat projects the rather predictable outcome of her outrageous act: "There will be distress, there will be questions. Secrets will be unearthed. There will be pain. After that, everything will go way too far" (48). Rather than allowing this to limit the possibilities of her storytelling, however, Atwood takes Miller's advice about the plots of women's literature being about not life, but "about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints. . .of rendering a female life in fiction" (44-45). In "Hairball," Kat refuses the traditional role of the woman scorned by accentuating her rage, and Atwood eludes the traditional literary patterns of romance and melodrama by underlining them in her storytelling. Furthermore, when Kat goes out for a walk after sending her gift, Atwood's narrator tells us that Kat "intends to walk just to the corner, but when she reaches the corner she goes on" (48). While Kat (having rid herself of her hairball but not herself) finds herself temporarily at peace in that space between impulse to power and erotic impulse, Atwood

explores the space between women's lived experience and the limited possibilities for new stories offered to women by conventional romantic narratives.

If "Hairball" is an exploration of the possibility of a new story of women's experience, "The Bog Man" is the map for its creation. Again, Atwood uses her metafictional wizardry to negotiate the narrative gap between reality and perception in order to show women how to claim their own stories and thus take control of their own lives. The story is about a graduate student's love affair with her married archeology professor, their trip to Scotland on an archeological "dig," and their subsequent break-up. The protagonist of "The Bog Man," Julie, is a young woman in the throes of romantic self-abandonment, trying desperately to make her experience fit the conventional narratives open to her. She labors to make her lover, Connor, into a god through her self-abnegation: "She had been possessed by some notion of self-sacrifice; she had asked nothing for herself, except that Connor should continue to be superhuman" (82). However, as time passes and as Julie shares the story of Connor with other women, it becomes, more and more, *her* story. Through telling the story over and over, Julie revises it by putting herself in control, at the same time that Atwood's tale creates a story for women to live by. Heilbrun suggests that telling their stories in isolation only results in women's being caught up "in some individual erotic and familial plot and, inevitably [being] found wanting" (45), which is why she believes that only by sharing their stories can women begin to create them: "I suspect that female narratives will be found where women exchange stories, where they read and talk collectively of ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments" (46).

The story of "The Bog Man" spans thirty years, beginning in "the early

sixties" when Julie was in her last year of university in Toronto and determined to rebel: "She thought of herself as a sort of pirate. A dark-eyed, hawk-faced, shaggy-haired raider, making daring inroads on the borders of smug domestic settlements. Setting fire to the roofs, getting away with the loot, suiting herself. . . .But inwardly, she was seething with unfocused excitement, and looking for someone to worship" (80-81). In her search for love, she has isolated and abandoned herself. The narratives into which Julie must fit her life are limited to two over-romanticized alternatives: a happily-ever-after marriage or death. Sneaking off on an archeological trip to Scotland with Connor, at the archeological sites of the standing stone rings in Orkney, Julie is attracted to the fairytale-like settings that suggest the "happily ever after" theme: "The fields were green, the sun shone, the stone circles were suitably mysterious" (84), but their connection to the death plot appeals to Connor; they are "the sites of ritual human sacrifices" (84). The appearance of the bog men shakes Julie's belief in the old narrative: "Julie does not feel the same connection with them that she felt with the standing stones. The idea of human sacrifice is one thing, but the leftovers are something else again" (85). The possibility of ruptures in the fairy tale romances of self-sacrifice unnerves her. Meanwhile, more ruptures appear in Julie's narrative of Connor: his wallet photo of his wife, three young sons, and a black Labrador.

For Julie, the narrow gap between reality and perception widens. Two months into the affair, "marooned" with Connor in a tiny Scottish town, reduced to knitting an ill-fitting sweater for her lover, Julie can now see "that there might be a difference between her idea of him and his own idea of himself." When they make love, "she feels that she's been demoted, against her will. What to her has been self-abandonment, to him has been merely sin" (92). The result

of this realization is that Julie presses for the more palatable of the two narrative closures open to her: marriage. When Connor balks, "Let's talk about it tomorrow," Julie detects more narrative ruptures in his words: "He has recovered himself, he's plotting" (93). Julie, however, seems to learn a lesson from Connor's revision of the ending. She takes the next train for Edinburgh, and "she leaves behind the tapestry bag and the unfinished sweater. It's as good as a note" (94). Finally, Julie undertakes to change the story in which she is entangled.

She does this first in continued isolation back in Toronto where, when Connor phones her and proposes marriage, she experiences a diminishing perception of him:

> Julie starts to cry. She's crying because she no longer wants to marry Connor. She no longer wants him. The divinity is going out of him, like air. He is no longer a glorious blimp, larger than life and free in the heavens. Soon he will be just a damp piece of flabby rubber. She is mourning his collapse. (95)

It is not the collapse of Connor that she is mourning as much as her loss of a narrative pattern with no replacement in sight. Julie transformed him into a superman, and now must change him back into a real man, shorter, saggier, and needier than she remembers. The transformation of Connor takes place in a phone booth, but ironically it is Julie inside the booth. While Connor stands outside pounding desperately on the door, her imagination effects the change: "He's no longer anyone she knows, he's the universal child's nightmare, the evil violent thing, fanged and monstrous, trying to get in at the door" (96).

At this point, Julie is still caught in the old narrative patterns of fairy tales and gothic romance. It is not until she ends her silence and isolation and

begins to tell her own story to other women that a new possibility emerges. She turns Connor into a story, but makes herself the center. She accomplishes what Heilbrun suggests to women: "to see themselves collectively, not individually" and to "read and talk collectively" (45-46). Over time, as Julie begins to talk collectively, a new story takes shape:

> Then . . . she began to tell the story of Connor once in a while. . . always to women. It became part of an exchange, the price she was willing to pay for hearing other, similar stories. These were mystery stories. The mysterious objects in them were men; men and their obscure behaviour. Clues were discovered and examined, points of view exchanged. No definite solutions were found. (97)

The old conventions of safety and closure have disappeared and in their place new possibilities appear. As Julie ages, marries, divorces, and remarries, and goes on sharing the story of Connor, her own ambitions and accomplishments become more distinct, while Connor begins to fade: "The story is now like an artefact from a vanished civilization, the customs of which have become more obscure" but "with each retelling, she feels herself more present in it" so that with each telling she gains more life while "more life goes out of him, he becomes more dead" (like the bog man) and finally "is almost an anecdote" (98). Julie has become the archeologist and Connor her site for study, and through her collective storytelling, she has managed to resurrect herself. Atwood's metafictional approach fulfills Heilbrun's prediction: "There will be narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and stories of men" (47).

In "The Bog Man," Atwood offers to women a revision of the old

conventional narrative patterns and new possibilities for their lives, which include the impulse to power, and the progressive narcissism that values identification with other women and puts women in the center of their own stories in order to share the truth about their lives and their power to change them. Heilbrun reminds us that "power consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told" and that "male power has made certain stories unthinkable" (43-44). By choosing to tell the unthinkable stories of Canadian women dealing with loss and recovery in their lives, and by describing the world around her as a Canadian woman, Atwood challenges conventional male narrative patterns in Wilderness Tips.

Atwood's Attention to Language

"But the question is not only one of narrative," Heilbrun reminds us, "it is also one of language. How can women create stories of women's lives if they have only male language with which to do it?" (40). Atwood believes that "the examination of 'language' is something every good writer is engaged in by virtue of vocation" (22), but she concedes that women writers experience the language dilemma more consciously. She recalls her early days as a writer before official "consciousness-raising": "We spent a lot of time wondering if we were 'normal.' Some of us decided we weren't. Ready-to-wear did not quite fit us. Neither did language" (16). Thus, her predicament is clear, and the strategy she adopts is similar to that recommended by Mary Jacobus: "though necessarily working within 'male' discourse'" women must "work ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written" (qtd in Heilbrun 41). In the stories of Wilderness Tips, Atwood deconstructs the power system of language by emphasizing the impossibility of the representation of experience in words,

and by calling attention to language as a power system that reinforces women's problematic relations to it. Throughout her writing career, Atwood has expressed her ambivalent position in relation to language. She is fascinated by the power of words: "I can get words to stretch and do something together that they don't do alone. Expand the possibilities of the language" (Tightrope-Walking" 200). Although she confesses to having a "distrust of language," she also feel that "language is one of the few tools we *do* have. So we have to use it. We even have to trust it, though it's untrustworthy" (209).

According to Elaine Showalter, gender can be seen as "the social, cultural and psychological meaning imposed upon biological, sexual identity," and the intersection of gender and language is a site of major power struggles: "all speech is necessarily talk about gender, since in every language gender is a grammatical category and the masculine is the linguistic norm" (Speaking of Gender 1). Showalter advances Lacan's explanation for women's alienation from and complex relationship to the power system of language: "gender is primarily constructed through the acquisition of language, rather than through social ascription or cultural practice. . . .Thus to deconstruct language is to deconstruct gender" (3).

Emphasizing the importance of naming one's experience is one way to call attention to women's alienation from a language that erases and devalues their experience. According to Barecca, naming one's universe draws "the universe into every life," a strategy that attracts women "long barred from acting on their ambitions or rebellions" who "have turned to language as a way of dealing with and influencing the world" (3). Atwood's attraction to the transformative power of naming one's world and the possibility for change that is effected by this process is foregrounded in her short story , "Weight," where

she depicts women challenging men's sole power to name the universe at the same time that she uses a nameless narrator to call attention to women's long history of being barred from access to the dominant discourse that defines the world. In this story, Atwood's unnamed narrator struggles with middle age and with a shifting moral position as she tries to compete in a man's world and atone for the murder of her best friend by setting up and funding a shelter for battered women. Early in the story, the protagonist and her good friend, Molly, find relief from the alienation of being the few women in law school by "making up silly meanings for the things we got called by the guys. Or women in general got called: but we knew they meant us" (175). The two women "kill [them]selves laughing" during coffee breaks by redefining the names they are called:

> *Strident.* A brand of medicated toothpick used in the treatment of gum disease.
>
> Okay! *Shrill.* As in the Greater Shrill. A sharp-beaked shorebird native to the coasts of. . .
>
> California? Yes. (176)

Both women chose the law profession because they wanted to "change things" for women. The narrator describes their initial enthusiasm: "We wanted justice and fair play. We thought that was what the law was for. We were brave but we had it backwards. We didn't know you had to begin with the judges" (176). What these women didn't realize in their joking about "naming" is that they were right about beginning with the language. In their emphasis on the importance of their alienation from the language and by renaming their experience they can begin to act on their ambitions to influence the world.

Language's influence in social change is emphasized by Mary Eagleton,

who asks: "How does the struggle of some women with language connect with the struggle of other women in their work place or against domestic violence?" (203). According to Julia Kristeva and other theorists, the change comes not from the creation of a new power system of language or gender, but through appealing to "difference" by extolling feminine experience and in this way calling attention to the dominant, masculine system. Eagleton believes (as I think Atwood does) that this "appeal to difference. . .can be a powerful and necessary mode of struggle and action, can take the force of an alternative representation," and "can clearly become important as a basis for movement and challenge and transformation" (204). In "Weight," Atwood calls attention to masculine discourse through her depiction of the ironic power politics employed by the narrator: she uses her femininity to manipulate men (often by sleeping with them) into contributing money to support Molly's Place, a women's shelter named after the narrator's old law-school friend who was murdered by her husband.

Written as a first-person narrative (the only story in the collection using this point of view), the story begins with the narrator describing her puzzling present condition: "I am gaining weight. I'm not getting bigger, only heavier. . . technically I'm the same. My clothes still fit, so it isn't size. . . . It's a density of the cells, as if I've been drinking heavy metals. Nothing you can measure." The narrator's paradoxical predicament is further detailed in the story as she takes on the heavy burden of seeking retribution for her friend's death, takes on the duplicitous burden of working within the power system of male discourse, and takes on the burden of silence and deception. This is a heavy weight to be sure and one that troubles her: "The heaviness I feel is in the energy I burn up getting myself. . .through the day. . . .Some days, I think I'm not

going to make it" (173). The narrator, a successful businesswoman, struggles under the weight of her bottom line, "that cash is cash" (187) and it buys her power.

The money she raises for Molly's Place also eases her guilt over not doing more to prevent the death of Molly and women like her. She addresses her lost friend about her failings: "Molly, I let you down. I burned out early. I couldn't take the pressure. I wanted security. Maybe I decided that the fastest way to improve the lot of women was to improve my own" (181). She must balance her own gain in prestige with the painful loss of her friend. Certainly, money and the prestige it buys help the narrator pick through the minefield of masculine discourse and even detonate a few "bombs." Her power lunch with the "rich man" Charles reveals her duplicity in the world of "bottom lines": "He has excess money, and I'm try to get some of it out of him." Furthermore, she is willing to "lie judiciously" to get it: "I'm doing it for a friend. This is true enough: Molly was a friend" (174). Not only is she brutally honest with herself about this duplicity, but she also recognizes her paradoxical role as the "other woman" to these men and their wives: a comfort to the former and a threat to the latter: "The tending of such men is a fading art. . . .The wives are too busy for it, and the younger women don't know how" (178-79). Thus, she confesses: "My guilt is about other things." She knows that her power lies in her silence. It makes the wives uneasy. "I make them nervous." She realizes, however, that to tell what she knows would mean abdicating her power: "But then I would lose power. Knowledge is power only as long as you keep your mouth shut." The narrator's guilt about being silent and enjoying her power parallels the paradoxical dilemma of women's situation in masculine discourse.

Atwood approaches women's silence as one alternative to women

speaking in the foreign tongue of the dominant discourse. At times, the narrator feels that her silence is empowering; it gives her a sense of control over her conversation with Charles: "I think: 'Now he'll say 'Cheers' again, and then he'll make some comment about seafood being good for the sex drive. He's had enough wine for that, by now. Next he'll ask me why I'm not married'" (179). At other times, however, the narrator seems to understand Adrienne Rich's advice that "Lying is done with words, and also with silence" (186). As the narrator and Molly moved into careers, Molly "developed a raw edge to her voice" and committed herself to representing "the kind of women" who "never had any money" (181-82), while the narrator admits to silently putting the improvement of her own "lot" ahead of the lot of women like Molly's clients.

The narrator is clever enough, however, to understand and resist the pitfalls of romance. She replaces erotic impulse with impulse to power. Whereas "Molly was a toad-kisser" who "thought any toad could be turned into a prince if he was only kissed enough by her" (176), the narrator dismisses such romantic notions: "I no longer think that any thing can happen. I no longer want to think that way. *Happen* is what you wait for, not what you do; and *anything* is a large category" (187). The narrator's attention to the "slipperiness" of language is unwavering and at times unsettling. When she thinks of Molly's husband's brutal actions and his subsequent claim to amnesia, her word play is chilling: "*Dismemberment*. The act of conscious forgetting. I try not to think of Molly like that. I try to remember her whole" (186).

"Re-membering" Molly through the duplicitous system of language is a continual and conscious operation engaged by the narrator in her struggle to survive within the dominant discourse. Atwood is, of course, quite aware of her parallel deconstructive task in writing what cannot be written in her story:

women's struggle between erotic impulse and impulse to power, between language's representation of women's lives and the reality of their experience. And she will not rest with one or the other. She is as acutely aware as her protagonist of the slipperiness of language. It is no coincidence that during her artful lying and manipulation to get more money for Molly's Place, the narrator is all the while conscious that Molly would disapprove of her methods.

Atwood reveals both the difficulty and subversive effectiveness of ceaseless maneuvering within the dominant power system of language when, at the end of the story, her protagonist envisions a future that remains much the same as the present in terms of her ongoing power politics. Trying to stay slim and attractive to her married lovers, the narrator imagines herself "power-walking. . .for the inner and outer thighs" in a cemetery where Molly is not buried, picking out a tombstone which she will "pretend" is Molly's, bending "to do [her] leg stretches," touching the ground, "or as close to it as [she] can get without rupture" (187). Caught in the instability of language and its failure to represent the world as she experiences it, the narrator's words call attention to her shaky relationship with language and reality. Atwood's chooses words that come as close as she can get to writing what cannot be written without rupturing the narrative gap between reality and perception. Just as the narrator lays "a wreath of invisible money on [Molly's pretend] grave"(187) signaling the power of her manipulative methods, Atwood lays a wreath of invisible meaning on her fiction, signaling her awareness of the manipulative power of language, which Eagleton suggests "can clearly become important as a basis for movement and challenge and transformation" (204).

"Weight" thus addresses Eagleton's question "How does the struggle of women with language connect with the struggle of other women in their work

place or against domestic violence?" (203) in a way that tells the truth to women. The struggle must begin with women's attention to language as a system of power. In "Weight" Atwood's artistic imagination challenges language's power while working within its confines.

The imaginative treatment of the language paradox faced by women writers is described by Coral Ann Howells as "a woman's only way of defiance against abuses of [systems of] power. . .her ability to make things visible through words." Howells further explains women writers' complicity: "Women's writing often celebrates the power of the female imagination, yet such celebration is frequently accompanied by a deep unease about the activity and purposes of writing. There are obvious dissatisfactions with the duplicitous nature of language and fiction-making" (30). One such dissatisfaction is manifested in Atwood's treatment of the Canadian sensitivity to language in the title story of the collection, "Wilderness Tips." This story is about three Canadian sisters, Pamela, Portia, and Pru, their silent brother, Roland, and their relationships, over the years to George, an Hungarian exile to Canada and now a rich entrepreneur, married to one sister, lover of another, and fascinated by the third.

George's experience with language, especially his manipulation of the sensitivity of colonized Canadians toward language, may express some of Atwood's attitudes towards her own complicity with language. The third-person narrator describes George's contempt at "the fuss here people make about language, he doesn't understand it. What's a second language, or a third, or a fourth? George himself speaks five" (193). He has learned to survive and even thrive in exile through his opportunistic complicity in dealing with Canadians: "These people were lax and trusting, and easily embarrassed by a hint of their

own intolerance or lack of hospitality to strangers. They weren't ready for him." He consciously uses his cultural and linguistic difference to profit: "A hint of opposition and he'd thicken his accent and refer darkly to Communist atrocities. Seize the high moral ground, then grab what you can" (201). His role as an outsider, exiled to Canada, provides George with an awareness of his duplicitous position, which parallels the ambivalent relationship that is entailed in the way that Atwood has profited through her writing.

George's marauding strategies carry him far within his adopted country; he had fallen in love with Wacousta Lodge, the family vacation home, the first time he set eyes on it when Pru dragged him there, as a young refugee, one more shocking affront to her stuffy family. By charming the mother, and marrying the youngest sister, Portia, not for love, but because she was and is "a woman of courtesy and tact and few words" (199), George gets what he really wants: Wacousta Lodge. Throughout the marriage to Portia, George has carried on an affair with Pru. The sisters, especially Portia and Pamela, illustrate women's dilemma with language as they ceaselessly maneuver within the powerful web of language. In "Wilderness Tips," Atwood's depiction of Pamela's obsessive attention to words and their meaning and Portia's equally obsessive silence illustrate how Canadian women's fiction can generate what Howells calls "a double sense not only of women's difference but also their complicity in traditional power arrangements and an awareness of their strategies of appeasement" (27).

Moreover, according to Howells, Atwood's portrayal of Canadian women's doubleness of vision opens a "female imaginative space" (15) which is also the consequence of Canadian women's experience of colonization, a large part of which involves "an awareness of the wilderness" as "the dominant

cultural myth. . .encoding Canadians' imaginative responses to their landscape and history" (11). Upon arriving in Canada, however, men and women experienced wilderness differently. The men's reaction of either "fear and recoil. . .or an adventurous challenge to the unknown" (14) is played out in "Wilderness Tips" through Roland and George, and connected to the language issue in terms of their responses to an old book in the lodge library, entitled Wilderness Tips. Both men are drawn to the old book, published in 1905, that bears a photograph of the author in a typical Canadian male response to his wilderness surroundings, wearing "a plaid wool jacket and felt hat, smoking a pipe and paddling a canoe" in apparent control of his environment. The book is filled with practical advice for survival in the wilderness "interspersed with lyrical passages about the joys of independence and the open air, and descriptions of fish-catching and sunsets" (202).

Atwood portrays differing responses to this book by Roland and George. For Roland, Wilderness Tips signifies his lost youth and lost ideals as well as his fear of the wild. Middle-aged now, he remembers its mythical power: "How old had he been--nine? ten?. . . .It was the summer he wanted to be an Indian because of Wilderness Tips" (207). Roland was caught up in the book's myth of the noble savage: "There was a lot about the Indians, about how noble they were, how brave, faithful, clean, reverent, hospitable, and honourable." Because the myth pairs nobility with savagery, as a boy, Roland had dressed himself as an Indian "with a tea towel tucked into the front of his bathing suit for a loincloth," had decorated his face with charcoal and red paint, and had tried to "brain" Pru with his homemade stone axe (208). As a grown man, an accountant in the city who spends his weekends splitting wood, Roland now feels "alive" only at Wacousta Lodge (206). He yearns for the romantic code of

behavior offered by the book-- "the innocent, fusty vocabulary that once inspired him: Manhood with a capital M, courage, honour. The Spirit of the Wild"--even though he recognizes that such words are "naive, pompous, ridiculous." The romantic conventions encoded in the vocabulary of Wilderness Tips have now become for Roland "faint echoe[s]" of his chopping axe, "an old sound, a sound left over" (209). He is imprisoned in a net of fear and nostalgia for the wilderness that hinders his struggle to survive and to feel alive.

If Roland cannot entirely release himself from the spell of the words in the book, George faces another language dilemma with Wilderness Tips. He encounters the book during his first visit to Wacousta Lodge, and the book's title puzzles him: "'Wilderness' he knew, but 'tips'? He was not immediately sure whether this word was a verb or a noun" (201). George first associates the word with the phrase "asparagus tips," and then with his first experience with a canoe: "Pru had said, 'Be careful, it tips.'" Finally, he decides that the word is best decoded in terms of "the 'Handy Tips for Happy Homemakers' columns in the women's magazines he had taken to reading in order to improve his English--the vocabularies were fairly simple and there were pictures, which was a big help" (202). Atwood's strategy is thus to use the domestic domain of women's magazines to unlock the key to the meaning of the words, and by extension, the Canadian wilderness. George comes to realize that "tips" means hints and for him it is the "tips" that are meaningful, not the "lyrical passages about the joys of independence" and Manhood: "how to do useful things, like snaring small animals and eating them--something George himself had done, though not in forests" (202). What interests George are the wilderness survival tips, which Atwood cleverly compares to the domestic survival tips offered by women's magazines.

George is attracted to the passage about "skinning knives," not those about "courage and honor." Even so, he knows that wilderness also resides in large cities, where he has been both prey and predator. Unlike Roland's game of killing of Pru with a homemade stone axe, George "once shot three men himself, though only two of them were strictly necessary. The third was a precaution" (198). At Wacousta Lodge, "he feels privileged" to be part of "an alien past" where once existed the life and death struggles for survival that George has so recently known, and where echoes of them still exist. It is not words like "honor and courage," however, that come to mind when he remembers his past, it is the word "survival."

In a sense, through his refusal to romanticize Canadian tradition as Roland does, George deconstructs the vocabulary of Wilderness Tips and deromanticizes it, until even Roland realizes that in the end, George will own Wacousta Lodge "and then turn it into a lucrative retirement home for the rich Japanese. He'll sell them Nature, at a huge margin" (206). George's refusal of the "innocent, fusty vocabulary" of Wilderness Tips and all that it stands for--a powerful misrepresentation of the reality of survival--undercuts Roland's nostalgia. In this instance, Atwood's juxtaposition of these two views of the language of Wilderness Tips displaces the traditional authority invested in language as a record of truth.

The experience of colonization and survival was different for women, according to Howells, and thus, "we find some important difference in female versions of the wilderness." Women's unique awareness of wilderness as "unknown psychic territory within" becomes for writers Canadian women writers like Atwood "the symbol of unmapped territory to be transformed through writing into female imaginative space" (14,15). This female imaginative space offers

Atwood the opportunity to explore women's "different" experiences of survival within the wilderness of the dominant culture.

In her portrayal of the language strategies used for survival by Pamela and Portia, Atwood explores the language paradox faced by women. Pamela is obsessed with pointing out the tricky figures and quirks of language. A college professor and now a Dean of Women, she illustrates women's dilemma with language by her relentless challenge of its rules until ultimately she finds herself captive of her own obsession. Her preoccupation with the system of language, as well as her cleverness in expressing herself in words, are her strategies for survival within the male dominated world of academia. Pamela's attempts to "master" the male system of language leads George to label her as the "intellectual sister" (211) whose word-games strike George as "incomprehensible" (196), and which explains for him why she never married. Pamela's relativizing of language rules is her defense against the powerful language system in which she operates.

Pamela seems to adopt Luce Irigaray's linguistic strategy for women's survival within a language system that is foreign to them: "one way of disrupting patriarchal logic. . .is through mimeticism, or the mimicry of male discourse" (qtd in Moi 139). Irigaray proposes that such imitation is a powerful method of "undermining patriarchy," especially when performed by a woman fully conscious of her position within the power system of language and fully conscious that all she can do to counter its alienating effects is to mirror it or reflect it back on itself (149). If at her first meeting with George, when Pamela corrects his English, she herself is perhaps unaware of the power of miming male pedagogic discourse, certainly Atwood is aware of this deconstructive strategy. When George refers to Portia as his "host," Pamela is quick with a

correction: " 'Hostess'. . . A 'host' is male, like 'mine host' in an inn, or else it's a wafer you eat at communion. Or the caterpillar that all the parasites lay their eggs on" (211). Most of her conversations with George take this direction. When Portia asks George whether there is any "news" in the newspaper he has been reading, Pamela breaks in: "Why is 'news' plural? Why don't we say 'olds'?" (196). And George's idle remark that he is an oaf for spilling his coffee draws this response from Pamela: "If the plural of 'loaf' is 'loaves,' what is the plural of 'oaf'. . . .Why isn't it 'oaves'?" (203-04).

It is not just Pamela's preoccupation for precision in language that puzzles George, it is also "her metaphoric leaps, her tangled verbal string-works, that confuse him" (197). Her use of such colorful figures of speech as "a sea of maggots" and "smoking like a furnace" leave George confused. As he becomes used to Pamela's incessant and confusing word-games, however, George begins to see through the clouds of confusion to realize "that a good deal of what she says is directed not to him or to any other listener but simply to herself. Is that because she thinks that no one can hear her?" (204). Ironically, this is the case. Pamela resorts to language games because she feels that this is the way to make herself heard. Moreover, although her ambiguous words seem reduced to obscurity and constitute an unappealing alternative to silence, they do underscore the duplicitous role of language in representing our world. Pamela's authoritarian use of language, her intellectualizing and her metaphoric leaps, are all evidence, as well, of Atwood's awareness of women's duplicitous position within the power system of language.

Atwood's strategy complements Kristeva's theorizing on women writers' unending dialogue with the male constructs of language and literary tradition. According to Kristeva, this position is a "privileged" one which gives women

writers a doubleness of vision with which to call attention to the dominant tradition as a power construct. Whereas Irigaray prescribes over-miming the dominant discourse as a way to call attention to it as the power construct of the symbolic order of language, Kristeva suggests other options: "father-identification, which will create a woman who will derive her identity from the same symbolic order" or "mother-identitication, which will intensify the pre-Oedipal components of the woman's psyche and render her marginal to the symbolic order" (qtd in Moi 165). Kristeva is attracted to the common ground shared by femininity and the semiotic--their marginality: "As the feminine is defined as marginal under patriarchy, so the semiotic is marginal to language" (166). From this marginal position in the power system of language, Kristeva concludes, the semiotic, while it "can never take over the symbolic," is able to "make itself felt" through its disruption of the symbolic, "analysable as a series of ruptures, absences and breaks in the symbolic language" (170). This linguistic strategy is explored by Atwood when Pamela is reduced to using the semiotic, pre-Oedipal language of the mother during her sexual "scuffling" with George in the boathouse. Portia overhears her sister in the form of "a voice" that "sounds like her mother. . . that soft crescendo of surprise and almost pained wonder. Oh. Oh. *Oh.*" (215). Pamela's loss of words and her reversion to pre-Oedipal language, reveals her marginal position within as well as the limits of symbolic language. Thus, by rupturing the symbolic order, her pre-Oedipal "words" emphasize women's alienation from the power system of language.

Women's continual alienation from language is most pointedly portrayed through Portia's passivity and silence, the very qualities that initially attracted George to her: "he knew. . .that she was the one he would marry. A woman of

courtesy and tact and few words, who would be kind to him" (199). Roland also reacts positively to Portia's passivity: " [She] has always been his favourite sister. . . the youngest, the baby. Pru used to tease her savagely, though Portia was remarkably slow to cry. Instead, she would just look. . . . Then she would go off by herself" (207). Pru, however, is angered by Portia's passive silence: "You've always been too good for words," she tells her sister "with rancour" (213). Pru is equally incensed by Portia's acquiescence to George and to their mother: "When Mother married you off. You just stood there and let the two of them do it, like the little suck you were" (214). Even Pamela gets annoyed by Portia's gullibility and the easy-victim role she plays with Pru: " 'Don't believe her,' Pamela would say. 'Don't be such a sucker' " (210).

Portia, herself, reenacts her youthful passivity by clinging in middle age to the daily routine at Wacousta Lodge "enforced on her once, by her mother" (209), the afternoon nap. Instead of sleeping, however, Portia makes up stories. As a girl, her stories were "about all kinds of things"; now, "the only stories she ever makes up are about George" (209). Her silent storytelling, nonetheless, undermines conventional notions of feminine passivity. For example, Portia has long ago realized that "there are those who lie by instinct and those who don't, and the ones who are don't are at the mercy of the ones who do" (210). She longs to "go back a few decades, grow up again," regain "vital information other people seemed to have. . . make different choices. . . be less obedient. . . not say 'I do' but 'I am' " (214).

Ironically, Portia has the chance to do just that--to revise her childhood passivity, to give voice to her silence. The opportunity for revision arises when she overhears Pamela and George in the boathouse and a voice that sounds "like her mother." At first, Portia reacts as she always has, by retreating from

direct confrontation. Avoiding everyone, she heads for the beach and escapes into sleep, and "when she wakes up there are pine needles sticking to her cheek. . .the sun is low in the sky; the wind has fallen" and there is a "dead flat calm." During this calm, however, Atwood provides Portia with a new story. Atwood's description of Portia's submersion in the lake, where "she meets the doubles of her own legs, her own arms, going down" (215), recalls Portia's initial encounter with George, when "George leaned over to kiss the mother's sun-freckled hand, and his dark glasses fell off into the lake. The mother made cooing sounds of distress. . . .[and] Portia. . .took off her shirt without a word and dove into the lake. . .retrieved his dark glasses for him. . .her wet hair dripping down over her small breasts like a water nymph's on an Art Nouveau fountain" (199). This is the vision of Portia that prompts George's decision to marry her. In the new version, however, the story is Portia's to control: "She takes off her clothes. . . wades into the lake. . .floats with only her head above water. She is herself at fifteen, herself at twelve, herself at nine, at six" (215). This time, instead of being swept into the future as George's silent wife, Portia moves into her pre-Oedipal past, before language and reclaims a feminine psychic space long repressed: "The cold hush of the lake is like a long breathing-out of relief. It's safe to be this age, to know that the stump [on the shore] is her stump, the rock is hers, that nothing will ever change" (216).

Submerged in the Canadian wilderness, Portia finds a new female imaginative space in which to reconstruct language and narrative, or at least to expose their limits for women. She can go on ignoring George's lies and deceptions, or she can give voice to her alarm. As if to emphasize women's precarious position in language, Atwood leaves Portia wavering between keeping her silence and giving voice to herself. Portia clings to the safety of her

vision of the unchanging objects on the shore, "attached to their familiar reflections. . .the same rock, the same white stump that have always been there" (216). This version of the wilderness, however, cannot hold.

From her pre-Oedipal position outside of language, Portia's startling new vision of the wilderness "tips" her out of her passive role momentarily, and she envisions herself disrupting the old story in which she has long been confined. From her spot in the lake, "float[ing] with only her head above water" (215), Portia watches the shoreline change: "It's no longer horizontal: it seems to be on a slant, as if there'd been a slippage in the bedrock. . .as if the whole mainland were sliding gradually down, submerging." Portia's version of this wilderness " tip" is apocalyptic, and registered in terms of the disaster of the Titanic: "She thinks of. . . a huge boat, a passenger liner--tilting, descending, with the lights still on, the music still playing, the people talking on and on, still not aware of the disaster that has already overcome them." For once, however, Portia projects herself as someone who acts and speaks: "She sees herself running naked through the ballroom. . .with dripping hair and flailing arms, screaming at them: 'Don't you see? It's coming apart, everything's coming apart, you're sinking'" (216).

Atwood's attention to language in Wilderness Tips is a particular strategy for rupturing and breaking the old conventions of language and narrative, not in order to replace them with new equally monolithic patterns, but to challenge the limited stories available to women. She makes us aware of the dilemma women face when they must trust the symbolic order of language, and she also points out how women's marginalized position can be an advantage (or doubly privileged position) from which to critique the limits of language. Portia, too, comes to an understanding of these limits: "She would be invisible, of course.

No one would hear her. And nothing has happened, really, that hasn't happened before" (216). What *has* happened is that through Portia's experience of wilderness, Atwood makes visible the powerful system of language while at the same time she reveals its slippage in attempting to represent experience. Portia's temporary position outside the symbolic order offers the opportunity for a disruption of the old story of women's silence and submission and a vision of new possibilities, both of which reinforce Atwood's ambivalence toward language as a web of power but also her belief in it as a web of possibility for a multiplicity of meaning.

Atwood's Notions on Subjectivity and Form

In her writing, Atwood is conscious of the unreliability of language to represent subjectivity. I have already discussed her treatment of the power of naming and the practice of labeling female characters through language in relation to "Hairball" and "Weight." Beyond her depictions of these characters' shifting sense of identity in relation to language, however, Atwood also explores the intricate and changing relationship of the woman writer herself to language and experience. Women writers' sense of identity and their sense of authority as story tellers differ from men's. Historically, women's story-telling has not been regarded as literary art, but rather has been associated with the oral traditions of folk tale, legend, old wives' tales, and gossip. The difficulty in assuming the authorial power to define their characters as women, to give a sense of authenticity to women's experience, is similar to the struggle that women authors undertake to be taken seriously as story-tellers, as writers of authority. Therefore, says Barreca, women writers of the short story often present contentious and alternative voices and stories that "force their way into

definition and prominence" (6). The result is that the traditional authorial devotion to the short story as an art form, complete with a totalizing unity of effect and inevitable movement toward closure, is often called into question by women writers in narrating women's struggles toward identity, which do not resemble the traditional path to autonomy. Because women writers often explore the traditional sense of a cohesive identity in their writing, the close connection between women writers' challenge to authority and story form becomes clear.

Questioning the notion of coherent subjectivity is, of course, a major project of postmodernism, and here a basic conflict seems to occur. At the same time that postmodernism is proclaiming the death of the self and the death of the author, women are in the process of redeeming a sense of unified wholeness long denied to them. In this context, de Beauvoir's emphasis on the inability of the "other" to shape one's psychological, social and cultural identity has become a major project of feminism and is often seen in direct conflict with postmodernism's project of destabilizing what Linda Hutcheon terms the "so-called universal and timeless humanist subject" (A Poetics 159). Hutcheon, however, reminds us that postmodern theorists do not destroy the concept of the subject; rather, Derrida insists on situating it, which means "to recognize difference of race, gender, class, sexual orientation" as well as "to acknowledge the ideology of the subject and to suggest alternative notions of subjectivity" (159). Therefore, the feminist project of reclaiming women's subjectivity is valid insofar as this is the necessary first step to challenging the traditionalist notions of the stability of the self and the equation of an autonomous self with human consciousness.

One way for women to break the hold of the notion of an autonomous self

is through paying attention to postmodernism's theorizing about the construction of subjectivity through language. The idea that an individual gains selfhood by claiming it ("I am") through access to language, however, is problematic to women, because their access to discourse and their resulting subjectivity means their submission to "phallocentricity, to the masculine and the symbolic," while the alternative means women's further alienation from language and from the humanist notion of selfhood (Heilbrun 41).

Hutcheon explains women's paradoxical situation: "Women must define their subjectivity before they can question it; they must first assert the selfhood they have been denied by the dominant culture. Their doubled act of "inscribing and challenging subjectivity has been one of the major forces in making postmodernism such a resolutely paradoxical enterprise" (The Canadian Postmodern 6). As well, the colonial history of Canadian writers has engendered an identity divided between region and nation that is well-suited to the paradoxical sense of the postmodern.

Atwood is, of course, aware of the importance of identity to a writer's sense of authority, and furthermore, she is aware of how late Canadian and women writers have come into any sense of selfhood. She often mentions that not until graduate school in the United States did her consciousness of a national or authorial identity arise, and only after this came her realization of the erasure of much significant *Canadian* experience under colonialism. Her first-hand experience with the American insistence on individualism reveals the problems accompanying such a position ("Nationalism" 86-87), and her consciousness of the double bind of writing within the dominant cultures of Great Britain and the United States is acute: "How do you come to terms with that? Do you try to imitate the mother country. . .or do you try to create new

forms. . .and then everybody jumps on your head and spits at you." To Atwood, colonialism's double bind pertains especially to women writers: "Women have had this experience. . . . Do you try to write like a man and get praised for. . .[it] or do you try to write like a woman and have your work dismissed as secondary and inconsequential and subjective and too female?" (Lyons 233). For Atwood, a Canadian woman writer, issues of identity and literary inheritance are paramount.

A possible outcome of the strong connection between nationality and gender resides in the fact that Canadian literature approaches the idea of a national identity in much the same way that women's stories explore gendered subjectivity. Canada's multi-cultured inheritance, its discontinuous history of colonization, and its tendency to political decentralization can be seen to correspond to the marginalized position from which women's stories have challenged the dominant literary traditions, not through overt opposition and revolution, but through the revision of the problem of inheritance and identity. The postmodern assertion of the "inconsistencies and contradictory impulses inside the self" occurs in tandem with the political definition of the subject existing under "a superior power in a colonial situation" (Howells 2). If Irigaray is correct in contending that any notion of the subject is always masculine, then women are better served by resisting the possibility of a unified self in favor of a pluralized approach to subjectivity which destabilizes rigid categories of identity and gender. Similarly, Canada's "problem of identity may not be the problem of having no identity but rather of having multiple identities, so that any single national self-image is reductive and always open to revision" (Howells 26). The same situation applies to women writers' inheritance of the "male" short story, shaped by such dictates as unity of effect and singleness of impression: any

single notion of unity of impression is reductive and always open to revision.

Contesting both subjectivity and story form by establishing possibilities for the coexistence of multiple impulses is a project well-suited to Atwood's recent fiction. Declaring freedom "from the burden of too much Self," from the burden of political and cultural imperialism, and from the burden of monolithic narrative movement toward closure requires a deconstructive strategy that "displaces" these burdens without laying them down, requiring a process of revision. In order to revise these burdens in Wilderness Tips, Atwood first calls upon these powerful traditions and then proceeds to expand their reductive patterns. Howells suggests that recent critical focus on Canadian women writers may be traced to the way that "their stories seem the natural expression of the insecurity and ambitions of their society" and the way that they thus "provide models for stories of Canadian national identity" (26). I would suggest that as well as challenging national and gender imperialism, Atwood's short stories also express the insecurity and ambitions of a woman writer working within the official literary tradition of the short-story form. One result of her imaginative efforts is that the reductive drive for unity of effect and singleness of impression is displaced with an awareness of the multiple impulses of story.

Transgressing the generic boundaries of the traditional short story, in "Death by Landscape," Atwood presents what amounts to a "non-story," or a reverse bildungsroman. The protagonist, Lois, a widow with grown sons, sits alone in her Toronto waterfront condominium. Lois contemplates her collection of landscape paintings of the Canadian wilderness as she recalls the story of her botched search for selfhood, which centers upon a canoe trip at a girls' summer camp when she was thirteen. During the trip into the Canadian wilderness, Lois' summer companion and alter-ego of three years, Lucy,

disappears, a loss that Lois has carried with her into the present moment.

The main characteristic of this short story is that it is filled with gaps that disrupt the traditional male narrative patterns of the quest for identity. Lois's romance and marriage to Rob, and the birth of her sons are dismissed by Atwood in the first sentence of the story: "Now that the boys are grown up and Rob is dead, Lois has moved to a condominium apartment" (102). In one fell swoop, the conventional reasons for a woman's self-fulfillment are displaced. In their place Atwood presents an initiation story, another conventional metaphor for attaining selfhood. The male ritual of the wilderness journey as a way to find oneself, however, is quickly subverted through Atwood's unconventional treatment. The journey is undertaken by a dozen thirteen year-old girls and two female counselors, and rather than the traditional male initiation story about gaining manhood through a test of nature, it concerns a girl's loss of self through her encounter with the wilderness.

Perhaps "loss" of self is too "unified" a term in itself. The female initiation process in this story seems more a record of the dissolving of self so that the boundaries of identity become fluid and blurred. This condition is illustrated by the way Lois recalls not her individuation, but her gradual dissolving and merging with Lucy during their three summers together at Camp Manitou. As the two girls move together through the "sort of totemic clan system" (106) that the different age groups of campers are assigned to-- ranging from "Chickadees" to "Bluejays" to "Ravens" and then to "Kingfishers"-- they take part in public and private rituals of change. They experience camp "singsongs" gathered "around a mosquito-infested campfire ring"; the "required cheerfulness" at breakfast is punctuated by "loud shouting and the banging of spoons on the tables. . .at ritual intervals"; they share the story spread by the

older campers that the "huge moulting moosehead" hanging "in the dining hall, over the stone fireplace" is haunted (103-05). All these shared public rituals make the camp seem "ancient," and, in fact, many of the campers are the daughters of past campers who have handed down Camp Manitou "as an inheritance, an obligation."

Lucy, an outsider, from the United States--"where the comic books come from, and the movies"--has been sent to Camp Manitou in the Canadian wilderness because "her mother had been a camper here" and "had been a Canadian once" as well (106). Lois, in contrast, is a real Canadian, with a life she perceives as "placid and satisfactory" (109). Her Canadian identity is marked by a year of camping experience over Lucy and by the fact that she knows the French words "when they sang "Alouette" around the campfire." The girls write to each during their winters apart and pretend to be "sisters, or even twins," signing their letters "LL, with the L's entwined together," but Lois knows that she cannot measure up to Lucy's more dramatic life experiences or to her jaded outlook: "The difference was that Lucy did not care about the things she didn't know, whereas Lois did" (107).

Each summer when they meet again at Camp Manitou their differences become clearer to Lois: "They had changed so much, or Lucy had. . . [she] always had a surprise or two, something to show, some marvel to reveal." These changes in Lucy affect Lois vicariously, "like watching someone grow up in jolts." The first summer Lucy brings to camp "a picture of herself in a tutu," the next year she "was taking horseback riding," and the next summer "her mother and father had been divorced, and she had a new stepfather. . .and a new house," and the summer they "entered Ravens, she got her period, right in the first week of camp." It is this female initiation that Lucy and Lois mark with a

private ritual, one that Lois recalls years later: "the two of them. . . made a small fire out behind the farthest outhouse, at dusk. . . . On this fire they burned one of Lucy's used sanitary napkins. Lois is not sure why they did this, or whose idea it was, but she can remember the feeling of deep satisfaction it gave her as the white fluff singed and the blood sizzled" (108). This private ritual, not a sanctioned part of the campers' coming of age experience, is, ironically, far more fulfilling to Lois and Lucy than the canoe trip that caps their last summer together.

The change in Lucy this summer is that "she has a boyfriend who is sixteen and kisses her until her "knees go limp." He is, of course, entirely unacceptable to her parents who threaten her "with boarding school," so that "she wants to run away from home" (109). Such dramatic symbols of life changes are foreign to Lois whose expectations are limited to her first canoe trip. The irony is that while Lois mistakenly believes that this wilderness journey will mark her as dramatically different, raised to a more mature level, Lucy sees the trip as a way to escape the responsibilities of the dramatic changes in her life.

The two friends' very distinct views of the trip serve as a focus for Atwood's exploration of the larger difference in male and female experiences of selfhood and attitudes towards the wilderness. In a deliberately ludicrous fashion, Atwood depicts women's attempt at male initiation rituals in the form of a "special send-off" that mimics a Native American chief's ceremonial farewell to the young men in search of their bravehood. The camp's director, an anxious woman of indeterminate age with a "stringy neck" (105), Cappie, or "Chief Cappeosota," wrapped in "a red-and-black Hudson's Bay blanket," "wearing a twisted bandanna around her head" with "a row of frazzle-ended

feathers around it" and "three streaks of red across each of her cheeks with a lipstick" (109), exhorts her Ravens sitting around the fire to "beat on tom-toms made of round wooden cheese boxes with leather stretched over the top and nailed in place" (110).

Lois remembers the thrill she felt at the time, which is now (in her adult mind) replaced by a "disquieting" feeling. Atwood revisits the romantic notion of the noble savage, that appears in "Wilderness Tips," and displaces it with the reality of Native subjection: "they should not even be called Indians. . . . other people taking their names and dressing up as them." It is the possibility of "pure and aboriginal" adventure, however, which appeals to the young Lois. This type of adventure has been allowed only to boys, as Lois now realizes in her recollection of the language Cappie uses: " 'Do good in war, my braves, and capture many scalps.' This is another of her pretenses: that they are boys, and bloodthirsty. But such a game cannot be played by substituting the word 'squaw.' It would not work at all" (110). Pretending to be boys in search of their manhood doesn't work either.

The next morning, twelve Ravens "set out from the main dock, in four canoes, three in each" with their counselors, boyishly named "Kip" and "Pat" (111), singing "raucously and with defiance" the songs of explorers. The thirteen-year-old girls do their best to mimic the male response to the wilderness terrain. Lois, especially, feels the exhilarating pull of this male "story." She "feels as if an invisible rope has broken. They're floating free, on their own, cut loose." (112). When she sleeps next to her best friend under the stars, however, Lucy displaces the male story of journey, conquest, and triumphant return with the possibility for escaping the realities of growing up female, when she says, "It would be nice not to go back" (113).

Lois's and Lucy's differing views of their journey illustrate the doubleness of women's response to the wilderness. As Howells explains: "For the vast Canadian solitudes provided precarious conditions of existence where women were forced to redefine themselves and where the self was discovered to be something far more problematical than feminine stereotypes from 'home' had allowed women to believe" (15). Such a response helps to explain why the adult Lois relives the story of their journey over and over, searching for "anything important, anything that would provide some sort of reason or clue to what happened next" (112). There is no doubt that what happens next on the canoe trip does not fit the pattern of the traditional male story or male response to the wilderness, and perhaps the "clue" is to be found in the realization that female identity development does not correspond to the dominant, male theories of identity development.

Such renowned identity theorists as Erik Erikson, Heinz Lichtenstein, and Norman Holland make use of what Judith Kegan Gardiner calls a "male paradigm for human experience" (178), and consequently she feels that their theories of "human" development are irrelevant to women. Gardiner, accordingly explores an alternative female identity paradigm by invoking Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic perceptions of the difference between the composition of male and female personality. One of her operative metaphors for this difference is that of process versus product, and she notes the way that the "processual nature of female identity" is reflected in women's writing, "particularly its defiance of conventional generic boundaries and of conventional characterization" (179). She proposes that since prevailing identity theory assumes the goals of "stability and constancy," it expresses identity formation as a progression toward a final product, "the autonomous

individual, the paradigm for which is male" (182). Because the relational and flexible formation of female personality begins in childhood and is an on-going process throughout womanhood, the idea of a stable self is problematizing to women. These differences in views of identity formation, according to Gardiner, can be seen in differences in writing by men and women, and "contemporary writing by women reflects these dissonances" (184). Three characteristic narrative strategies employed by women writers, suggests Gardiner, are nonconformity to traditional generic boundaries, defiance of the integrated character, and a tendency to refuse the operation of repression in memory process.

In "Death by Landscape," Atwood skillfully employs all three of these strategies. Nonconformity, for example, can be seen the way that Atwood subverts the male coming of age story. Instead of resulting in stable identity formation, the story of Lucy ends when she disappears from Lookout Point into the relentless landscape of the Canadian wilderness. Lois's initiation involves a loss when her strong relational bond with Lucy is violently disrupted and displaced by an unspeakable separation. The two friends' daring climb to the top of Lookout Point brings them to "a sheer drop to the lake and a long view over the water, back the way they've come" (114-15). Lois' initial sense of accomplishment and euphoria over her strength and capability is undercut by Lucy's terse observation that "it would be quite a dive off here" and her irreverent need to "pee." These are not the expected traditional male responses to reaching the symbolic pinnacle of one's journey into the wilderness. Instead, Lucy's abrupt and final disappearance disrupts any notion of an integrated self for Lois, as is evidenced by her lifelong inability to make sense of her loss. Recalling the traumatic disappearance in order to create the

"real" story of what happened, she also disrupts the traditional notion of the representation of memory. Lois realizes that rather than giving a direct representation of the event, each time she retells the story she displaces reality a bit more. The result is that "Death by Landscape" becomes a story about a missing story.

Atwood artfully reveals what the story is really about. As often as Lois has recalled that moment on Lookout Point-- "she looked at her watch: it was noon. This is when she heard the shout"-- she cannot be sure of what happened: "She has gone over and over it in her mind since, so many times that the first, real shout has been obliterated, like a footprint trampled by other footprints. But she is sure (she is almost positive, she is nearly certain) that it was not a shout of fear. Not a scream. More like a cry of surprise, cut off too soon" (115-16). Atwood's depiction of the tricks that memory plays in storytelling subverts the notion of the authority of representation. With Lucy's disappearance shrouded in mystery, Lois must return to Camp Manitou and face Cappie, who is in need of a reason, or a "true" story of the missing girl. For Lois, however, every retelling makes the story less real: "she knows it word for word. She knows it, but she no longer believes it. It has become a story" (118). Ultimately, Cappie's veiled accusation turns it into a story, rather than a representation of a real event: "Tell me again . . . from the beginning. . . . Were you mad at Lucy?. . . Sometimes we're angry when we don't know we're angry. . . . Sometimes we might do a thing without meaning to" (118-19). Only in retrospect does Lois realize what Cappie was after, "a real story with a reason in it," much like a conventionally-plotted short story, whose unity of effect is due in part to a clear motivation for its movement. Operating within this traditional narrative framework, Cappie must add what she needs to make the story

complete for herself. It is not until twenty years later that Lois understands why Cappie implicated Lois in Lucy's disappearance: "It was for herself: something to explain the loss of Camp Manitou and all [Cappie] had worked for" (119). Cappie holds fast to the conventional sense of a stable and constant identity, and hers is tied up in Camp Manitou; thus, she needs to find a "motivation" for Lucy's disappearance that will complete her identity once more.

Lois, however, has refused all these years to repress her memories of the event in order to satisfy Cappie's need--or even her own need--to find a reason for the devastating loss of Lucy. According to Gardiner, "Many women writers feel that women remember what men choose to forget. If memory operates in the service of identity maintenance differently in the two sexes, it will appear differently in literature by women--both in the representation of mental processes and in the representation of the narrative process itself" (188). This practice operates clearly in Atwood's detailed rendering of a woman who refuses to repress the memory of a terrible emotional trauma. Gardiner further speculates that if memory can be viewed as "empathic introspection with one's past self, then men and women constitute an identity differently" (189). Men must repress memory in order to constitute a coherent sense of themselves, although, in reality, they do change over time. Women, in contrast, are more conscious of change and more open to registering identity loss, or "diminishing self-concept." This distinction is illustrated by Atwood's description of Lois's growing realization that her obsessive remembering of Lucy's disappearance has obliterated her memories of events that ought to be keys to her identity formation:

> She can hardly remember, now, having her two boys in the hospital, nursing them as babies; she can hardly remember

> getting married, or what Rob looked like. Even at the time she never felt she was paying full attention. She was tired a lot, as if she was living not one life but two; her own, and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not let itself be realized--the life of what would have happened if Lucyhad not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time. . . .it was as if she was always listening for another voice. (120)

In "Death by Landscape," Atwood's protagonist's empathic introspection on the story of her missing friend plays a much larger role in constituting her identity, albeit an unstable one, than do any of the other predictable milestones in a woman's life. As a result, Lois's identity seems filled with gaps. It does not resonate with a sense of wholeness, that is, as a "real story with a reason to it." Neither is Atwood's short story a "real story" with a conventional plot motivation that propels the narrative. Instead, Lois's and Atwood's stories each resemble the paintings Lois has of the Canadian wilderness: "There are no backgrounds, in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back endlessly involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock" (121). The paintings' representation of the wilderness is similar to Lois's memory of Lucy: everywhere and nowhere at the same time, a random presence, much like Gardiner's theory of the flux of female identity formation. Moreover, Atwood's description of the paintings may be correlative with her view of herself as a woman writer. Cora Kaplan defines this experience: "Rather than approach women's difficulty in positioning themselves as writers as a question of barred access to some durable psychic state to which all humans should and can aspire, we might instead see their experience as foregrounding the inherently unstable and split character of all

human subjectivity" (180-81).

Contemplating the tangles of endless foreground in her paintings, Lois finally hears the voice she has awaited: "She hears something, almost hears it: a shout of recognition, or of joy" (121). Does this shout come from Lucy or Lois? As Lois looks closely at the paintings, she senses that "everyone of them is a picture of Lucy," but that Lucy's figure is always just out of sight behind a tree, a branch, a rock. The missing Lucy returns over and over in the landscapes, triggering Lois's memories of her disappearance, and entwining their identities in a way that dissolves the male paradigm of unified identity. As a consequence, Lois never attains the character integration that is expected at the end of the conventionally-plotted short story.

The protagonist's strong relational tie to her friend diminishes any sense of autonomous wholeness. Instead of any final separation or individuation, at the story's end, Lois feels Lucy's presence more than ever: "She is here. She is entirely alive" (122) . Memories of the missing Lucy continually rupture the import of the narrative pattern of traditional short-story form. Moreover, for Lois, the paintings are like "holes that open inwards on the wall, not like windows but like doors," which suggests that there is no barrier that separates the outside from the inside, and in turn, that the wilderness is as much within as without. In this way, for Lois the wilderness becomes "internalized as metaphor" to use Howell's phrase, and the image of the endless tangle of the wilderness lurking just "beyond the enclosure of civilized life" becomes what Howells calls "the symbol of unmapped territory to be transformed through writing into female imaginative space" (15). In "Death by Landscape," Atwood's imaginative appropriation of the tangled image of the Canadian wilderness operates as a disruption of the traditional view of one single and irreducible identity or self-

image, and further transforms the conventional story form into one that is always open to revision.

In the last story of Wilderness Tips, Atwood further unleashes the potential of this transforming power. "Hack Wednesday" deals with a middle-aged journalist's search for hope amid all the despair contained in the "real news" of the day. Facing the onrush of time as a new century looms larger, Marcia must deal with the gradual failing of her aging body and the gradual sickening of the planet: "She notices she is no longer thinking in terms of *if* – only of *when*. She must watch this tendency to give up, she must get herself under control" (237).

In many ways, "Hack Wednesday" also acts as a kind of continuation of the first story in the collection, "True Trash." In "Hack Wednesday," the main character, Marcia, in her fifties, seems to be an older and wiser embodiment of the younger central character, Joanne, in "True Trash." Seventeen-year old Joanne first appears in "True Trash" in a Canadian summer camp and then ten years later in the summer heat of Toronto, while Atwood introduces us to Marcia in "Hack Wednesday" during the coldest December in Toronto's history. At the end of "True Trash," Joanne has just become a free-lance writer who "live[s] by [her] wits" (24-50). "Hack Wednesday" presents Marcia, similar to Joanne, but thirty years older, who free-lances as a newspaper "columnist on contract" (228). Both women hold world views that are anti-romantic, wry, and ironic. Their similar professions and personalities indicate a continuity between them that is difficult to ignore. Both women also possess a doubleness of vision similar to Atwood's. If, according to Gardiner's scheme of female identity development, Joanne, as early hero of this story collection, can be designated as "her author's daughter" (179), then Marcia, the later hero, comes as close to

being identified with the author herself as any of Atwood's female characters.

Atwood is distinctly engaged with her character, Joanne, in a "motherly" way. Joanne, at seventeen, is already anti-romantic in her reading taste. She adopts a "fake English accent" and a mock "serious, histrionic voice" when she reads what she calls a "Moan-o-drama" from True Romance magazine to the other Camp Adanaqui waitresses (4). Already she is acquiring a writer's critical eye for fictionalizing: "She has a compulsion about getting to the ends of things. Sometimes she reads books backwards" (14-15). Moreover, she reads the ending counter to its intended effect. At the end of the True Romance story, for example, Joanne is not enthralled by the precious domesticity of the heroine's outcome, marriage to a devoted husband, with an adorable, laughing baby and a frolicking Irish setter; rather, she sees this outcome as a dead-end for the heroine: "This is how the story ends, with the dog" (15). In turn, Atwood's third-person-narrator takes an indulgent view of Joanne's occasional lapses into romanticizing her chosen career as a writer. Of her camp supervisor, Joanne thinks dramatically, "I will never be that old. . .I will die before I'm thirty." And the narrator continues to poke gentle fun at Joanne: "She is not at all unhappy but she intends to be, later. It seems required" (14). At the story's end, when Joanne has a chance to produce a "melodrama. . .a revelation, a sensation, a neat ending" for an old Camp Adanaqui romance, she resists: "it would not be an ending, it would only be the beginning of something else" (30). The narrator's regressive maternal indulgences of the young woman's foibles, as well as the story's record of Joanne's maturing critical eye, is clear indication that in "True Trash" the hero is her author's daughter.

A tendency toward identification with rather than separation from others

is typical of the characters in Wilderness Tips, although if some of Atwood's characters, like Joanne, and like Kat in "Hairball," can be seen as the author's daughters, some of them are more sisterly in relation to the author, as is the case with Marcia in "Hack Wednesday." Middle-aged Marcia's "uncanny ability" to size-up people, especially men; to " just look at a face and see in past the surface, to that other--child's --face which is still there" is also one of Atwood's gifts (7) according to James Wilcox. Marcia's (and Atwood's) identification with others is a mark of sisterhood, and along with that maternal perception comes forgiveness and the possibility for renewal. Dining with her husband, Eric, at the end of a trying day, Marcia and Eric silently acknowledge their complicity in "their mutual crimes" of "being. . .old" and "knowing too much" (240). Moreover, Marcia is able to visualize her boss, "Ian the Terrible," a heartless man who regards journalists as "pieceworks in a garment factory" (228), as a dull, friendless boy "storing up his revenges. It has helped her to forgive him, somewhat" (236).

Marcia's seemingly innate sense of empathy must be learned by Joanne, who has actually seen and talked to the camper, Donny, as a boy, so that when she encounters him as Don, a grown man, her memory of the boy--"all elbows and spindly knees, with huge deep-blue eyes" (12)--influences her decision to withhold information in order to protect him. Joanne, the novice writer, serves as the author's apprentice-daughter, while Marcia, the tested professional "hack," serves as the author's alter ego. The stories themselves are propelled by a narrative energy that seems to move in a cyclical pattern of retelling women's experience.

The paradox of sameness and difference also operates in these stories in a way that ultimately transforms the short-story genre itself. In Survival,

Atwood observes that English Canadian writers are "beginning to voice their own predicament" of colonization, and she suggests that in finding a new vehicle for their unique voicing, these writers must enter their own tradition in order to depart from it (245). This is doubly true for Canadian women writers whose work is often resistant to the traditional conventions of genre and characterization, while at the same time their writing functions within these conventions.

In Wilderness Tips, Atwood's metafictional bent reveals both her own and her writer-protagonists' awareness of traditional short-story conventions. Joanne and Marcia's ironic readings of women's magazines, Joanne's temporary attraction to and then rejection of "a neat ending" to her story of Ronette's romance at Camp Adanaqui, and Marcia's need to fabricate pathetic boyhood lives for men grown into monsters are all indications of Atwood's metafictional tendencies. Ultimately, as each protagonist envisions new departures from the traditional male story of human identity formation, Atwood's short stories displace the conventional "neat ending" of the genre.

In this way, the stories of Wilderness Tips, also serve to generate new models for women to live by. "True Trash" explores the predictable paradox or "threshold moment" of young women's sexual desire, the outcome being either the danger involved in forbidden acts, or safety in marriage, and in the end, Joanne realizes that "nothing has turned out that way" (30). "Hack Wednesday" explores the "threshold moment" of middle age: Marcia's urgent sense of lost time is coupled with the ancient Christmas story's appeasing distraction of hope for the future. The result is that the "real news" stories of the day are buried, according to Marcia, in "all this hope," "all this talk of babies at Christmas" (242).

Shannon Hengen's contention that the stories of Wilderness Tips present a bleak imaginative vision in the form of "women and men" who "inhabit a dark world" is only partly true. If we take into account that Atwood's attempt to "say the unsaid" and to "encourage women to claim their full humanity. . . means acknowledging the shadows as well as the light" ("If You Can't Say" 24), then these stories may be seen to present a more hopeful world. The fact that Atwood's characters do not always seem capable of changing their own situations acknowledges the shadows, while Atwood's artistic skill and authority in presenting the possibility of positive change equally stresses the light.

Hengen is particularly interested in the way that the evolution of Atwood's characters' --from her early works of the 1970s up until the early 1990s-- reflects the development of a "progressive narcissism," which she associates with a subject's reunion with a mother whose powers the subject had misunderstood and rejected" (20). For Hengen, Atwood's use of this perspective produces a feminist and Canadianist literature with the potential for social change: through their reformation as multiple and dispersed identities and through their redefinition of the concept of power as identification with others rather than a separation from others, Atwood's central female characters give "voice and meaning to the twice-obscured histories of Canadian women" (14).

Hengen, however, has misgivings about the role that progressive narcissism plays in Atwood's work of the early 1990s, including Wilderness Tips. According to her theory, the main characters in this collection should have "found their most human and most revolutionary voices," but "have not" done so (110). Instead, she feels that Atwood's character portrayals serve only as shadows of the possibility of change: while many of these characters

express anti-romantic views, and although Atwood's belief in the possibility of social change can be found here, any final self-actualization in the form of political effectiveness is missing from the stories in Wilderness Tips (111).

I would argue that Hengen's theory of progressive narcissism is too linear in its direction, and I prefer the more fluid, digressive, and even cyclical vision of female identity formation proposed by Gardiner, which also emphasizes the mother-daughter bond as the original relationship that shapes female identity. In her study of women writers' depictions of the importance of this bond to their central characters, Gardiner constructs a metaphor to explain its operation: "the hero is her author's daughter" (179), and she presents this as a guide to the study of literary identifications. In her view, the maternal metaphor of female authorship helps to focus on the distinctive interaction between the woman writer and her characters, and further, this unique maternal engagement can also be enacted between woman reader and character so that, from this perspective, the possibility for social change and even for political effectiveness rests in the author's "manipulation of identifications between narrator, author, and reader" (179).

Whereas Hengen would argue that this continual and intensely personal crossing of self and other in the acts of writing and reading is not political in nature, I believe, as does Gardiner, that this characteristic of women's writing and reading has the potential to "blur . . . the public and private and defy completion" (185). Thus, the personal becomes political and change can be enacted.

In Wilderness Tips, Atwood reveals that beneath conventional narrative patterns lies the potential for regeneration. Her unflagging attention to the processual nature of identity, as well as the distinctive metafictional tendency in

her story telling, mark her as a writer for whom the conventional short-story form becomes a departure point for her creative investigation and transformation of this genre. In reminding us that stories are not whole, that, at best, they can "only be the beginning of something else," Atwood's short stories become models for women to live by.

Chapter Three

Part I

Alice Munro's Views on Gender and Nationality: "Who Do You Think You Are?"

In the 1970s, while Canadian writers were learning from Atwood's theorizing in Survival about the need for overcoming the traditional role of victimhood by becoming "creative non-victims," and while North American feminists were enlisting or appropriating Atwood to advance their cause, Alice Munro, a Vancouver housewife, had already been functioning independently as a creative non-victim by chronicling the everyday experiences of Canadian women. Unlike Atwood, Munro was not active in the Women's Movement of the late sixties and early seventies, but her work did not go unnoticed: her first story collection, Dance of the Happy Shades (1968), won the Governor General's Award, and Lives of Girls and Women (1971) was acclaimed by Canadian critics for its honest portrayal of the artist as a young woman and also achieved commercial success in the United States.

If Atwood's unconventional background, including her undergraduate exposure to professors such as Northrop Frye and her graduate work at Harvard, helps to explain her urban, satirical, socially conscious approach, then Munro's more conventional background may have played a role in her focus on the the daily fabric of Canadian women's lives in rural settings, a focus that is more lyrical than satirical, and more concerned with social doings than social issues.

Munro, from rural southern Ontario, with only two years of college education at the University of Western Ontario and twenty years of a

conventional marriage and three children, began her literary career in relative isolation. Catherine Sheldrick Ross explains: "With small encouragement from the world, Alice just kept writing whenever she could. She sent stories off to the few available markets, and coped with rejections by focusing on what she was writing next. . . she worked alone, not knowing other writers or feeling part of any [artistic] community" (5).

Munro grew up as Alice Laidlaw on the edge of the small town of Wingham in southern Ontario, and early on she was schooled in conventional gender roles. When her mother contracted Parkinson's Disease, Alice--ories. Marriage presented itself at the same time that her scholarship ran out, and, Munro admits, "there was no money then to do anything but get married. . . I could either stay in Wingham or get married" (Ross 49). Although she is quick to add that her husband was accepting of her role as a writer, nevertheless, for the next twenty years, her writing was accomplished in between her main duties as wife and mother. She often wrote in her laundry room, and when she applied for a Canada Council grant, she explains, "perhaps unwisely I said it was to get a cleaning woman and babysitters. I did not get it, and I heard via the grapevine that. . .a demand like this just was not taken seriously. I imagine that men who said they had to go to Morocco or Japan would get grants" (Ross 58).

This domestic situation may account for her preference for the short-story genre. As she explained in a 1973 interview with Graeme Gibson: "in twenty years I've never had a day when I didn't have to think about somebody else's needs. And this means the writing has to be fitted in around it. . . .I think it's a miracle that I've produced anything" (55). In addition, Munro's creative imagination seems well-suited to the short-story genre, for what is important to her is "a view of reality--a kind of reality that I can go into for a while . . . . It's

getting into it that's important, not caring what happens"
(Gibson 257).

Arguing that Munro is the foremost writer of the short story in Canada, and perhaps in North America, Ross attributes her success to a variety of strengths:

> And what is she famous for? For stories written with such emotional honesty, compassion, and intimacy that in them readers recognize their deepest selves. For stories so rich they seem like compressed novels, juxtaposing past against present, one point of view against another. For creating identifiable "Munro country" based on her own experience of Huron County, Ontario. For presenting ordinary life so that it appears luminous, invested with a kind of magic. Perhaps more than anyone else, Munro is responsible for making short-story writing respectable in Canada. A generation of short-story writers. . .has been encouraged by her example. (15)

Munro has often been asked why, as a writer, she prefers the short story over the novel since the novel is often thought to have more generic prestige. First of all, she refutes this notion, "I don't feel that a novel is a step up from the short story" (Gibson 258). Secondly, she explains her preference in terms of an instinctive attraction to the compression that the short story requires: "I've never known why I've chosen the short story form. I guess in a short story you impose discipline rather soon . . . . I have to know the design" (Twigg 16). Similarly, although she frequently has felt the impulse to "just write and see where it was going, where it would take me" (Gibson 257), she never sits down without a plan. Her tendency is "to write sort of on . . . a single string. . . that's

the. . . story. I don't write as. . . some people say a true novelist does, manipulating a lot of strings" (Gibson 258). Yet perhaps what best explains Munro's attraction to the short story is her interest in the seemingly uneventful lives of Canadian women in conjunction with her feeling that "a story is a spell, rather than a narrative" (qtd in Slopen 374).

For Munro, the ordinary existence of Canadian women serves as a point of departure into the remarkable and mysterious. Through her stories, Munro views everyday details and life experiences as potential departure points into the extraordinary. Although seeing the mysterious in the lives of her characters, usually Canadian women, may be a way of escaping from one's everyday reality, it may also be Munro's way of acting the creative non-victim. Seeing beneath the surface into the mystery and truth of women's lives challenges a previous literature which defined women according to male-directed conventions. This pursuit, however, is conducted on the artistic and intuitive level: "Her method is not that of the didactic social critic, but that of the literary artist who filters and refracts society through the prism of her own imagination and experience" (Rasporich xii).

At the same time, the converse is also true: society in the forms of gender and nationality has played a part in shaping her present vision. As Munro herself explains becoming an artist was a struggle, in which the roles expected of women was a major component: "I grew up having to feel so. . . protective about. . .writing . . . . I always operated in disguises, feeling if I do to a certain point what the world expects of me, then they'll leave me alone, and I can do my work" (Gibson 249-51). Being left alone, however, is not something that is easy when one is a wife and mother: "The detachment of the writer, the withdrawal is not what is traditionally expected of a woman, particularly in the

man-woman relationship. . . . And then when children come . . . the problems are . . . getting enough time" (Gibson 250). Munro goes on to explain that this necessary "selfishness" is something which "complicates a woman's life much more than a man's, because men are expected to be selfish in a way about their work, to have faith in themselves" (Gibson 254).

In 1973, her marriage of twenty years dissolved, and she lived on her own raising her younger daughters, struggling to write and teach. Looking back on this period in a 1987 interview, Munro draws attention to her prior lack of feminist consciousness: "When I wrote Lives of Girls and Women, it didn't cross my mind that I was writing a feminist book. . . . It just occurred to me once that I wanted to write the kind of thing about a young girl's sexual experience that had often been written about boys'. . . . But I didn't think, then, that I was writing about women and their ways of survival. . . . Now, I am consciously interested in the way women live. The way things are different for men and women at middle age, and so on" (Hancock 223). By the 1990's, she had also been made aware of the effects of gender roles on women's sense of power:

> I do feel a power now that I haven't felt since I was very young, probably since I was about twelve, and I do think there is this power at both ends of the sexual life. . . .that pleasure you have as a child which doesn't come from recognition by other people or social role or achievement or anything at all but the moment. . . .I remember that very strongly from about nine to twelve. That's the girl's period of power, really, and then the whole female thing has to be dealt with. And I guess you go on dealing with it for about forty years in one way or another. (qtd in Rasporich 18)

The development of Munro's consciousness of her own experience of gender

has become subject matter for her art.

Dealing with the conflict between conforming to gender-role expectations and following one's ambitions to be an artist has been an ongoing process for Munro. She compares writing to "a trip you take all alone . . . something we are accustomed to thinking of the male artist as doing," but not the woman, who, instead, we see as "looking after the material wants but also providing a kind of unquestioning cushion. . . which is the very opposite of what the female artist has to do" (qtd in Rasporich 21-22). This is the dilemma of the female artist, which, according to Munro, is made more difficult by the perception that "you are betraying to men that this still center that they had thought was there, this kind of unquestioning cushion, is not there at all," and because at the same time "you know that you are not a freak. You are just the artist woman as the man is the artist man" (qtd in Rasporich 22).

This struggle for identity as an "artist woman" was compounded for Munro by her nationality. The title of her 1978 story collection/novel, Who Do You Think You Are?, indicates the Canadian preoccupation with identity that can be traced to Canada's political and economic colonization by Britain and the United States. Even more revealing, perhaps, is that when Munro was arranging to release the collection in the U. S., her publisher felt that the original title was too tentative and changed it to The Beggar Maid, after the title of another story in the collection. In an interview, Munro explained how the title change reveals differing concepts of national identities: "They said to me nobody in America ever said to anybody, 'Who do you think you are?' Because Americans were too self-assured" (Hancock 203).

Such a sense of self-assurance continues to be alien to Munro. Although she experienced as well as contributed to the Canadian cultural

renaissance of the early 1970s, a sense of self-deprecation tends to remain. Thus, when asked about the practice of journal-keeping, Munro confesses, "No. No. I don't do any of that. . . . I'm always attracted by the idea of writing a journal. But I'm too self-conscious when I start to do it. I don't think it's natural for me to write a journal And I wonder if this has something to do with being a Canadian" (Hancock 220). The pervasive sense of the impossibility of being a Canadian and an artist is also one that Munro has explicitly addressed: "People say, how did you think you could be a Canadian and a writer (who do you think you are?), but since I thought that I could be a girl from Wingham and a writer (laughter) that was the first step" (Harwood 127).

The other force Munro has had to deal with is the sense of a lack of a Canadian literary tradition. She, like Atwood, points to the British tradition, especially the women novelists, as having a significant impact on her artistic ambitions: "Wuthering Heights was the BIG influence from the time I was 12 to 14. I still know parts of that book by heart" (Harwood 124). Although she has dismissed the influence of Canadian writers, "You know, I wasn't aware of them" (Harwood 124), she does admit to the important effect on her of L.M. Montgomery's Emily of New Moon because it "is about a girl who wants to be a writer" (Miller 124). Munro also remembers the significance of her later discovery of Ethel Wilson's stories:

> I discovered Ethel Wilson. . .when I had just moved to Vancouver, and she was actually living in Vancouver, and I read "Lilly's Story" and "Tuesday and Wednesday". . . .It'd be about '52. And "Tuesday and Wednesday" is a story that I don't think is around much any more. It's like a short novel. I *was enormously* excited by her work. . . .It was important to me that a Canadian writer was

> using so elegant a style. You know I don't mean style in the superficial sense, but that a point of view so complex and ironic was possible in Canadian literature. (Struthers 18)

Certainly, complexity and irony are words that can be used to describe Munro's own writing, and both qualities evolve naturally out of the unique vision inherent equally in being a woman and a Canadian. "The woman and the Canadian find that they have much in common," observes Linda Hutcheon, "in both cases there is a necessary self-defining challenging of the dominant traditions (male; British/American)" (Canadian Postmodern 5).

This affinity between the woman and the Canadian has been noted by W.J. Keith who points out that much of modern Canadian fiction has been produced by "accomplished women writers" (157), just as David Stouck has noted that the great amount of attention "focused on Canada's women writers" is due to "a conjunction of feminist literary interest and the intriguing fact that a disproportionately large number of Canada's best writers have from the outset been women" (257). This situation, according to Mickey Pearlman, leads also to explorations of "the issue of identity. . .the linchpin of Canadian writing by women" (4), and is certainly at the center of Munro's writing. Moreover, Pearlman suggests that "identity. . .evolves from place and site, from birth and perception. . .in reaction to someone else's perception of you" (50), which,of course, includes gender, race and national identity. Coral Ann Howells suggests that Canadian women writers' search for identity reveals that "instead of the self being solid and unified it becomes a more shifting concept without fixed boundaries" and that "this feminine awareness finds interesting parallels in the problematic concept of Canadian national identity which has notoriously escaped definition" (25). Speaking of her own experience in teaching Munro's

stories, Lorna Irvine observes that the varying responses to Munro's fiction by her students reveal "the peculiarly ambiguous quality of Munro's fiction." Her students commented on the way that Munro's "shifting literary paradigms emphasize idiosyncratic angles of vision," and they listed the complex characteristics of Canadian writing that are addressed by Munro: "women's contemporary Canadian writing is fundamentally ambivalent; contemporary women's writing tends towards indeterminacy; Munro uses fiction to demonstrate and investigate the topic of ambivalence" (252).

A complex and ironic point of view is indeed a sort of stylistic signature in Munro's stories. She, herself, best describes her own distinctive writing style in "Simon's Luck," a story in her collection, Who Do You Think You Are?, whose main character provides an idiosyncratic view of life's unfolding as, "those shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open to question, the disarrangements which demand new judgments and solutions, and throw the windows open on inappropriate unforgettable scenery" (173). According to Lawrence Mathews, Munro's "art of disarrangement" also functions as a way to "remind. . .us that any significant truth that literature delivers is a partial and provisional one" (192). Furthermore, Mathews believes that this strategy is one that Munro will continue to employ and that will continue to constitute a major appeal of her work:

> The value of the art of disarrangement. . .lies in its continual commentaryon its own tentativeness, in the face of life's complexity and mystery. It is not that the artist should abandon her attempt to render experience fully and accurately. . .rather, one should proceed warily, in humility, even, in a sense, quixotically. Munro's engagement in this endeavor in full awareness of its

> difficulties, points to what will prove to be of enduring interest in her work. (193)

That Munro remains committed to writing fiction despite her awareness of art's tentativeness can perhaps be traced to her desire to encourage her readers to remain committed to a sense of the goodness of life in the face of their awareness of life's complexity and mystery. Similarly, she may be encouraging her readers to deploy the strategy of disarrangement as a way to "demand new judgments and solutions" to their specific life situations. According to E. D. Blodgett, indeed, Munro's particular fictional disarrangements are what constitute her attraction "to women--some of whom find feminist concerns in her work," while he also notes "a growing appeal to those attracted by her subtly self-aware manner of narration. It is this appeal that has made her one of the more profound contemporary writers of the short story in Canada" ("Preface"). I would emphasize that this self-awareness especially constitutes an appeal for women and feminists who are sensitive to the power politics of gender relationships.

Of course, the complexity of social relationships depends on the nature of the balance of power in a relationship, and Munro claims this is a major concern in much of her writing. Being a Canadian and a woman has sensitized her to feelings of powerlessness, and she explains that her ambition to write comes out of "isolation, feelings of power that don't get out in a normal way" (Twigg 18). She agrees with Gibson that most fiction is about love and power, and she maintains that she often writes "from the side of the person who loses power, but not always" (26).

As much as Munro writes about powerlessness, however, she does so in a way that indicates her survivor status and makes her a creative nonvictim,

albeit in a complex and ironic way. This complexity, according to W. R. Martin lies in the way that her insights are "at once penetrating and sympathetic, are typically conveyed in paradoxes and parallels that are informed by the texture of her vision, which appears also in the shape of her prose as well as in the structure of her stories. Her art is . . . a complex counterpointing of opposed truths in a memorable model of life and reality" (1). As Martin sees it, Munro's nationality contributes to this artistic strategy. Her realistic descriptions of the country towns of southwestern Ontario, where she grew up and now lives, set a familiar scene that facilitates the injection of the "strange. . .the mysterious, or alien" (205). This conjunction of the familiar and strange can in turn register a sense of an ironic, doubleness of vision toward this region and its people that, Martin feels, allows the exploration of the characteristically Canadian struggle with identity evidenced in Munro's aphoristic query, "Who do you think you are?" as well as in Northrop Frye's speculation about Canadian identity, "Where is here?"

Whereas Martin points to Munro's Canadian experience as the inspiration for her fictional paradoxes and parallels, Helen Hoy focuses on the way that Munro translates her gendered position into a fictional model that is able to "include" rather than "discard," and which is able to "make room for 'all that is contradictory and persistent and unaccommodating about life.'" Hoy suggests that it is Munro's experience of being a female that helps to explain her inclusion of "what is muted, unremarked, or silenced in society" (5). As Hoy sees it, it is Munro's womanly experience of listening beyond the usual sounds and seeing beyond the usual sights that enables her to challenge a narrow view of reality and the dominant fictional patterns related to it. To Hoy, Munro's stories demonstrate that reality "consistently proves more various than

the human constructs created to contain it" (5).

Munro's vision of Canadian women's experiences allows her to see beneath the surface to the mystery in the lives of her characters, some of whom, in turn, are accorded this unique vision. Howells suggests that just as Munro struggled early on to disguise her writerly ambitions in normal feminine pursuits, so many of her fictional characters feel that they must camouflage their determination. Author and characters, says Howells, "are struck by the discontinuities between the surface ordinariness of their town and of their own lives and the secret worlds that lie beneath appearances of normality" ("Worlds"124).

Whereas Atwood seems to have resisted pressures to conceal her artistic ambitions, and has made clear her views on nationality and gender in the form of very public and polemical statements, Munro seems to deal with her concerns about gender and nationality mainly on the artistic and intuitive level. She is much more likely to approach art as separate from politics. She is also very aware of this similar reticence in many women writers. In an interview with Rasporich, she explains her ambivalence about overt political statements: "women are trained to be reticent, to be nice, to be genteel. . . . I think it's very hard for women to manage the kind of exposure that they may feel has to be done in their fiction. I think all this has changed, of course. But I think that this is a problem" (21). When asked, however, how conscious she is as an artist of envisioning her world in female terms, Munro concedes her political awareness:

> I'm not at all conscious of doing it, but it has certainly become apparent to me that this is what I do. . . it could have something to do with the kind of environment I grew up in. . . . You know, it's the

> women in the kitchen who talk about everything that's happening to everybody and so the community's personal life would seem to be much more strongly seen and felt by women than by men." (20)

Munro transforms the personal into the political in her art, not through overt commentary by her characters or narrators, but through the subtle dynamics of complexity and irony which inform her fiction. The arresting description that concludes her early story collection, The Lives of Girls and Women, is imbued with personal, domestic images of women's consciousness, which can, in turn, be shared by the entire community: "People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable--deep caves paved with linoleum" (253). In her most recent story collection, Munro continues to look beyond the surface ordinariness of people's lives and reveals the open secrets beneath.

Chapter Three

Part II

Open Secrets: "Sudden holes and impromptu tricks and radiant vanishing consolations"

Alice Munro's recent short-story collection, Open Secrets (1994), presents the hidden histories of women, and more importantly it demonstrates that, if, like Munro, we look beyond conventional expectations, women's experiences provide ready material for disrupting and rearranging the "surface ordinariness" of life and fiction alike. In "Carried Away," the first story in the collection, the protagonist, Louisa, comes to the startling understanding that her life has consisted of a series of disarrangements, "sudden holes and impromptu tricks and radiant vanishing consolations." The collection as a whole echoes this view of reality, for it assembles eight stories depicting the frequently dislocated and disguised lives of Canadian women. Publishers Weekly notes: "The careful ordering of these works, the casual reappearances of characters in various entries, the layering of time, the unity of place -- all expand the depth of each entry, heightening the illusion that Munro's fiction is as infinitely startling as life itself" (72).

This unsettling quality, however, is standard Munro fare, for as Diane Turbide notes, the collection contains, "the usual Munro elements: murders, marriages, horrible accidents, love, intrigue, surrender--and surprises at every turn. . .the stories convey Munro's sense of life's arbitrariness, of the subjectivity of truth--no matter how hard our traditions and social rituals try to disguise it" (49). In a Time magazine review of Open Secrets, R. Z. Sheppard gives Munro judo kudos: "If black belts were awarded for writing short stories, Canada's Alice Munro would have one with bells on," and he lauds her "stunning victory

over one of the toughest of literary forms. . . . where each story is richer and more satisfying than most novels" (82). Sheppard understands Munro's attraction to a genre whose characteristic compression welcomes the skillful layering and startling juxtaposition of details that unsettle conventional narrative patterns. In addition, it seems that the short story's search for definition and acceptance into the literary canon as an equal genre in comparison to the novel, poetry, or drama, parallels a central theme of Munro's fiction: "the search for identity, the quest for definition and place" (Rasporich xv). Moreover, Rasporich observes that Munro's depictions of her heroines frequently moves "hopefully and ironically" beyond the traditional conventions open to women, and her treatment thus calls for new stories which are "as moving, profound and *heroic* " as traditional male stories have been (xv-xvi).

As much as Munro has felt the pull or the "spell" of storymaking, she has also felt a distrust of the traditional conventions of storymaking. Her own experience as a woman and a Canadian make her wary of controlled structures; thus while she draws detailed representations of the textural surface of reality, she also questions her own or anyone's narrative authority by resisting the convention of the neat ending, or the reliability of the narrator. This disarrangement questions any conventional "order" of reality. As Helen Hoy points out, "For Munro and her characters, reality is often the antagonist of the stories, confronted, defined, pinned down, only to reappear in a different and more plausible guise elsewhere, more elusive, more disconcerting, more intractable than previously suspected" (5).

If during the first twenty years of her writing career, the constraint of marriage and children influenced Munro's choice of literary genre, during the next twenty years she has turned that necessary choice into an exploration of

what story telling involves. With increasing complexity and irony, Munro ventures to express the struggle that she and her characters experience in confronting and defining reality. In Open Secrets Munro, to use Adrienne Rich's metaphor, performs a breath-taking dive into the depths of reality, knowing that any discovery of sunken treasure is less important than the plunge itself, that controlling or possessing reality is futile, and that all we can hope for is the recognition that the elusiveness of reality is a sign that experience eludes any unified, super-imposed structure.

Diving and soaring are recurrent metaphors used to describe the risks that she takes. Turbide, for example, observes that in Open Secrets, "Munro takes her exploration of character, circumstance, landscape, fate and time--and the interplay among them--to new levels. The stories, filled with troubled and questing souls, have amazingly intricate structures. Yet the feeling they produce is a gravity-defying lightness--cathedrals in the air" (47). Similarly in describing Munro's attempts to render the provisional quality of reality, Malcolm Jones Jr. observes that she "[hacks] up her chronologies, introducing narrators midway in stories who contradict everything that's been said. . . plunges her people into unsteady circumstances where well-ordered existence can go off the rails in an instant," whereby her stories leave us "slack-jawed with wonder and filled with delight" (63).

In part, this spatial dimension derives from the way that Munro gives a novelistic breadth to her short stories about women whose roots lie in rural Ontario by reason of the way that their lives span various continents, cultures, and centuries. Commenting on how Munro blurs the lines between novel and short story, Julia O'Faolain observes: "Alice Munro. . . enlarges her scope and focuses her themes in what begins to look like an epic view of the Canadian

woman's psyche" (24). By imbuing her depiction of rural life in Canada with moments of legendary significance and by evoking flashes of superhuman capability from her heroines, Munro attains a wider literary outlook. In an early interview with Rasporich, Munro claimed that the details of small town Ontario, her roots, are her focus: "I don't generalize. I don't see beyond" (xii). To Rasporich, however, such a claim is a bit too modest and misleading: "However private and unique her visions seem to be, readers of Munro are stunned by her capacity to go beyond. They . . . praise her sensitivity to social history and psychology, recorded in her precisely remembered depictions of the fading world of the . . . North American town of the forties and fifties" (xii). I would argue that not only does Munro see beyond her local roots, but also that she employs this larger sense of social history and psychology to render the collective core of Canadian women's reality. The epic scope attained by the short-story genre in Munro's hands is the result of the infusion of the combined forces of gender and nationality with Munro's personalized complex and ironic representation of experience, her attention to language, her attitudes toward identity and its relation to the structures of fiction.

Representation of Women's Experience: "A Real Life"

Since early in her writing career, Munro has been praised as a consummate realist. Evidenced in her careful and detailed renderings of life in rural Ontario, Munro herself has also emphasized the importance of "things": I'm very, very excited by what you might call the surface of life. . . .It seems to me very important to be able to get at the exact tone or texture of how things are" (Gibson 241). Yet, as she goes on to explain, her bent for documenting the surface details of life is also a means to an end: "I can't get into people or life

without. . . having all those other things around them" (Gibson 257). In this way Munro's realism is ultimately what Alan Twigg describes as "super-realism"; it is her way of getting to the "emotional core" of life (13, 15). Although Munro continues her pursuit of the balance between surface and core in Open Secrets, here it takes a new direction.

In Lives of Girls and Women, as William H. New noted, "the deceptive casualness about individual observations in her work conceals the careful artifice behind them: cumulatively they build substantial portraits of complicated human beings" (271). In the recent collection, the complexity at the emotional core has become more and more important, and with it has come the need to balance a sense of the "uncertainty of meaning and truth" with the "epitomizing detail, observation so acute that it gives the illusion of real life" (Murphy 22). Accompanying both of these tendencies is also a third: an increasing concern with the vantage point from which a story is told. As John Orange remarks, "the way Alice Munro tells her stories has evolved over the years from a relatively conventional and straightforward narration by a first-person narrator to a much more complicated, subtle, and experimental narrative technique, often involving a third-person" limited narrator (83) and a "peculiarly jerky . . . even breathless pace of narrative" (99).

This experimentalism, in turn, constitutes a new kind of realism and is related to Munro's interest in looking at what people understand and how this changes over time: "what we think is happening and what we understand later on, and so on" (Hancock 201). Instead of trying to capture a historical sense of time, she is concerned with depicting "the way time is felt to be real," and this, for her, involves gaps during which "something happens that you can't know about." And herein, she goes on to explain, is the reason why she is not drawn

to the novel: "Because I don't see people develop and arrive somewhere. I just see people living in flashes. . . and this is something you do become aware of as you go into middle age." When this concern with the way we experience life in flashes is conjoined with detailed attention to the texture of a moment, the result is a way of "looking at people's lives over a number of years, without continuity"-- as if one were "catching them in snapshots." What particularly attracts Munro to this technique is how it can reflect "the way people relate, or don't relate, to the people they were earlier" (Hancock 200). In this way, the story-telling impulse-- i.e., the attempt to connect one snapshot with another in a narrative sense-- goes hand-in-hand with Munro's realism, with both serving to suggest the way that we distance reality. Commenting on how this dynamic operates in Open Secrets, O'Faolain remarks: "Several of her new stories pivot on reality's slipperiness--in the light of which, realism can only be a convention and a willed distortion. . .it is by distorting that writers share their vision. It is for the distortion that we read" (24).

One such story is "A Real Life," which is set in the fictional town of Carstairs in rural Ontario, in the late thirties and early forties. The story focuses on two middle-aged best friends, Millicent, a housewife, and Muriel, a single music-teacher, and their efforts to "arrange" the marriage of their third friend, Dorrie Beck, to an eligible Australian bachelor, Mr. Wilkie Speirs. The title derives from the conventional view of what constitutes reality for a woman, a view expressed by Millicent when she tells Dorrie: "Marriage takes you out of yourself and gives you a real life" (75). Munro's strategy in this work is to conjoin a realistic representation of these women's experiences with a questioning of the traditional assumptions about human needs that are embedded in certain narrative patterns. For example, Millicent and Muriel's

attempt to create a" real life" for Dorrie is motivated by traditional notions of love and romance. The two friends wish to turn Dorrie's unrestrained and unconventional outdoor life of trapping and shooting into one of domestic restraint. First, they arrange a summer buffet dinner at which Mr. Spiers is introduced to Dorrie, and when she later tells them that she and Spiers intend "to go through a 'form of marriage'" (68), Millicent and Muriel furiously begin their plans for Dorrie's wedding.

In the process of depicting this all too familiar scenario, Munro also explores the artist's attempt to arrange life into a story by employing a self-reflexive third-person narrator and by associating story-telling with Millicent's and Muriel's attempts to exercise control over Dorrie's life. Similarly, the failure of the two friends to understand both the past and subsequent life-style of Dorrie, as well as the extent to which their own lives involve maintaining appearances, become Munro's means for suggesting both the way that traditional narrative conventions of love and romance distort reality, and the way that reality itself is a very "slippery" thing.

In the story's first three lines, Munro establishes her ironic treatment of love and romance: "A man came along and fell in love with Dorrie Beck. At least, he wanted to marry her. It was true" (52). The romantic recipe involved in the first sentence is thus immediately undermined by the qualifying tone of the second sentence. Finally, the emphatic declaration in the third sentence causes us to wonder just what is true, his falling in love or simply wanting to marry. As much as this encourages us to consider what is real, however, so much do her detailed descriptions of her characters and settings feed our belief that art can capture reality. Consider here Munro's meticulous catalogue of Millicent's preparation of the buffet dinner and her description of Dorrie's

disheveled appearance:

> . . . the various dishes--the potato salad, carrot salad, jellied salad, cabbage salad, the devilled eggs and cold roast chicken, the salmon loaf and warm biscuits, and relishes. Just when they had everything set out, Dorrie came around the side of the house, looking warm from her walk across the field, or from excitement. She was wearing her good summer dress, a navy-blue organdie with white dots and white collar, suitable for a little girl or an old lady. Thread showed where she had pulled the torn lace off the collar instead of mending it, and in spite of the hot day a rim of undershirt was hanging out of one sleeve. Her shoes had been so recently and sloppily cleaned that they left traces of whitener on the grass. (62-63)

These accurate details, however, also operate as departure points into the "emotional core" of women's lives. Millicent's reality is one in which the careful plotting of Dorrie's marriage and life supersedes her own. It is ironic that Millicent temporarily escapes her own life of attending to "things" and putting others before herself by planning a similar life for Dorrie.

Through her use of a distant, but observant, third-person limited narrator in "A "A Real Life," Munro dramatizes individuals' perceptions of reality (Millicent's, Muriel's and Dorrie's) and at the same time, she acknowledges a collective female experience. At the outset of "A Real Life," the narrator presents Millicent's perception that Dorrie's earlier attendance at finishing school, Whitby's Ladies College, was "a last spurt of the Beck's money" (67), and that the refined "way that Dorrie used her knife," which she learned at Whitby's, "had captivated [a] man" (52). Later in the story, the narrator reports

that Mr. Spiers is indeed captivated by Dorrie's use of a knife, but not in the traditional lady-like way that Millicent believes. Instead, he is interested in Dorrie's description of her techniques for skinning animals: "He asked about the skins, saying they must have to be removed very carefully, and Dorrie said that. . .you needed a knife you could trust. She described with pleasure the first clean slit down the belly" (66). Millicent's belief that love and good table manners go together is undermined by the narrator's careful detailing of Dorrie's *other* knife-wielding skill.

Another of Millicent's illusions that the narrator recounts and then discounts is that Dorrie's finishing-school handwriting helped to captivate Mr. Spiers. Millicent believes that this was a factor, "because after the first meeting the entire courtship appeared to have been conducted by letter" (53). The narrator, however, draws attention to why "letters had gone back and forth between them" (67), i.e., the simple fact that after their meeting, Dorrie had remained in Canada and Mr. Spiers returned to Australia. Thus, we are left to surmise that the letters' contents, not the hand in which they were written, had prompted a proposal and an acceptance. Whereas Millicent's speculations about Dorrie's "romance" voice the conventions women share, the narrator functions as the individual and realistic countervoice to Millicent's fantasizing. The combination of a distanced and contradictory narration coupled with careful attention to textural details is described by Gerald Noonan as a muting of the "solid, detailed texture of style" in order to hinder seeing "the surface of the objects. . . as the whole of reality" (178). According to Noonan, "the distancing of the narrator helps emphasize a more honest view of life" (179), one in which reality is inconsistent, that precludes any illusions that art can represent reality.

Munro's wariness of attempts fully to accommodate the experience of Canadian women is most noticeable in her sly critique of the patterns of womanhood offered by conventional codes of the time, especially by etiquette books and women's magazines. For example, Muriel, the spinster music-teacher, carefully patterns her appearance on fashion articles, whose prose, in turn, is parodied by Munro's description of Muriel's code of beauty:

> Muriel was always dressed in some shade of blue. A woman should pick a color that really suits her and wear it all the time, she said. Like your perfume. It should be your signature. Blue was widely thought to be a color for blondes, but that was incorrect. . .It suited best a warm-looking skin, like Muriel's--skin that took a good tan and never entirely lost it. It suited brown hair and brown eyes, which were hers as well. She never skimped on clothes, it was a mistake to. Her fingernails were always painted--a rich and distracting color, apricot or blood-ruby or even gold. She was small and round, she did exercises to keep her tidy waistline. (57-58)

Both Muriel's slavish mimicry of the magazine beauty tips, and Munro's parody of Muriel's adopted code are forms of imitation. The kind that Muriel adopts however, is restrictive. Just as she is limited to appearing a certain way in order to attract a man so she is limited to certain behavior once she has attracted one. The provincial morality of Carstairs, for example, forbids a sex life to a middle-aged single woman like Muriel. Furthermore, when any hint of the possibility surfaces, "at the first whiff of trouble" (59), Muriel is instantly reminded of her limits. The narrator explains: "A warning from the school board. Miss Snow will have to mend her ways. A bad example. A wife on the phone. Miss Snow,

I am sorry we are cancelling--Or simply silence. A date not kept, a note not answered, a name never to be mentioned again" (59). In the face of Muriel's protests over these restrictions, even Millicent feels that she must defend the prevailing propriety: "Well, you know, Muriel. . .a wife is a wife. It's all well and good to have friends, but a marriage is a marriage" (59).

Millicent's defense of marriage arises, of course, from her exposure to the same manuals that provided Muriel's beauty tips: women's magazines. Having ascribed to the view that marriage is an exchange of "goods," she agreed to marry Porter, for despite the fact that he is nineteen years older than she is, "he owned three farms, and he promised her a bathroom within a year, plus a dining-room suite and a chesterfield and chairs." By reason of the same economy, she is willing to be his sexual outlet: "On their wedding night he said, 'Now you've got to take what's coming to you,' but she knew it was not unkindly meant." Having fulfilled her part of the bargain, she in turn has acquired some bargaining chips: "After the third baby she developed some problems. Porter was decent---mostly, after that, he left her alone" (53). What is particularly effective in conjoining literary issues and cultural codes is the way that Munro uses euphemisms to describe women's sexuality: "trouble," "problems," "what's coming to you," "left her alone." Moreover, Millicent welcomes the erasure of her sexuality, and she embraces Victorian sentimentality: "She believed always in the sweetness of affection that. . .eliminated sex" (52).

Subcribing to Victorian mores, Millicent also adheres to the double standard, and Munro draws attention to the mutual conspiracy which keeps it in place: Millicent acts as if she believes Porter's promise to stop drinking, and Porter keeps a bottle in the granary and stays away when he drinks. Nor is their duplicity unusual, for as the narrator explains: "This was a fairly common

pattern at that time. . .among farmers---drinking in the barn, abstinence in the house. Most men would have felt there was something the matter with a woman who didn't lay down such a law" (61). Thus, women would seem to be at least partly responsible for the rules which confine them; in the case of men such rules are meant to be broken whereas in the case of women they must be strictly enforced.

The most pointed example of the prescribed pattern that women are expected to conform to is the elaborate planning by Millicent and Muriel of Dorrie's wedding, which ranges from guests to food to clothing. In each case, Munro's description juxtaposes external details with internal ones: surface and core. The principal guides seem once again to be etiquette books and women's magazines:

> Muriel had taken charge of clothes. She knew what there had to be. There had to be more than a wedding dress. There had to be a going-away outfit, and a wedding nightgown and a matching dressing gown, and of course an entire new supply of underwear. Silk stockings, and a brassiere--the first that Dorrie had ever worn. (69)

While Muriel handles the more worldly concerns of Dorrie's trousseau and the ultimate confinement of Dorrie in silk stockings and a brassiere, Millicent agonizes over the appropriate guests and food:

> the wedding luncheon. . .was to be held in the Brunswick Hotel. But who was there to invite, except the minister?. . . .The cake was being made at home, then taken to the shop to be iced. . . It would be covered with white roses, lacy scallops, hearts and garlands and silver leaves and those tiny silver candies you can break your

> tooth on. . .the menu. . .creamed chicken in pastry shells, little round biscuits, molded jellies. . .pink and white ice cream with the cake." (69-71)

To accompany the romantic traditions of a white satin wedding dress and a cake with white roses and lacy scalloped icing, Muriel selects the appropriate music: " 'O Perfect Love.' And the Mendelssohn" (70).

Both Muriel and Millicent, themselves victims of the oppressive agenda that Victorian mores and Romantic ideals place on women, perpetuate this regime and force it on Dorrie. In the midst of the wedding preparation, however, the sudden thought of Wilkie Spiers interrupts their single-minded designing. "Then there was a moment in which they all fell silent, because they had to think of the bridegroom. They had to admit him to the room and set him down in the midst of all this. Picture hats. Creamed chicken. Silver leaves. . . . They hardly dared to look at each other" (71). At this moment, they are forced to look beyond the asexual "form of marriage" they envision for Dorrie to the reality of sex as a major part of the marriage experience. The wedding nightgown, the new supply of underwear, the elaborate bakery icing on the homemade cake, all function as masks and metaphors for the real place of sexual union in marriage.

In an attempt accurately to depict women's lives, Munro pays close attention to such details in "A Real Life." While Muriel and Millicent find it difficult to include Wilkie Spiers in their narrow scheme of the wedding, Munro stresses the importance of inclusion, and by extension of the need for a kind of writing that adapts to the disruptions of real life by attending to the flux. In metafictional fashion, in her detailed depiction of the women's impromptu dressmaking, Munro could very well be describing her own storymaking. Both

activities illustrate the futility of imposing a narrow scheme on women and their lives:

> Late in the winter Dorrie arrived at Millicent's house with a large piece of white satin. She said that she intended to make a wedding dress. . . .Sheets were laid down on the dining-room floor. . . .The satin was spread out over them. It's broad bright extent, its shining vulnerability cast a hush over the whole house. . . .Dorrie, who could so easily slit the skin of an animal, laid the scissors down. She confessed to shaking hands.
>
> Muriel made the first cut into the satin, saying that somebody had to do it, though maybe if she was doing it again it wouldn't be in quite that place. Soon they got used to mistakes. Mistakes and rectifications. Late every afternoon. . .they tackled a new stage--the cutting, the basting, the sewing--with clenched teeth and rallying cries. They had to alter the pattern as they went along, to allow for problems unforeseen, such as the tight set of a sleeve, the bunching. . .at the waist, the eccentricities of Dorrie's figure. Dorrie was a menace at the job, so they set her to sweeping up scraps and filling the bobbin. . . .Or she stood like a docile beast in her woolen underwear, which smelled quite frankly like her flesh, while they pulled and tugged the material around her. (67-69)

Altering the pattern as she goes along in order to fit the "eccentricities" of women's lives and the realities of their bodies--this is also how Munro has described her writing about the lives of Canadian women: "I notice that what I strive for does change. . .with each story. You really strive for what the story

seems to demand. . . .Each time it's as if the story itself dictated the way you were going to tell it" (qtd in Rasporich 22-23).

Such skillful alteration is a function of what J. R. Struthers calls Munro's "fictive imagination," in which "the imagination serves as the principal *theatre* of Munro's work" and "the major developments in Munro's writing. . . make us think frequently of the fictions themselves" (103). In describing the operation of her fictive imagination after she remarried and settled in Huron County, Ontario in the mid-seventies, Munro explains that she found herself looking beyond textural details, what she calls the "furniture," to "attitudes. . .and the shape of people's lives, the shape of their stories, the whole business of how life is made into a story by people who live it, and then the whole town sort of makes its own story" (Struthers "The Real Material" 63). Although Munro believes that we each possess a fictive imagination, Struthers argues that as a professional storyteller, she has refined this faculty to an "uncommon degree" as evidenced in her self-conscious preoccupation with storytelling as a basic human impulse, and in the way that "story becomes a metaphor for life" (103) in her fiction. Noting that Munro's fiction "makes references to both stories from daily life. . . and stories from literature," Struthers suggest that the reader is left to ascertain the purpose of these embedded stories and to weigh their metafictional possibilities, that is, "how much truth the older stories and legends convey for the purpose of interpreting the present story" because Munro sometimes acknowledges their truth and sometimes refutes it (106). The one quality of these stories that Munro embraces unconditionally is their power, the spell they cast, the mystery of story. This is what she hopes happens in her own stories: "story is a spell rather than a narrative." In calling our attention to the fictiveness of such stories, however, she highlights how stories are made,

including her own. Such metafictional directions abound in "A Real Life."

Of course, the old story from literature operating in "A Real Life" is the "romance," whose moral is that the completion of a woman's life lies in love and marriage. "Marriage takes you out of yourself and gives you a real life," Millicent tells Dorrie, but with Dorrie's response-- "I have a life" (75)-- Munro challenges the conventional formula and the attitudes which inform it. By telling the story of Millicent's struggle to impose a conventional narrative pattern on Dorrie's unconventional life, Munro also creates a story about the nature of story-telling, which becomes a method for investigating her own artistic creation.

Similarly, through her inclusion of various people's stories about their lives in "A Real Life," Munro illustrates "how life is made into a story by people who live it." For example, when Dorrie recalls memories of her dead brother, Albert, who delivered groceries to rural folk, she is composing a story that comforts her in her loss. In having her tell the story, however, Munro is herself able to explore the mystery and disorder of people's lives and the writer's difficulty in containing this chaos in story. Dorrie's story of the crazy woman on Albert's route seems a strange combination of grisly rural anecdote and fairy tale:

> once when he was getting her groceries out of the truck, he had a compulsion to turn around. There she stood with a hatchet, about to brain him. In fact her swing had already begun, and when he slipped out of range she had to continue, chopping neatly into the box of groceries and cleaving a pound of butter. He continued to deliver to her, not having the heart to turn her over to the. . . asylum. She never took up the hatchet again but gave him

> cupcakes sprinkled with evil-looking seeds, which he threw into the grass at the end of the lane. . . . "Aren't some people amazing?" said Dorrie. (55)

We are not certain whether Dorrie's amazement is directed towards the woman's madness or her brother's kindness, but we can be sure that Munro is talking about the amazing lives people lead and their earnest attempts to make their lives into stories by fitting them into the conventional designs available to them. Dorrie's storytelling seems to be an attempt on her part to fit Albert's experience into a recognizable pattern. If it had fit the pattern of a fairy tale, however, the woman would have been a witch, and Albert would have cleaved her in two with her own hatchet. The story of the crazy woman and Albert's kindness to her, while seeming to adhere to the conventional form of a fairy tale, becomes, instead, a metaphor for the unpredictability of human experience.

Munro, however, is fully aware of the appeal of the old stories. At Dorrie's wedding, Millicent is overcome with her romantic vision of life for Dorrie, and she whispers to her, "He'll take you everywhere! He'll make you a Queen!" (78). In some ways, albeit ironically, this prophecy seems to be fulfilled when, some years after her marriage, Dorrie writes to Millicent from Queensland, Australia to confirm Millicent's prediction: "I have grown as fat as the Queen of Tonga" (78). Dorrie's life, however, has not turned out quite as Millicent planned it. Instead, Dorrie continues to live essentially the same active outdoor life she had in Canada. In place of her hobby farm, and hunting and trapping, "she grew sugarcane and pineapples. . .rode horses . . .learned to fly an airplane. . .shot crocodiles" and "died in the fifties, in New Zealand, climbing up to look at a volcano" (78).

Whereas Dorrie's life has continued to follow a similar path of outdoor adventure in the bush, Millicent, nevertheless, insists on taking credit for creating "a real life" for Dorrie. A few days before her wedding, Dorrie, filled with sudden trepidation, had announced to Millicent, "I can't leave here" (74). Aghast at her response, and believing that "nobody had any business living a life out 'here'" (76), Millicent felt compelled to persuade Dorrie to move on by telling her: "When Porter and I found out you were getting married, we put this place on the market, and we sold it." While this statement is a lie, Munro also uses it to illustrate the way that stories do not so much record what happened as much as they can make things happen: "Millicent was already believing what she said. Soon it could come true" (75). Although the house is in fact not sold, Millicent continues to believe that she was responsible for shaping a new life for Dorrie. In recalling the way that Dorrie had wanted to stay in Carstairs, Millicent muses: "But I would not allow that," and the narrator continues: "She would not allow it, and surely she was right" (80). In these two lines, the narrator simultaneously presents Millicent's heartfelt attempts to persuade herself that she did the right thing and the third-person narrator's impersonal interrogation of that conviction. In much the same way, Munro is confident in her ability to tell a powerful story of women's reality, at the same time that she questions her own authority to tell it accurately.

A subtle example of Munro's metafictional stance in "A Real Life" can also be found in the description of Dorrie's ancestral home, the house that stands on Millicent and Porter's land, and that Millicent purports to have sold. Houses appear in many Munro stories, and she claims that "houses have a great interest for me. When I look at a house, it's like looking at a person" (Hancock 211). Munro's description of the fate of Dorrie's house similarly

functions as a metaphor for the life of its former inhabitants:

> The house that [Dorrie] and Albert had lived in--that she had lived in alone, after his death--was large and handsomely laid out but practically without furniture. . . .No carpets remained. . .and no pictures. . . . Absences of such customary things--and the presence of others, such as Dorrie's traps and guns and the boards for stretching rabbit and muskrat skins--had made the rooms lose their designations, made the notion of cleaning them seem frivolous. (54)

The house inhabits Dorrie as Dorrie inhabits the house, and both exist outside of usual customs and designs. Moreover, when Millicent had tried to trick Dorrie by telling her the house had been sold, Dorrie's protest, "You would not put me out of my house" (75), indicates that in effect this is what Millicent was doing, putting Dorrie out of herself, out of her unorthodox life. Conversely, just as Millicent could not bring herself to sell the house, so Dorrie remains her essential self, despite marriage. Thus, when Munro describes the way the house endures, she is also describing Dorrie herself: "its construction so sound that it did not readily give way. . . a tree of cracks can branch out among the bricks, but the wall does not fall down. Window sashes settle at an angle, but the window does not fall out" (79).

In addition to serving as metaphor for Dorrie's character, the house also serves as a metaphor for Munro's own artistic constructs. In commenting generally on her way of writing, she explicitly invokes this architectural model: "I've got to make, I've got to build up, a house, a story to fit around the indescribable 'feeling' that is like the soul of the story" (qtd in Slopen 374). To the same effect, in "A Real Life" Munro seems to register a sense of artistic

accomplishment when the narrator tells us that the house "was capable of standing for years and years and presenting a plausible appearance" (79), just as she may be registering a sense of the need for revision when Millicent says: "I ought to knock that [house] down and sell the bricks. . . and seems puzzled that she has not already done so" (80). The challenge to the artist-woman, like Munro, is to redesign conventional narrative forms in order to fit them around the emotional core of women's experience.

Attention to Language: "The Albanian Virgin"

The first obstacle to writing fictions that are true to women's experience is the matter of the women writer's alienation from the official, "male discourse" of literature. Citing Irigaray's description of the way women writers must first rethink the male system of discourse in order to create fiction that fits women's lives, Jacobus maintains that "the aim would be to show that 'the maxims that pass for the truth of human experience, and the encoding of that experience in literature, are organizations, when they are not fantasies, of the dominant culture'" (39). In Open Secrets, Munro not only questions the adequacy of language to represent women's experience, but she also reveals language as a power system that represses truth about women's lives by excluding women from its acquisition. As Showalter points out, the power system of gender, where the masculine becomes the norm, relegating the feminine to "other" than the norm, "is primarily constructed through the acquisition of language, rather than through social ascription or cultural practice" with the result that "to deconstruct language is to deconstruct gender" (3). This is what Munro attempts in her story, "The Albanian Virgin," where a young Canadian woman, lost in a strange and primitive land, is unable to speak the language and,

because of her foreignness, is excluded from full participation in the gender roles of either the men or the women. Initially, her solution is to adopt the status of "virgin," who, according to the ancient precepts of the Albanian tribal Ghegs "was a woman who had become like a man. She did not want to marry, and she took an oath in front of witnesses that she never would, and then she put on men's clothes and had her own gun, and her horse if she could afford one, and she lived as she liked. . . nobody troubled her, and she could eat at the *sofra* with the men" (90).

"The Albanian Virgin" begins with the abduction by Albanian outlaws of a young Canadian heiress traveling in Europe in the 1920s. At the outset, the story has all the markings of a romance. Captured by a fierce tribe of "Ghegs," the heroine is threatened with being sold into marriage to a member of an enemy Muslim tribe. Gothic conventions at this point dictate that the Muslim bridegroom must be handsomely and brutally attractive, and that the heroine must be powerless to resist his compelling charms and must marry him and live happily ever. Munro, however, resists this conventional plot and replaces it with a very different story involving the young woman's isolated life as an exile in Albania and her eventual escape to Victoria, Canada, where some forty years later--as an old woman, whose name we learn is Charlotte--she tells her story to a younger Canadian woman, Claire. In "The Albanian Virgin," Munro places Charlotte's story of her exile and adventure among the primitive tribe of Ghegs in northern Albania next to Claire's story of her flight from London, Ontario and the confines of a dull marriage and an unfinished thesis. The two women meet in Claire's bookstore in Victoria during the 1960s. The effect of Munro's juxtaposition of the two women's stories is at first unsettling and eventually revealing.

Most of the stories in Open Secrets are set in rural Ontario, and even the exotic setting of "The Albanian Virgin" has its roots in Munro's backyard. As Turbide explains, the story grew out of an incident Munro had heard about a woman from her hometown of Clinton:

> the tale...is based on a real-life episode of a Clinton librarian, Miss Rudd, who got separated from her traveling party in Albania. Munro heard the story from her husband, and she was later able to verify some details in the local newspaper accounts written at the time. "I could *not* put these two elements together: Clinton librarian, Albania," Munro recalls. "So I started reading everything I could about Albania". . . .Of course, Munro acknowledges, the story ["The Albanian Virgin"]is not really about a "high romance in Albania". . . .What really grabbed Munro's attention was the role that sex played in determining a woman's status in the tribal culture of that time. If a woman renounced sex to become a 'virgin,' she could live as an equal with men: she could own land, carry a weapon, be served food prepared by women. "It just fascinated me that her whole status was dependent on not having sex with men--not on the equipment she was born with," says Munro. "There was no pretence that she was mentally or physically inferior. Once she had had sex, she was *consigned* to a kind of inferiority." (49)

In "The Albanian Virgin," Munro focuses on women's cultural powerlessness and, by revealing the possibilities of transformation open to women in this position, she explodes the limits placed on men and women by conventional gender roles. By renouncing sex, both Charlotte and Claire find themselves

isolated from society. From that exile, however, comes not a sense of inferiority, but a sense of transformation. Instead of powerlessness, the "true privation" of their isolation brings about a sense of "risky authenticity" (120) that compels both women to refuse victimhood and the limited roles open to them.

Women who must write in the language and literary conventions of the dominant culture face similar artistic isolation and privation. Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes the peculiar cultural situation of the woman writer: "woman is neither wholly 'subcultural' nor. . . wholly main-cultural, but negotiates difference and sameness, marginality and inclusion, in a constant dialogue, which takes shape variously. . . but with one end--a rewriting of gender in dominant fiction" (43). Consequently, this dialogue gives way to a critique of the language and the conventions within which it must negotiate, and since such a critique can lead to a "rescripting" of the old stories, "it is no surprise that in the process romance is singled out as a "trope for the sex-gender system as a whole": the "Gothic" is "a major organizing grid for female consciousness. It is a form of sexual feudalism: the masochistic powerlessness of the generic female confronted with the no-frills, cruel-but-tender male" (DuPlessis 44).

Indeed, "The Albanian Virgin" begins as a romantic narrative complete with Gothic conventions of female powerlessness:

> In the mountains, in Maltsia e madhe, she must have tried to tell them her name, and "Lottar" was what they made of it. She had a wound in her leg, from a fall on sharp rocks when her guide was shot. She had a fever. How long it took them to carry her through the mountains, bound up in a rug and strapped to a horse's back, she had no idea. They gave her water to drink now and then, and

> sometimes *raki*, which was a kind of brandy, very strong. (81)

As the narrative continues, the heroine submits, in Gothic fashion, to her situation: "When she was being carried through the pine forest, she awoke and found herself suspended, lulled--in spite of the pain and perhaps because of the *raki*--into a disbelieving surrender" (85).

Yet Munro does not allow us to be lulled and suspended in the powerlessness of gender scripted into this genre. Instead, she positions herself between what Jacobus has termed "the alien critic and inheritor. . .at once within culture and outside it," able to challenge the conventions and work within them (43). Munro's authorial positioning parallels Jacobus's notion of women's "consigned inferiority," as determined by socially prescribed gender roles. According to Jacobus, "we need the term 'women's writing' if only to remind us of the social conditions under which women wrote and still write--to remind us that the conditions of their (re)production are the economic and educational disadvantages, the sexual and material organizations of society, which, rather than biology, form the crucial determinant" (39) . Lottar's experience within the women's culture in the *kula* also parallels the woman writer's alien position, at once within and outside the power system of language. At first, the only one she can communicate with is the Franciscan priest, who ministers to the clan, and who speaks Italian, a language she had recently picked up in her travels: "He understood so much more than anyone else around her that she expected him, at first, to understand everything" (82). His complete understanding is not possible, however, just as in the flow of time, instead of maintaining her outsider stance, Lottar is incorporated into the repetitious tasks of the women's culture:

> Women's hands must never be idle. . .they pounded the bread

> dough. . .had to sweep out the *kula*. . . . Little girls stirred the yogurt. . . .Older girl might butcher a kid. . . .Or they would go together, girls and women, all ages, to wash the men's white head scarves in the cold little river. . . .They tended the tobacco crop. . . hoed the corn and cucumbers, milked the ewes. . . .Women were with women and men were with men, except at times in the night. (87-88)

Caught up in this continual labor, Lottar also comes to a better awareness of those from whom she initially felt remote:

> When she thought of how she had been during those first weeks--giving orders, speaking English without embarrassment, sure that her special case merited attention--she was ashamed at how little she had understood. And the longer she stayed at the *kula*, the better she spoke the language and became accustomed to the work, the stranger was the thought of leaving. (90)

At the same time, the reality of her social position as a foreigner and a woman make it impossible for Lottar to play out the role of inheritor. Her marriage to a clansman is out of the question, so the clanswomen plan to marry her off to a Muslim infidel for three napoleons, because, as they explain, "she has to marry somebody" (92). The Franciscan priest, however, will not tolerate such a situation, and offers Lottar a way out of repeated female powerlessness: "If you become a Virgin, it will be alright. . . .But you must swear you will never go with a man. You must swear in front of witnesses. . . .By the stone and the Cross" (93). Lottar's oath of virginity in front of twelve witnesses serves not only as an acceptance of the official power of language, it also serves as a way to avoid consigned inferiority in the form of the accepted gender role of

marriage. As well, it provides her a time and place, away from conventional gender roles, to experience the sense of risky authenticity that is often denied to women. In this way, Munro challenges both gender stereotypes and language in her representation of the Albanian Virgin, whose oath allows her to live alone, free from the unending work of women, with the same privileges of men. Such a figure is very different from the female powerlessness ascribed to virginity by Gothic conventions.

According to Joseph Gold, "language is both an instrument in Munro's creation of women and a defining part of that creation, a part of her subject, in fact" (2). In "The Albanian Virgin," she addresses this position through her constant dialogue with prevailing narrative conventions and gender roles. Adopting a different tack, Ajay Heble explains how Munro's fascination with the details of the surface or appearance of reality is paradoxically coupled with her awareness of the limits of language to represent reality:

> The world of facts, details, and objects, which, at first, serve to ground the reader in a safe and recognizable reality is suddenly called into question as Munro makes us aware that we are reading only an attempt to represent these things in fiction, that language is being used to re-present reality. Our hold on reality thus becomes, at best, precarious and tentative, as referents become signs, things become words and signifieds become signifiers. (7)

In "The Albanian Virgin," Munro brings these two dimensions together: her deconstruction of the power of language to reflect reality also subverts the power system of gender.

Munro's use of multiple versions of the two stories (Lottar-Charlotte's and

Claire's) of women's cultural isolation is one of her primary means for exposing the unreliability of language to represent reality. In "The Albanian Virgin," Lottar's story of exile and escape is represented by Munro's third-person narrator after first being told by Charlotte and then retold by Claire. In turn, Munro intertwines the story of Lottar's exile in Albania with the first-person narration of Claire's exile to Victoria and her friendship with Charlotte. The gap between the realistic depiction of surface reality and the uncertainty at its core is manifested by Claire's reaction to Charlotte's story of the Albanian virgin:

> One night, when Lottar served one man his food. . .she noticed what small hands he had, and hairless wrists. Yet he was not young, he was not a boy. . .his voice. . .seemed. . .hoarse but womanish. But he smoked, he ate with the men, he carried a gun.
>
> "Is that a man?" Lottar said. . .But the young girls [laughed] . . ."Oh, Lottar, you are so stupid! Don't you know when you see a Virgin?" (89)

Munro interrupts Charlotte's third-person Gothic tale of Lottar's abduction by introducing the story of the Virgin and then by producing Claire's skeptical first-person account of her reactions to the story: "I heard this story in the old St. Joseph's Hospital in Victoria from Charlotte, who was the sort of friend I had in my early days there. My friendships then seemed both intimate and uncertain. I never knew why people told me things, or what they meant me to believe" (95). Claire is suspicious of Charlotte's story about the Virgin, her motives in telling it, as well as its meaning. In addition to presenting Claire's distrust of Charlotte's story, Munro disrupts the illusion of reality about Charlotte's past history with a multilayered representation of the story of the young Canadian woman's exile in Albania.

According to Gold, Munro's work should be placed "in a tradition of literature that can be said to concern itself with the necessity to formulate with great exactness . . . the relationship between. . .the truth of one's perceptions and the difficulty--importance--of finding the language for the expression of these feelings" (1). This sort of translation of women's feelings into the constraints of language is tricky, however, if not impossible. In "The Albanian Virgin," Munro's only attempt at a solution is to point out the problem of translation by offering revisions of the old story. As Gold explains: "It is the true, felt, past itself, the total experienced beingness of how it was, how it felt, which the writer strives to write. What we have instead is a version that is something else. But the glory of that attempt is the demonstration of the language process itself" (4). Showalter believes that such a demonstration operates in terms of the "bitextuality" of women's writing, "always in dialogue with both masculine and feminine literary traditions," and that "women's writing necessarily takes place within, rather than outside, a dominant male discourse, through acts of "revision, appropriation, and subversion" that produce a "double-voiced discourse" (4-5).

In "The Albanian Virgin" such a double-voiced discourse is presented by Munro in the side-by-side stories of Charlotte's and Claire's alienating experiences and it is redoubled as each story is re-presented by the narrator in Munro's story. The original story is the real-life episode of Miss Rudd, the Clinton librarian lost in the Albanian mountains. The subsequent translations that produce the sense of a double-voiced discourse in "The Albanian Virgin" are the love stories of Charlotte and Claire, whose proximity produces a kind of dialogue in their ironic commentary on each other and themselves. Ultimately, traditional love stories of self-negation are translated into stories of self-

possession. For example, the Gothic pattern which characterizes the Ghegs' abduction of Lottar is interrupted by the Franciscan priest's refusal to allow her marriage to a Muslim infidel and his proposal that she become a Virgin. Instead of losing her freedom and virginity in marriage, the reverse happens. Lottar's life of isolation as a virgin/shepherd in the Albanian mountains is a transforming experience, physically and psychologically. First, she is dressed as a man: "the women removed all the rich clothes. They brought out men's trousers. . .and a shirt and head scarf. Lottar put them on. One woman with an ugly pair of shears chopped off most. . .of Lottar's hair" (93). In her virgin state, she lives alone and sleeps outside, shoots, skins, and cooks rabbits, and bathes in the stream. Lottar's transformation is complete: "Everything was changed" (98), including her relationship with the men, who feel free to visit her and speak in her presence as if she were a man: "When they weren't talking about guns, the men spoke of recent killings and told jokes" (99-100). This period of gender parity resulting from Lottar's renunciation of sex, offers her transformational possibilities. This condition, however, is short-lived. The "consigned inferiority" of women according to conventional gender roles again becomes a reality for Lottar when the men tell her that she cannot survive the winter alone in the mountains. Furthermore, they say, because she has no father in the *kula* to provide a bit of land for her, upon her return, the tribe will again attempt to sell her to a Muslim. This time, the Franciscan intervenes in her fate by taking her to his Bishop in Skodra. Nevertheless, Lottar has been changed by her life as an exile: "She would never forget any of it. . .[and] she now realized that in Skodra she would be in an unfamiliar position--she would not be powerless" (101-03). At this point, Lottar gives up the self-negation of the Gothic heroine in favor of self-possession.

This translation of self-negation into self-possession is repeated in Claire's first-person story of her exile from sex. She relates: "I had come to Victoria because it was the furthest place I could get to from London, Ontario, without going out of the country" (111). Claire's life in London had included her marriage to Donald, a dermatologist, and her affair with Nelson, an English major, who with his wife, Sylvia, a nurse, rented the basement apartment from Claire and Donald. Claire's thesis on Mary Shelley had directed her focus to the self-negation of "Mary's life before she learned her sad lessons" and to "the other women who had hated or envied or traipsed along" in a "mishmash of love and despair and treachery and self-dramatizing" (111-12). When Claire's affair with Nelson was discovered by Donald and Sylvia, Claire was disappointed by the lack of Gothic drama: "The scene had lasted a much shorter time than I had expected. . . .I felt that short shrift had been given to the notion of love as a capturing tide, a glorious and harrowing event" (113).

Claire's flight from further sexual entanglement with either man begins to echo Lottar's exile in the Albanian wilderness. As she recalls, when she arrived alone in a strange place: "there I sat, in the shambling morning in the day coach, coming down the steep-walled Fraser Canyon into the sodden Fraser Valley, where smoke hung over the small, dripping houses, the brown vines, the thorny bushes and huddled sheep" (113). In Victoria, she had found a small apartment in an old building called "the Dardanelles" and had opened a bookstore. Like Lottar, Claire is an heiress: "I had inherited a little money--that was what had made it possible for me to come out here and get the shop going" (108). Also like Lottar, in her new surrounding, Claire had no friends, but her complete isolation was strangely comforting: "I never had any company. . . .But I was not despondent, I had made a desperate change in my

life, and in spite of the regrets I suffered every day, I was proud of that. I felt as if I had finally come out into the world in a new, true skin" (106). This period of isolation offers transformational possibilities for Claire. Her book store becomes a refuge, much like Lottar's shepherd camp in the Albanian mountains. Claire explains that her shop is "what a cabin in the woods might be to somebody else--a refuge and a justification" (107).

The stories of Lottar and Claire both include a sense of insulation from intense relationships. Lottar is restrained from communicating, at first by a language barrier, and later, by her self-imposed physical isolation. Claire feels this same restraint: "The people who came to browse were buying regularly, and some of them began to turn into friends--or the sort of friends I had here, where it seemed I would be happy to talk to people day after day and never learn their names" (108). Charlotte is one such friend to Claire, just as the nameless Franciscan was to Lottar. Similarly, the friendships play enormous roles in the transformations of both women. As well, the distanced repetition of the stories of Lottar by both Charlotte and Claire plays an enormous role in Munro's transformation of the Gothic romance into a form that can contain the truth of women's experience.

The intimate but complex relationship between the stories is marked by what Linda Hutcheon would call a postmodernist concern with self-reflexivity: "Parody is one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse" ("Theory" 2). Parody functions in Munro's story to interrupt the legacy of the Gothic romance, while at the same time acknowledging its continuity. Hutcheon points out that parody's power of subversion lies in its appropriation and revision of artistic tradition:

> Parody is one mode of coming to terms with the texts of that "rich

> and intimidating legacy of the past". . . . Modern artists seem to have recognized that change entails continuity, and have offered us a model for the process of transfer and reorganization of that past. Their double-voiced parodic forms play on the tensions created by this historical awareness. They signal less an acknowledgement of the "inadequacy of the definable forms" of their predecessors. . . .than their own desire to "refunction" those forms to their own needs. (Theory 4)

It would seem that Munro has this model in mind when she refashions the Gothic form to fit the truth of women's experience and her own artistic needs. Through her retrospective retelling of Charlotte's and Claire's love stories, Munro highlights the continuity of the conventional literary constructs of women's experience. This acknowledgement operates within the conventional narrative form of romance, and Munro's urge to retell the story of women's lives, revised to her own authorial needs, emphasizes the author's and reader's contradictory roles of embracing and refusing their literary legacy. Hutcheon reminds us of parody's two-fold role: "To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact, to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it" (A Poetics 126).

Parody operates most basically in the way that Munro has taken a true incident and shaped it loosely to fit Gothic conventions, which include the use of narrators and "twice-told tales." The story of a Canadian woman's forced exile in the Albanian wilderness and her subsequent escape is first related by Munro's third-person narrator, and we soon come to realize that this narration is further distanced through Claire's retelling of it. Moreover, Claire intersperses her own first-person account of exile and escape with her third-person recount of Charlotte's story of Lottar. This retelling serves both to focus on and diminish

the story's Gothic conventions; as a form of parody and self-reflexivity, it constitutes "one of the ways in which modern artists have managed to come to terms with the weight of the past" (Hutcheon, Theory 29).

In "The Albanian Virgin," there are numerous ways in which Munro comes to terms with her authorial role in negotiating the weight of the past. For example, Claire's account of her visit to Charlotte's hospital bedside where she hears Charlotte's story can be seen as an example of Munro's self-reflexive awareness of the process of story-making. In Claire's version of Charlotte's story of Lottar, we see the way that Charlotte needs to make up a story that fits the romantic conventions popular in Hollywood movies:

> "This is a terrible place," said Charlotte. . . "but I have been putting the time to good use. . .I've been making up a story, for a movie! I have it all in my head and I want you to hear it"
>
> "Listen," she said "(Oh, could you haul that pillow up more, behind my head?) It takes place in. . .northern Albania. . .in the nineteen twenties, when things were very primitive. It is about a young woman traveling alone. Lottar is her name in the story."
>
> I sat and listened. Charlotte would lean forward. . . stressing some point for me. Her puffy hands flew up and down, her blue eyes widened commandingly, and then from time to time she sank back onto the pillows, and she shut her eyes to get the story in focus again. . . .And she continued.
>
> "Yes, yes," she said at last. "I know how it goes on, but that is enough for now. You will have to come back. Tomorrow. Will you come back?"
>
> I said, yes, tomorrow, and she appeared to have fallen

asleep without hearing me. (86-87)

Claire's skepticism at Charlotte's use of story-telling as a way to keep her friendship is evident when a nurse asks Claire if she is related to Charlotte. Claire denies any connection: "Oh, no, I said. No" (94). This exchange reveals the present distance that exists between the story-teller, Charlotte, and her listener, Claire, and it sets up Claire's later realization of her shared complicity with Charlotte in repeating the story of Lottar.

Claire's recognition of her distanced control in story-making parallels Hutcheon's notion that parody functions both to implicate and critically distance the teller and the tale. According to Hutcheon, parody is more often defined according to only one of the meanings of its etymological root, the Greek noun *parodia*, where *para* means "counter" and *odos* means "song." This notion of "counter-song" results in parody being regarded as "one text. . .set against another with the intent of mocking it." As Hutcheon notes, however, there is a second meaning for *para*, "beside," which offers "a suggestion of an accord or intimacy instead of a contrast"; this "doubleness of root suggests the need for more neutral terms of discussion" and suggests that "there is nothing in *parodia* that necessitates the inclusion of a concept of ridicule." Therefore, Hutcheon maintains:

> Parody. . .is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in theintertextual "bouncing". . .

between complicity and distance. (A Theory of Parody, 32)

In "The Albanian Virgin," the story of the exiled Canadian woman, Miss Rudd, is reshaped by Munro into Charlotte's story of Lottar, which is placed next to Claire's version of Charlotte's story, and is echoed by Claire's own story of escape from her marriage and affair and her self-exile in Victoria, British Columbia. Claire's story of her transformation through exile becomes an ironic repetition of Charlotte's story of Lottar's transformation into an Albanian Virgin. Thus, the same story is repeated, each time with a difference. The new, incorporating work, that signals an ironic distance between itself and the backgrounded text is, of course, Munro's story itself, "The Albanian Virgin." Rather than ridiculing the conditions of exile and virginity, Munro suggests an accord between the two that becomes a constructive metaphor for women's freedom from prescribed gender roles.

The result of parody's ironic distance, says Hutcheon, is that parody has made imitation a means of freedom, even in the sense of exorcizing personal ghosts--or, rather, enlisting them in their own cause" (35). In "The Albanian Virgin," Munro enlists the spirit of Gothic romance in order to exorcize its influence over the shaping of women's lives and over her own story-telling. Specifically, in order to exorcize the influence of the dominant discourse of Gothic romance over her own life, Charlotte tells the story of Lottar, whose life disrupts the conventional narrative pattern. Instead of self-negation in marriage, Lottar's life as an Albanian Virgin offers possibilities for self-possession.

This same kind of exorcism informs the ending of Charlotte's story of Lottar. Continuing her story for Claire, Charlotte relates that when Lottar finally reached Skodra, it was only after she told her story to the authorities that she

was allowed to bathe, was given clean clothes and put on a boat: "She had to tell her story--the story of how she came to Maltsia e madhe--and this was difficult, because she was not used to speaking English, also because that time seemed so far away and unimportant" (109). It was also difficult, perhaps, because her story would not fit the conventions of the dominant discourse: she was not sold to a Muslim bridegroom, she was not a conventional virgin, nor was she romantically swept away by the rescuer-Franciscan. Charlotte stresses this disparity when she refuses to present to Claire any satisfactory conventional ending to Lottar's story. When Charlotte's story reaches the point where Lottar is put on a boat leaving Albania, "Charlotte stopped. She said, 'That part is not of interest'" (109).

Instead of conventional closure, Munro interrupts Charlotte's story of Lottar with Claire's first person account of how she had come to Victoria and how she came to know and admire Charlotte, one of her "regular customers who had changed into something like [a] friend" (114). What Claire admires most about Charlotte is her self-possession: "I was not certain what I felt about her. It was not simple liking or respect. It was more like a wish to move in her element, unsurprised. To be buoyant, self-mocking, gently malicious, unquenchable" (121). By replacing Charlotte's story of Lottar's past life of exile in Albania with Claire's account of Charlotte's present life of "risky authenticity" in Canada, Munro transforms the story's Gothic tendency toward self-negation in romantic love into a story of self-possession in real love.

This new direction becomes clear in Munro's rendering of the repetition of the romantic conventions in Claire's imagination. Returning to the hospital to hear the rest of Charlotte's story, Claire finds that Charlotte has been released from the hospital, and that she and her husband have both disappeared. Going

in search of them, Claire discovers that their apartment building on "Pandora Street" has been renovated, "the stucco. . . painted pink; large, new windows and French doors. . . put in. . . the fancy balconies. . . painted white, the whole place had the air of an ice-cream parlor" (127). More important than this general sense of confusion and disruption is its effect on Claire:

> The change. . .seemed to have some message for me. It was about vanishing. I knew that Charlotte and Gjurdhi had not actually vanished--they were somewhere, living or dead. But for me they had vanished. And because of this fact--not really because of any loss of them--I was tipped into dismay. . . .I had lost my bearings. . . . My connection was in danger. . . .Sometimes our connection is frayed, it is in danger, it seems almost lost. . . . Wouldn't we rather have a destiny to submit to, then, something that claims us, anything, instead of such flimsy choices, arbitrary days? (126-27)

Shaken by this loss of continuity, Claire submits to the old pull of romance: "I let myself slip, then, into imagining a life with Nelson." As she quickly realizes, however, such yielding would signal her complicity in perpetuating the old narrative conventions of women's lives, and consequently she breaks the spell of romance by envisioning a more accurate version of her projected life with Nelson:

> He comes to Victoria. . . .He gets a job teaching. . . .We move. . .to a roomy bungalow a few blocks from the sea. We marry. But this is the beginning of a period of estrangement. I becomepregnant. He falls in love with the mother of a student. I fall in love withan intern. . . .

> We get over all this. . . .We have another child. We acquire friends, furniture, rituals. We. . .talk regularly about starting a new life, somewhere far away, where we don't know anybody.
>
> We become distant, close--distant, close--over and over again. (127)

The playful irony with which Munro treats the old conventions is doubled when Nelson actually seems magically to appear in Claire's shop: "Jokingly disguised. . . this was really Nelson come to claim me. Or at least to accost me, and see what would happen," says Claire of his impromptu appearance. Munro's critical distance from the backgrounded text being parodied, the Gothic romance, becomes evident in her authorial list of optional storylines open to Claire at the point of Nelson's appearance:

> *We have been very happy.*
>
> *I have often felt completely alone.*
>
> *There is always in this life something to discover.*
>
> *The days and the years have gone by in some sort of blur.*
>
> *On the whole, I am satisfied.* (128)

Munro, however, realizes the narrative power of the rich and intimidating legacy of the past. In order to engage it, she must return one more time to the part of Lottar's story that Charlotte had declared was "not of interest": Lottar's departure from Albania and from the loyal Franciscan. At the end of "The Albanian Virgin," Munro returns to the story of Lottar and, in doing so, repeats the old story of love:

> Lottar. . .had not seen the Franciscan since he had followed the Bishop's man into the house. She called out for him now, as she was leaving. She had no name to call, so she called, "*Xoti! Xotl!*

> *Xoti*," which means "leader" or "master" in the language of the Ghegs. But no answer came. . . . She called him and called him, and when the boat came into the harbor at Trieste he was waiting on the dock. (128)

At the end of Munro's story, Lottar is collapsed into Charlotte, and the story of Lottar's exile in Albania with her Franciscan is continued in the story of Charlotte's life in Canada with her husband, Gjurdhi. The audience for this story are, of course, Claire, who hears the story from Charlotte, and Munro's readers, who experience Munro's repetition of the old narrative conventions. Ultimately, tellers and listeners come to a mutual realization of their shared complicity in the continuation of the weighty past. Hutcheon points out that "the pleasure of parody's irony comes. . .from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual 'bouncing'. . .between complicity and distance" (A Theory, 32). I would add that this pleasure also arises from the author's own degree of engagement. Through her use of parody, Munro consciously frees herself from the weighty literary tradition of Gothic romance through the skillful incorporation of its conventions in her story-telling.

Concepts of Subjectivity: "A Wilderness Station"

In pointing to the role of language in constructing identity, Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn explain feminism's preference for deconstructing the subject, rather than destroying it:

> French theories of femininity, using Derridian deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, centre on language as a means through which men have shored up their claim to a unified identity and relegated women to the negative pole of binary oppositions

> that justify masculine supremacy: subject/object, culture/nature, law/chaos, man/woman.
>
> Phallocentrism--this structuring of man as the central reference point of thought, and of the phallus as the symbol of sociocultural authority--is the target of Franco-feminist criticism. (81)

Franco-feminist and postmodernist theories of subjectivity target the same issues of language and subjectivity through similar methods. Hutcheon maintains that "it is the feminist need to inscribe first--and only then to subvert--that I think has influenced most the postmodern complicitously critical stand of underlining and undermining received notions of the represented subject"; she goes on to argue that in this operation of inscription and subversion "a gendered subjectivity, rooted also in class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation" is often rendered through "textual self-reflexivity that paradoxically calls these. . . particularities to our attention by foregrounding the doxa, the unacknowledged politics, behind the dominant representations of the self and the other in. . . narratives" (Politics 39-40).

In Open Secrets, Munro's subtle inscription and subversion of gendered subjectivity foregrounds the traditional representation of the self and the other. As Sheppard suggests in his review of this collection, "Munro's gender agenda is neatly buried in her quietly daring art" (82). "Quietly daring" is a concise description of Munro's artistic disclosure of alternative narratives of gendered subjectivity in her stories. Her use of shifting perspectives weakens traditional notions of a stable self. Finding alternative concepts of subjectivity, according to Hutcheon, in her study of postmodernism, is one method for destabilizing traditional concepts of subjectivity: "On the one hand, we find overt, deliberately manipulative narrators; on the other, no one single perspective but

myriad voices, often not completely localizable in the textual universe. In both cases, the inscription of subjectivity is problematized" (A Poetics 160) Applauding Munro's ongoing experimentation with narrative point of view, John Orange notes her shift from a more continuous first-person point of view "ranging back through memory time" to "a much more complicated, subtle, and experimental narrative technique" whereby her stories increasingly have a "more mysterious, cryptic quality. . . .The reader experiences a disquieting sense that meaning is hidden, blurred, even obscured because of the way the story is told" (83, 87). As he sees it, however, her manipulation of point of view to depict the fragmented reality of human experience is also accompanied by attention to the way that this fragmentation may be a form of social masking: "Munro emphasizes the theme that people tend to hide their 'real selves' from others, and more especially, that we all tend to live at a little distance from ourselves. We act out roles and scenes in which we do and do not believe" (93). For Wendy Lesser, this kind of destabilization may be seen in the way that Munro's earlier focus on autobiographical material has been replaced by her venture into new territory: "These days [Munro] is no longer remembering, but guessing or imagining; and her material tends now to be the history of others--researched or overheard, contemplated, explored, added to--rather than her own immediate personal history. . .in this new collection perspective has become vagrant, anonymous, almost impersonal" (51). Such vagrancy of perspective does not mean, however, that Munro's vision is blunted or diluted in any way. On the contrary, her wandering point of view seems to highlight more clearly her vision of the alternatives to the traditional unified subjectivity rendered through the traditional Jamesian centre of consciousness. Through her experiments with point of view, Munro inscribes and subverts the traditional

idea of the unified subject. The result is a story like "A Wilderness Station," where Munro redefines rather than destroys the traditional notions of subjectivity. In this story, Munro's skillful manipulation of narrative point of view reveals the way that the sociocultural construction of subjectivity, with the masculine as the norm for the universal subject, is one of the open secrets of women's lives.

"A Wilderness Station" is about Annie McKillop, who becomes the mail-order bride of a homesteader, Simon Herron, in the outpost of Carstairs in 1852. Annie, an orphan from Toronto, becomes a widow almost as soon as she becomes a wife, then moves to the nearby settlement of Walley, and eventually lives out her life as seamstress for the extended Mullen family, including five girls. Munro's story focuses on the death of Annie's husband, who at first seems to have died from an accident, but is later said to have been murdered. The murderer is apparently either his wife, Annie, or his brother, George. The story depicts Annie's surrender to the Walley jailer, James Mullen, and Annie's confession, which no one will believe. For Munro, however, Annie's surrender and confession are not the complete story; at least, they are only the beginning of the story. The entire story, "A Wilderness Station," consists of letters written by various characters involved in Annie's life, and it spans a century, from 1852 to 1959. In this way, Munro reviews Annie's life, but without using a fixed point of view. Ultimately, Munro's use of many perspectives serves to present Annie as what Hutcheon would call a subject "in process, never as fixed and never as autonomous" (Politics 40).

In "A Wilderness Station," Munro gives Annie a physical characteristic that seems to encapsulate her awareness of her own authorial subjectivity, whereby her depiction of Annie's subjectivity becomes a self-reflexive mirror for

Munro's depiction of her own art as a "subjectivity in process." Annie has a "wall-eye," and this peculiarity is specifically and similarly described by three different narrators. The matron of a Toronto orphanage responds to a query from a homesteader in the bush of Carstairs, North Huron in 1852 about Annie's suitability as a mail-order bride. She reports: "Miss McKillop is of a. . . durable constitution though. . .not so good a complexion. She has a waywardness about one eye but it does not interfere with her vision" (191). Later that year, the minister of the Free Presbyterian Church in Carstairs, North Huron writes to the jailer in Walley, North Huron to inform him of Annie McKillop Herron's impending arrival. He describes her as "not comely but not ill-favoured except having one eye that goes to the side" (199). In 1959, an elderly woman, granddaughter of the Walley jailer, for whose family Annie was seamstress for many years, writes to a Queens University historian about her long-ago expedition with "Old Annie" to visit the Herron family in Carstairs. Of Annie, she writes: "She had one eye that slid off to the side and gave her the air of taking in more information than the ordinary person" (217). Annie McKillop Herron's wandering eye is not an impediment as would be expected; rather, it serves to broaden her vision and enhance her understanding of what is going on around her. In the same way, Munro's wandering perspective enhances her awareness of how identity is constituted by situating it--that is, first by recognizing the masculine ideology of the unified or coherent subject and then by suggesting alternative notions of subjectivity.

Focusing on the epic scope of Munro's story, O'Faolain reminds us that the story of early Canadian settlement "stretches over a hundred years" (24). Both the celebrated genres of the epic and the epistolary novel are inscribed in "A Wilderness Station," and Munro's use of these genres and many characters

and perspectives displaces the conventional view of the coherent and unified subject with her pluralizing, multivalent story of Annie McKillop Herron's life in the wilderness.

In exploring women's journeys of self-discovery in the Canadian bush, Howells reminds us that "wilderness has been and continues to be the dominant cultural myth" of Canadian literary tradition, and that Canadian women writers experience a doubleness of vision in the face of their gender and cultural identity that can lead to their imaginative transformation of wilderness into an "awareness of unknown psychic territory within" (Private and Fictional Words 11,15). According to Howells, such self-awareness can facilitate "the rehabilitation of the feminine as an alternative source of power; wilderness provides the textual space for such imaginative revision" (18). In exploring these journeys of self-discovery, Howells then expands on this idea:

> Contemporary writers use the same rhetoric of wilderness as their . . . predecessors, revising their inheritance to accommodate modern versions of similar experiences, but still multiplicity is the key in the multiple facets of the self and the multiple stories contained within the maze of narrative reconstruction.The awareness of such multiplicity problematizes the sense of one's own identity for instead of the self being solid and unified it becomes a more shifting concept without fixed boundaries, something for which "wilderness" would be an appropriate analogy. (25)

"A Wilderness Station" similarly records Annie McKillop Herron's transformation of the Canadian wilderness into an interior psychic landscape. Her multiple responses to her environment, her astute vision of life, as well as her spells of

madness and her contradictory versions of her life story become indicators of the multiplicity and unfixed boundaries of her subjectivity. Moreover, in this story, Munro's use of the Canadian wilderness, and the different ways in which men and women respond to it, reveals Munro's self-reflexive awareness of the contradictions that lie within the "founding subject." That is, Munro as author is what Hutcheon would call "the original and originating source of fixed. . . meaning in the text" (A Poetics 126). In "A Wilderness Story," Munro is aware of her authorial position as unified subject who splits herself deliberately in order to reveal multiple and contradictory versions of her protagonist.

Through the story's epistolary format, Munro allows us to examine Annie's written responses as well as other people's written descriptions of her reactions. If we focus first on Annie, we might note the way that her experience of the anger and physical brutality of her new husband, Simon Herron, causes her to project her fear of him and his brother, George, on to the harsh wilderness. In Annie's first letter, written December 20, 1852, in the Walley Gaol, where she has taken refuge from George, she expresses her relief to be protected from the wilderness: "I am in here pretty well and safe" (207). In another letter, however, Annie describes the wilderness as a place of refuge from her recurring nightmare of the murderous brothers:

> I dreamed nearly every night that one or the other of them came and chased me with an axe. . . .I didn't stay in the house where [George] could find me and when I gave up sleeping inside and slept outside I didn't have the dream so often. It got warm in a hurry and the flies and mosquitoes came but they hardly bothered me. I would see their bites but not feel them, which was another sign that in the outside I was protected. (214)

Annie's contradictory experiences of the wilderness as both a dangerous place and a place of refuge reveal multiple facets of her personality. These contradictory forces also manifest themselves in the stories she tells the five Mullen girls. Christena Mullen writes that although they were not supposed to, they often pestered Annie for stories: "About being married herself, she sometimes said she had been and sometimes not. . . .Then she said a bear killed her husband, in the woods, and my grandfather had killed the bear, and wrapped her in its skin and taken her home from the Gaol. My mother used to say 'Now, girls. Don't. . . believe a word she says" (217-18).

The Canadian wilderness is viewed by Annie as dangerous and unknown on the one hand, and on the other hand, as a place that offers refuge from traditional gender roles through her imaginative revision of herself. After her husband's murder, Annie has recurring nightmares of being chased by either an axe-wielding Simon or his brother George, and of George's telling her that it is she who killed Simon, not him. She admits her guilt to James Mullen, who writes, "I do not believe it for a moment. . . .But I see nothing for it at the moment but to admit her to the Gaol" (201). As an old woman Annie asks Christena Mullen, George's grand-daughter, to drive her in the Stanley Steamer from Walley to see the Herron family (especially George) in Carstairs. On the trip to visit George, her first trip outside Walley since she ran away from Carstairs years ago, Annie expresses her amazement at the tamed landscape: "Look at the big fields, where are the stumps gone, where is the bush?" (219). The answer, of course, is that the bush is inside her. Annie has incorporated it into her psyche through her gradual internalization of the contradictory power of the wilderness. This power enables her to take charge of her story and to confront George: "Well, George," she says when she finally faces him again,

now white-bearded and dozing on the porch, "with a long, pale, obedient old face" (223). Of Annie's final confrontation of George Herron, Christena writes: "I asked Old Annie if Mr. Herron could understand her when she talked to him, and she said, 'Enough.' I asked if she was glad about seeing him again and she said yes. 'And glad for him to get to see me,' she said, not without some gloating" (225). In this scene, Annie seems to put her old nightmares to rest.

Annie's personal and contradictory responses to her wilderness experience are one way to understand her as subject in process, but Munro also provides us with multiple versions of Annie in the different responses to the Canadian wilderness of the men who write about Annie. In his letter, the Scottish minister, Reverend McBain, describes his fear of the winter raging outside, "such uproars as destroy my sleep and study and intrude even on my prayers. The wind blows bitterly through the logs. . . . And outside nothing but trees to choke off every exit and icy bog to swallow man and horse" (204). McBain's response echoes Atwood's observation that one male response to the wilderness as recorded in Canadian literature, has "accumulated around the idea of the North as a mean female--a sort of icy and savage *femme fatale* who will drive you crazy and claim you for her own" (Strange Things 88). A different response, one of adventurous and entrepreneurial challenge to the Canadian bush, exists in George Herron's description of settling the bush with his neighbors and wife: "We all worked together on my land or their land. . . . Our life together was a long one with many hardships but we were fortunate in the end and raised eight children. I have seen my sons take over my wife's father's land as well as my own" (196-97). Both of these views of the wilderness reflect an aspect of Annie's past: the economic exchange that characterized her marriage to Simon Herron, and her extreme fear of him and

his brother. Simon Herron's main purpose in taking Annie for his mail-order bride was economic. George Herron reports that his brother decided "we had the place in good enough shape to be bringing in a wife, so we should have somebody to cook and do for us and milk a cow" (194). A doctor's diagnosis of Annie as hysterical (206), upon her arrival at Walley gaol, is evidence of yet another view of wilderness.

These views of Annie and of the wilderness as alien and other also correspond to the masculine theories of female subjectivity as alien and other. That her version of herself and her story differs from the men who encounter her illustrates the alienation of the female subject. When Simon and George are clearing trees in the woods, Simon is killed. Although George tells her that "a branch fell out of a tree and hit [Simon]", Annie, in washing the dead body, realizes that George has murdered Simon. She discloses this in a letter to Sadie Johnstone, her friend from the orphanage: "we got him turned over. . . . And then I saw, I saw where the axe had cut. Neither of us said anything. I washed it out, blood and what else" (209). Annie knows the truth, but keeps silent, as does George. She fears, however, that because she knows the truth, George will do to her what he did to his brother. Her fear is confirmed after "he looked at me for the first time in a bad way" (213). Annie's ensuing nightmares of Simon or George chasing her with an axe and of George "coming into my dreams and. . .lying to me" (214), drive her into the bush for protection, until the coming of winter sends her to the Walley Gaol for refuge. Her claim that she murdered Simon gains her entrance: "I told them the very same lie that George told me so often in my dreams, trying to get me to believe it was me and not him. I am safe from George here is the main thing. If they think I am crazy and I know the difference I am safe" (215). It is not from the wilderness that Annie's

needs to feel safe, however, it is from men: her murdering brother-in-law and her soul-saving minister. In Munro's story, while Annie functions as "alien" and "other" for these men, they, in turn, function in the same way for her.

Especially revealing in the men's views of her is the official opinion of Annie's madness expressed by McBain, who writes to inform James Mullen that Annie will be arriving there "seeking to be admitted" (197). McBain feels compelled to reveal Annie's history, especially the "deterioration. . .of her mind and spirit" after her husband's death:

> She stopped appearing at services. . . . She would not plant peas and potatoes though they were given to her to grow. . . .She did not chop down the wild vines around her door. . . there was no order imposed on her days. . . the door was open and. . . animals came and went in her house. . . . her clothing was filthy and torn. . . and she was scratched by thorns and bitten by the mosquito insects and let her hair go uncombed or plaited. . . .Then while I was. . . puzzling how I might find a way to. . . deal with the danger to her. . . soul, there comes word she is gone. She. . . wrote on the shanty floor with a burnt stick the two words: "Walley Gaol." (198-99)

McBain has convinced himself that Annie may be insane due to "a natural and harrowing remorse" for her "careless" and "quarrelsome" treatment of her husband early in the marriage, "and this must have taken hold of her mind so strongly that she made herself out to be actually responsible for his death." The minister explains Annie's madness as a kind of hysterical response that is , "first taken on. . . as a kind of play," but which ultimately becomes the means whereby "the Devil has blocked off every escape" (203). While his explanation

for Annie's behavior is unsatisfactory, he affords us accurate insights into his own condition when he translates his loathing of the bush into a spiritual lesson: "This world is a wilderness, in which we may indeed get our station changed, but the move will be out of one wilderness station unto another" (204). When McBain laments his ineffectual attempts to minister to Annie's soul-- "I am not well-equipped to talk to women" (193)-- it becomes clear that his approaches to women and to wilderness are similar; he is unequipped to deal with either and both serve as metaphors for the trials of the spirit. Munro appropriates this image of a wilderness station for her story's title, but the story's real "lesson" comes from Annie's response to the wilderness as not only a place of unknown danger but also a place of psychic power and protection. Of her time spent hiding in the bush, she later writes: I ate berries both red and black and God protected me from any badness in them" (214).

Alongside Reverend McBain's concern for Annie's spiritual health, Munro places James Mullen's concern for Annie's physical well-being. When she "presented herself at the Gaol" and "said that she came to confess to a murder, and to be locked up" (200), Mullen is more concerned for her physical welfare than with her spiritual ills. He writes to McBain that although he does not believe Annie's confession, he has nevertheless admitted her to the "fine new Gaol. . . where inmates are kept warm and dry and are decently fed and treated with all humanity." At the same time, he explains that the Gaol "at present serves as a place of detention for the Insane as well as criminals, and if she is charged with Insanity, [he] could keep her. . . for the winter perhaps with removal to Toronto in the spring" (202). To this purpose he has called in a doctor, who concludes that Annie is suffering from "a sort of delusion peculiar to females, for which the motive is a desire for self-importance" and escape from

the "monotony...or drudgery" (205) of everyday life. According to the doctor, this female delusion can be blamed on books, specifically Gothic romances, "the sort of reading . . .available to these females, whether it is of ghosts or demons or of love escapades with Lords and Dukes and suchlike" which, for some women leads to "complete surrender and living within them as in an opium dream" (205).

Annie's response is, however, not a reaction to books but to the wilderness and to her precarious position in it; she is simultaneously terrified by the dark unknown and liberated through her internalization of the untamed wildness. Ultimately, Munro's story is about Annie's continuous redefining of her self in response to the wilderness, a kind of move from one identity to another. "I did used to have the terriblest dreams" (225), Old Annie tells Christena Mullen. Annie's identity ultimately lies in the wayward path of her life, from orphan-child to wilderness-wife to gaol eccentric, and finally, to sewing-woman for Christena Mullen's family. Christena recalls Annie's role in the family:

> The whole third floor was Old Annie's domain and one of my sisters--Dolly--said that whenever she dreamed of home, that is, of Traquair, she dreamed of old Annie up at the top of the third-floor stairs brandishing her measuring stick and wearing a black dress with long fuzzy arms like a spider. (216-17)

Annie's position as family seamstress and story-teller resembles Munro's role as author. Both attempt to sew and weave together women's lives : Annie, her own, and Munro, her characters'. The result is a challenge to conventional narrative patterns and notions of identity, which appear, according to Patricia Waugh in the form of "the gradual recognition of construing human identity in

terms of relationship and dispersal, rather than as a unitary, self-directing, isolated ego" (12). The wilderness stations of women's lives, their experiences of a wayward and vagrant subjectivity, prompt them to recreate themselves through relationships. Annie, an orphan, with few family ties, redefines herself through her relationships with the Mullen girls and the stories she tells them. Thus, through her revelation of traditional constructions of female identity, Munro recovers the "orphan Annie," whose wayward life and wayward eye parallel the elusiveness of the subject in process.

This unstable subjectivity has the same fleeting and elusive quality that Annie senses when she sees Lake Huron during her drive out of Carstairs. As Christina Mullen records: "From miles away the lake could be seen--just glimpses of it, shots of light, held wide apart in the trees and hills so that Old Annie asked me if it could possibly be the same lake, all the same one that Walley was on?" (225). Old Annie's difficulty in identifying the lake is comparable to the impossibility of defining the nature and scope of women's subjectivity. As well, the old question of Canadian identity arises from this scene. Annie's confusion over the lake's role as geographical marker brings up Frye's question of where is here as well as Munro's "Who do you think you are?" Old Annie's questioning of where she is, due to her confusion over the lake, is similar to Munro's treatment of women's lives as too indefinite and extensive to be pinned down. For Munro, subjectivity and story-telling are both on-going processes that enable her to give voice to the possibility of multiple meanings of women's experience.

Gail Gilliland claims that "if the subject is to be found as ever having had any real existence of its own, perhaps it is to be found in moments of experience rather than in the historical sense of time" (226). In "A Wilderness

Station," Annie's identity is a momentary thing and manifests itself only when fleeting versions of her life, as related by her and Christena Mullen, are placed alongside the more conventional and stable male versions of her story. Annie's letters to her orphanage friend have either a cryptic and paranoid tone or take on a surreal dreamlike quality, and Christena's letter is written in her old age, which she admits has an effect on her story: "Ask an old woman to reminisce and you get the whole rag-bag" (225). The result of the juxtapositoning of different stories is that these multiple versions cannot be neatly connected to form a complete identity. This notion of identity's flux is, of course, also reflected in the title, "A Wilderness Station" itself. A station in the wilderness suggests both a refuge and a temporary stop in an ongoing journey; a station in the wilderness is a somewhere in the midst of nowhere; like Annie's identity, such a site is contingent and provisional.

Attention to Story Structure: "Carried Away"

In a description of the shape of Munro's stories, Rasporich refers to Munro's departure from the old notions of narrative:

> Clearly, the form of Munro's art is equal to onion-skinned layers of multiple meanings and levels of reality. Clearly, too, to interpret her art as simple extensions of reality or mirror reproductions of life-as-it-is-lived, to argue. . . for a singular mimetic relationship between art and life, is highly suspect, particularly in the new age of postmodern writing and thinking. (164)

Munro's art, according to Rasporich, "consists of an expansion inward, rather than outward, the discrimination of tone and language that makes a small event within a provincial society an important human matter. It is perhaps an

essentially feminine art" (166). In turn, she relates this microscopic dynamic to Munro's choice of the short-story form, which, "like a needlepoint square, demands flawless execution," at the same time that the "finely woven complex thematic patterns, encoded symbols, language and allusions compete with visionary moments and expand within the boundaries of the short story form" (165-66). This expansion inward of layers of multiple levels of meaning is made possible not though a narrative chain of connections that results in a rounding off, a definitive completion of meaning, but rather, by a refusal to offer reliable patterns. Moreover, even when Munro provides temporary consolation by deliberately using the conventional patterns to reassure the reader, at the same time she uses them as points of departure to new realms of possibility.

The need for new structures to accommodate women's experience is an issue that is particularly foregrounded in the first story in Open Secrets, entitled "Carried Away." In this story, Munro translates her sense of reality's flux into a similar sense of narrative instability. She resists the conventional demand that a short story must be structured according to the notion of integrated wholeness or completion. Instead, "Carried Away" is formed in accordance with its protagonist's, Louisa's, "moments of experience," which, Munro reveals, do not necessarily fit together neatly. Even Munro's title, "Carried Away," reflects a sense of departure or escape from conventional forms and closure.

"Carried Away" follows the life of Louisa, a librarian in Carstairs, from the time of World War I, when she is twenty-five to just after World War II. Using third-person point of view, Munro presents the story mostly from Louisa's viewpoint, but with an impersonal tone that sometimes focuses on ordinary occurrences with the same intensity usually reserved for extraordinary events. This disproportionate focus, coupled with a discontinuous chronology,

produces a sense of narrative unreliability. "Carried Away" begins in 1917 with a section entitled "LETTERS." Letters are exchanged between Louisa and Jack Agnew, a Carstairs boy gone to war. The soldier writes to Louisa first; he had previously encountered her in the library but does not know her name and she cannot remember him. Their ensuing letters become more personal until Jack declares his love. In the next section, "SPANISH FLU," the war is over and Louisa tells two stories to Jim Frarey, a traveling salesman staying in the hotel where she lives: first, of being jilted by Jack upon his return to Carstairs, and then, of her earlier, ill-fated love affair with a married doctor at the sanitarium where she was recovering from an illness. "ACCIDENTS," the third section, focuses on Arthur Doud, owner of Doud's Factory, manufacturer of pianos, and on the death of his employee, Jack Agnew, in a bizarre factory accident in which Jack's head is cut off by a circular saw. The accident sets in motion a chain of events that ends in the marriage of Louisa and Arthur. In the last section, titled "TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS," forty years have passed and Louisa, an elderly widow with heart trouble, has a surreal encounter with her former soldier-beau, the dead Jack Agnew, in a bus station, an event which leaves Louisa dazed and confused by the "anarchy she was up against--a devouring muddle. Sudden holes and impromptu tricks and radiant vanishing consolations" (50).

Because of our reliance on a narrator who leads us, along with Louisa, into this "devouring muddle," Munro's readers, like Louisa, find ourselves searching for "some reasonable continuance" (50) to the story of Louisa's life. At first glance, Munro does seem to provide this sense of continuity by ending the story back at Louisa's arrival in Carstairs, forty-some years earlier, when she began her new job at the library and when "she believed in the swift

decision, the unforeseen intervention, the uniqueness of her fate" (51). As O'Faolain reminds us, however, Louisa's girlish hope in a fresh start "is a masculine way of thinking" (24), and our faith in authorial control over the protagonist's fate and the story's completion is ultimately shown to be illusory. Even when Munro employs this circular format in the story, it does not serve to call attention to her authorial control, rather it operates in the opposite way. Munro's technique is much like Arthur's attraction to Louisa: "He could no more describe the feeling he got from her than you can describe a smell. It's like the scorch of electricity. It's like burnt kernels of wheat. No, it's like a bitter orange. I give up" (40). While such indefiniteness may seem little consolation to the reader, it is a generous gesture in that it allows for the possibility of seeing multiple meanings. As Malcolm Jones Jr. suggests: "the only consolation [these stories] offer is the considerable artistry with which they are constructed" (63), and this artistry ultimately amounts to anarchy. Anarchy, however, need not necessarily imply obliteration of order, but possibility. This is the sort of expansion, or gravity-defying lightness, that Munro strives for in her structuring of "Carried Away."

A prominent feature of the story is its joining of "real" events from Louisa's life and the "devouring muddle" of her dream-like imaginings. This kind of juxtaposition illustrates, for Heble, Munro's awareness of language's paradoxical limits and possibilities, and "serves as a reminder of the unresolvable gap between all writings and the reality which those writings attempt to re-present" (5). Such unresolvable gaps appear throughout "Carried Away," functioning to open out or unfold rather than round out or complete human experience. These gaps allow for an expansive form which arises from Munro's close attention to and detailed rendering of the objects and

events of everyday reality. This intricate surface reality becomes for Munro a departure point into Louisa's dream-world, whose unimaginable and unreasonable visions offer new possibilities to old narrative patterns.

Munro's close attention to the surface details of narrative is announced early in the story in her depiction of Louisa, who sits in the dining room of the Commercial Hotel in Carstairs reading a letter dated January 4, 1917:

> The white tablecloths were changed every week and in the mean-time were protected by oilcloth mats. In winter, the dining room smelled of these mats wiped by a kitchen rag, and of coal fumes from the furnace, and beef gravy and dried potatoes and onions--a smell not unpleasant to anybody coming in hungry from the cold. On each table was a little cruet stand with the bottle of brown sauce, the bottle of tomato sauce, and the pot of horseradish. (3-4)

From this concrete setting, we and Louisa are carried away into the fantastic realm of romance, for the letter she is reading is from a man she does not know and who does not know her. Jack Agnew's letter begins, "Perhaps you will be surprised to hear from a person you don't know and who doesn't remember your name" (5), and an ensuing correspondence is built upon this gap and the potential narrative pattern it offers to Louisa and the reader especially. To Jack, this "anonymous" correspondence offers the opportunity to be "carried away" from the depressing surroundings of the military hospital. He writes: "What has landed me here in Hospital is not too serious. I see worse all around me and get my mind off of all that by picturing things and wondering for instance if you are still there in the Library" (5). His absence from Carstairs and enforced inactivity in the hospital provide him the opportunity for fictionalizing as

evidenced in his declaration of love for Louisa:

> the idea I won't ever see Carstairs again makes me think I can say anything I want. I guess it's like being sick with a fever. So I will say I love you. I think of you up on a stool at the Library reaching to put a book away and I come up and put my hands on your waist and lift you down, and you turning around inside my arms as if we agreed about everything. (11)

Jack's provisional situation provides him the perfect opportunity for fictionalizing, an opportunity that Munro is well aware of as a writer. Just as Jack's distance and precarious position in wartime make him feel there will be no consequences for what he writes, so perhaps does Munro's occupation as a writer offer a similar sense of distance, one that Munro questions in her story of the consequence of Jack's declaration of love.

If Jack Agnew seems determined to create a romantic story out of his daydreams and his anonymous position, Louisa, looking to be "carried away" from her isolation in Carstairs, picks up this narrative pattern: "at the prospect she still felt a hush, a flutter along the nerves, a bowing down of sense, a flagrant prostration." Previously the war was simply vague to her, but now she takes a personal interest. At the same time that she begins "to follow the war in a more detailed way" (10), and very practically joins with the ladies of the Red Cross to knit a scarf for "a friend overseas," however, Louisa feeds the fantasy that accompanies the reality of war. In her mind, she keeps warm the secret romantic impulse aroused by Jack's letters and the advice of a girl at the Red Cross meeting: "Knit up good and tight to keep him warm!" Louisa knits together her fantasy of Jack at the same time that Munro uses knitting as a metaphor for tightly constructed fiction. Louisa, however, is an inept knitter of

mufflers and stockings, and her fantasizing, too, suffers a "realistic" flaw in the form of this information from the narrator:

> One of the girls in this group was Grace Horne. She was a shy but resolute-looking girl, nineteen years old, with a broad face, thin lips often pressed together, brown hair cut in a straight bang, and an attractively mature body. She had become engaged to Jack Agnew before he went overseas, but they had agreed not to say anything about it. (12-13)

Through this seemingly impromptu revelation, Munro unravels the romantic narrative pattern, and provides a more realistic story in the form of Louisa's later revision of the story over drinks with Jim Frarey, a traveling salesman. At this point, according to Louisa, her story of her long-distance romance with Jack Agnew has become "a lesson. . .in what fools women can make of themselves" (15). That men also can make fools of themselves is evidenced in Jim Frarey's romantic response to her story. Posing as her rescuer, he wants to carry her away from the pain of her story and she is quite willing to allow him to do so: "She let him take her hands, half lift her from her chair. . . . Up the stairs they went, that they had so often climbed separately" (21-21). After making love to Louisa, he attributes traces of blood on the sheets to her virginity, and invests the event with great significance: "Louisa, Louisa, why didn't you tell me that was the way it was?" (21). Louisa, however, is not as concerned as he believes she should be, and to lessen his sense of responsibility she resorts to telling him that she merely has her period. At the same time, Munro tells us that, "her words came out with a luxurious nonchalance and could not be fitted together" (20). This anarchy of words conveys clearly the gap that exists between women's reality and the language and conventional narrative patterns

used to represent it. The deflowering of the virgin is a classic romance plot, as is the opposite situation of women tricking men into thinking they are virgins. Munro's strategy is thus to play with these old formulas and in doing so to suggest other possibilities.

In the last section of the story, "TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS," Louisa's amazing experience while waiting for a bus at the temporary depot similarly becomes the means whereby Munro invokes the old "dream" of love in order to expand the boundaries of the short story. Louisa, now a widow in her sixties with a weak heart, lapses into the unreliable realm of her imagination, wherein she experiences the ghostly reappearance of Jack Agnew. Having been shocked by reading an announcement in the local paper that a union representative from Toronto named Jack Agnew would be speaking in the park that afternoon, Louisa tries to regain her composure in the temporary bus terminal. Upon opening her eyes, "a man was sitting one chair away and was speaking to her" (45). When he tells Louisa that he had always meant to say goodbye-- as if his departure were a normal event-- and she recognizes him as Jack Agnew, words fail her, and she "[falls] back, ridiculously, on the usual courtesies" (46) of asking about his family. The story he gives her does not coincide with the reality she knows, and Louisa again is reduced to confusion which she masks with conventional conversation. She begins telling Jack about her marriage and life with Arthur Doud, and then stops, embarrassed: "What a thing to talk to a dead man about" (48).

While Jack easily makes his pronouncement that "Love never dies," Louisa's experience does not allow her his faith. Instead, she believes that "Love dies all the time, or at any rate it becomes distracted, overlaid--it might as well be dead" (48). Yet, as much as she rejects the literary construct of the

constancy of human love, so much is she desperate to hang on to this old narrative. Sitting beside her resurrected lover, "a giddiness seemed to be taking over, a widespread forgiveness of folly, alerting the skin of her spotty hand, her dry thick fingers that lay not far from his, on the seat of the chair between them. An amorous flare-up of the cells, of old intentions. *Oh, never dies"* (48-49). In this scene, Munro reveals one of the larger contradictions women live with and inside, yet she resists any easy resolution.

To appreciate her achievement it is helpful to note that this final section of Munro's story is filled with delicate echoes of Joyce's "Araby" in which the male protagonist is moved to "anguish and anger" as he remembers the youthful vanity of his unrequited love for his friend's older sister. In that story the narrator's epiphanic moment of self-recognition and shame serves to round off and complete the story. In "Carried Away," however, Louisa's epiphany leads first to shame, anguish and anger, but later, to humility, an emotional plane more inclined toward expansion and self-transformation. In the earlier section of "SPANISH FLU," a youthful Louisa had admitted to Jim Frarey that she deserved the treatment she received from Jack Agnew: "And what was it in my case but vanity, which deserves to get slapped down" (18). Later, in "TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS," when a frail, elderly Louisa is confused by her vision and visit with Jack Agnew, and his unexplained transformation into Jim Frarey, she is angry: "Oh, what kind of a trick was being played on her, or what kind of a trick was she playing on herself! She would not have it. . . . She was dizzy and humiliated. She would not have it" (49). Hoy has noted the way in which "Munro remains open, in her fiction, to the next disconcerting revelation. Reality, the stories demonstrate, consistently proves more various that the human constructs created to contain it" (5). Hoy explains that in many of

Munro's stories "the inner revelation is often accompanied by prickles of unexorcised guilt or shame," and she reminds us that "even repudiated emotions can exert fearsome power" (10). Like Louisa, we are confused by the appearance of Jack Agnew and by Munro's evocation of Jim Frarey. We can find no certitude, no resolution; instead, with "Carried Away," we are up against anarchy and desolation. Munro has maintained that "[w]hat I want now in a story. . . is an admission of chaos" (Hoy 17), which she views as a positive response to the anarchy of life, as evidence of " 'the way the skin of the moment can break open'," the way it can lead to "the discovery of another reality which shifts the protagonist's perspective on everyday life. The catalyst is often an experience of the imminence of death" (Hoy 14).

The dead Jack Agnew functions as such a catalyst, and when his vision vanishes and in his place appears the dizzying puddle of black-clothed people that Louisa mistakes as the legendary Tolpuddle Martyrs, Munro produces one of those moments, "those shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open to question, the disarrangements which demand new judgments and solutions, and throw the window open on inappropriate and unforgettable scenery" (Who 172). Quickly, however, the dark figures begin to come into focus as a group of Mennonites: dark blue-shirted, bearded men and blue and purple-dressed, bonneted women. Reflecting the way that Louisa's vision of life's chaotic uncertainty has begun to settle and reorganize itself at this point, Munro returns to her characteristic concrete description of reality:

> But these Mennonite settlings are a blessing. The plop of behinds on chairs, the crackling of the candy bag, the meditative sucking and soft conversations. . . .Louisa accepts a butterscotch mint. She is surprised to be able to hold it in her hand, to have her

> lips shape thank-you, then to discover in her mouth just the taste that she expected. She sucks on it as they do on theirs, not in any hurry, and allows that taste to promise her some reasonable continuance. (50)

Following Louisa's powerful feeling of detachment from reality, as if "she had gone under a wave, which nobody had noticed," this moment of physical and social connection--with its powerful images of communion--serves to shift the story's focus from despair to hope, into which Munro also enfolds a further sense of the imminence of death. As Louisa waits in the temporary bus station with the Mennonites: "Lights have come on, though it isn't yet evening. . . lines of little colored bulbs that she did not notice until now. They make her think of festivities. Carnivals. Boats of singers on the lake. 'What place is this?' she said to the woman beside her" (50). If such a scene evokes traditional depictions of entrance into heaven, so also does Louisa's question hark back to Jim Frarey's exclamation when they climbed the stairs to Louisa's third floor room long ago: "Never climbed so close to Heaven in this place before!" (20). In turn, just as that encounter was scarcely the end of anything, and more anti-climactic than closural, so following closely on Louisa's heavenly experience in the bus depot there is an abrupt shift far into the past to the day of Louisa's arrival in Carstairs. That day was also replete with a sense of a new beginning, and its reappearance here is Munro's way of using the notion of closure to suggest that endings are never final.

Munro unsettles our sense of narrative completeness, our belief in fiction's capacity to contain human reality, at the same time that she works within a conventional narrative tradition. Ultimately, this paradox serves internally to destabilize the boundaries of the short story. The last lines of

"Carried Away" attempt to capture this tension between continuance and chaos: "The town was full of the smell of horses. As evening came on, big blinkered horses with feathered hooves pulled the sleighs across the bridge, past the hotel, beyond the streetlights, down the dark side roads. Somewhere out in the country they would lose the sound of each other's bells" (51). As much as we depend on the pull of narrative completeness, our lives are like sounds dispersing and disappearing beyond the light.

In this way, Munro's fiction is truly "realistic." As she herself explains with respect to the way the "discordant effect" operates in her fiction: "It doesn't make much difference. . .how [a] heroine ends up at all. Because we finally end up dead. . . . There are just flashes of things we know and find out. . . .We think we've got things figured out and then they turn around on us. No state of mind is permanent" (qtd in Hoy 18). The humility of this insight underscores the faultiness of Louisa's belief in the fresh start, "in the swift decision, the unforeseen intervention, the uniqueness of her fate." Munro not only suggests that such thinking derives from adherence to the conventional narrative pattern, but also illustrates the way that such narratives do not fit Louisa's own experience. As a result, a story like "Carried Away" also serves to open the short-story genre to the "sudden holes and impromptu tricks and radiant vanishing consolations" of human reality.

Chapter Four
The Narrative of Community:
Strategies for Survival

In the 1990s, the prospect of facing the end of a century, an exceptionally disturbing and violent one, and the anticipation of the arrival of a new and unknown millennium, burdens literary culture with a weighty sense of loss and a debilitating doubt about the future. Such post-apocalyptic films as Rollerball, Blade Runner, and Total Recall, express this overwhelming sense of despair. Both Atwood and Munro's collections, have been published in the last decade of a century awash in this debilitating Zeitgeist. Thus, it is no coincidence that in Wilderness Tips Atwood twice employs the image of the sinking Titanic to describe her protagonists' sense of paralysis in the face of extreme individual dislocation and despair. For Atwood and Munro, however, this defeatist response is not the only avenue available, and while they render a sense of helplessness in some of their characters, both authors choose the narrative path less traveled: the narrative of community.

This alternative framework for facing a "sinking" world, the narrative of community, is generically defined by Sandra Zagarell as a form which flourished in the nineteenth century and still operates in the 1990s; even though "the most widely recognized strain of English-language literature has detailed massive cultural loss and despair, emphasizing individual anomie. . . this tradition has followed another path. . . expanding the story of human connection and continuity." A literary tradition generally overlooked since the nineteenth century, the narrative of community replaces the narrative of

"individual anomie" and the "often solitary determination to survive" with a communal acceptance of "increasingly heterogeneous visions of the collective life" (278).

Emphasizing the story of human interconnection by talking back in the face of individual anomie, is a powerful way to face the millennium with hope. According to VeVe A. Clark, "It is through our words. . . and through our conversations with each other, that we have the power to re-create our worlds" (9). This concept of "talking back" is congruent with Zagarell's claim that "many works that participate in narrative of community are also quite actively in dialogue with other genres" (262), and it fits Munro's and Atwood's stories of women, who talk back in the face of conventional story patterns that have so strongly determined their lives. Moreover, in "talking back," these authors use the communal narrative strategies of folktale, legend, gossip, jokes, old wives tales; they realign set story patterns in order to fit the open flux of women's lives and enable them to survive in the wilderness of silenced voices. In the process of being rehashed and retold in various forms, women's stories take on a relational quality, and a relational quality develops, as well, among the characters who individually lived in a specific space and time, so that these lives resemble, at times, a shared conversation.

Initiated by mostly white middle-class women during the nineteenth century, the narrative of community corresponds to what Zagarell calls "a markedly interpersonal, affiliative orientation" (259). This tendency to diminish the distance between individual and community functions as a reaction to the predominant literature of alienation:

> Narratives of community ignore linear development or chronological sequence and remain in one geographic place.

> Rather than being constructed around conflict and progress. . . narratives of community are rooted in process. They tend to be episodic, built primarily around the continuous small-scale negotiations and daily procedures through which communities sustain themselves. In keeping with the predominant focus on the collective life of the community, characterization typically exemplifies modes of interdependence among community members. (254)

In her essay, Zagarell focuses generally on American and British literature, and she discusses the above characteristics of narratives of community specifically in relation to the nineteenth-century collection by Sarah Orne Jewett, The Country of the Pointed Firs, and the twentieth-century work by Flora Thompson, Lark Rise. These works, are seen in contrast to Western literature's "preoccupation with the self," and concern themselves with the "self. . . as part of the interdependent network of the community rather than as an individualistic unit" (250). Zagarell argues further that in the late twentieth-century the narrative of community has diversified, and she suggests the need for further inquiry into these changes, especially, "the extent to which twentieth-century narratives of community may be inspired most strongly by writers' own racial, ethnic, class, and or cultural traditions, and the changing roles of gender" (278). In this way, the narrative of community as delineated by Zagarell accords with concerns about the way that gender and nationality inform the interactions of experience, language, subjectivity and form in Atwood's and Munro's short-story collections.

Specifically I wish to focus on the way that the traditional masculine concept of identity is problematized in their stories about Canadian women

living in the shadow of the twenty-first century. The essential spirit of these stories is similar to that of male adventure stories: survival. In dealing with this motif, however, Atwood and Munro are less concerned with rendering the pain of the alienated individual than with portraying communal sharing as consolation for human suffering and an effective strategy for survival. Women's ability to negotiate between viewpoints and interests, or in Carol Gilligan words, to "attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view"(qtd in Zagarell 260), and their ambivalence toward this strategy for survival corresponds to Canadian literature's variations on the theme of survival. In Wilderness Tips and Open Secrets, Atwood and Munro add a distinctly Canadian dimension both to the concept of survival and the role of the narrative of community.

Representation of Experience:
"Continuous Small-scale Negotiations and Daily Procedures"

Commenting further on "the continuous small-scale negotiations and daily procedures through which communities sustain themselves," Zagarell describes the density of detail surrounding the everyday activities and objects that are represented in the narrative of community. She counsels, however, that in this particular genre "the 'everyday' is also saturated with meanings in which the personal and the communal unite" in a partnership indicating that "the everyday. . . is ritualized" (268, 269). Personal and communal activities become interwoven and are recognized as one: "ritual and work, the celebratory and the customary" (269). Such a translation of the commonplace occurrences of women's lives enables both Munro and Atwood to expand their chronicles of women's experience in order to fit the growing diversity within the

collective life of women.

This ritualization of everyday experience can function as a part of both authors' resistance to traditional narratives' tendencies toward unity of effect. It can also have, however, its own totalizing effect by replacing women with Woman, a tendency that both Atwood and Munro resist in their fiction. For example, in Atwood's "Hack Wednesday," Marcia, the middle-aged protagonist realizes that "more and more, she is squirrelling away bits of time--a photo here, a letter there; she wishes she had saved more of the children's baby clothes, more of their toys" (226). Marcia recognizes that these items represent the importance of the daily procedures that sustain her family. In lamenting the passing of time and the dispersal of her family, Marcia creates a metaphor for this situation: "the days of the week whisk by like panties. . . the kind she had when she was a little girl, in pastels, with 'Monday,' 'Tuesday,' 'Wednesday' embroidered on them.'" This metaphor carries connotations of the kind of "proper" habits prescribed for girls by their mothers in the form of Marcia's story of her mother's warning that she should always wear clean panties in case a bus ran over her. Atwood's narrator, however, resists ritualizing such a daily procedure: "Marcia's mother never actually said this. But it was the kind of thing she ought to have said, because the other mothers really did say it, and it has been a useful story for Marcia" (220). This type of "communal" story appeals to Atwood because it highlights her inescapable doubleness of vision: it conveys her attraction to the collective quality of women's everyday experience as literary subject matter, while it also underscores her impulse to expand the story in order to fit the individual and diverse versions of this experience. At the end of "Hack Wednesday" the narrator's forecast of Marcia's particular emotional and physical negotiations of middle age extends to

accommodate a multiplicity of women's daily adjustments in order to sustain their community:

> Then Christmas Day will come. It will be a Monday. . . pastel blue, and they will eat a turkey . . . . Marcia will get a little drunk on the eggnog, and later, after the dishes are done, she will cry silently to herself. . . . She will cry because the children are no longer children, or because she herself is not a child any more, or because there are children who have never been children, or because she can't have a child any more, ever again. Her body has gone past too quickly for her; she has not made herself ready. (242)

In her depiction of Marcia in mourning over time's swift passing, Atwood succeeds in emphasizing the diversity that exists within the "small-scale negotiations and daily procedures" of women's collective life.

For a more extensive treatment of the ritualization of women's experience, we might turn to Munro's story, "Open Secrets." This ritualization is accomplished by the way that the community of Carstairs in 1965 is linked by the ballad verses about the disappearance of Heather Bell:

> *It was on a Saturday morning*
> *Just as lovely as it could be*
> *Seven girls and their Leader, Miss Johnstone*
> *Went camping from the C.G. I.T.* [Canadian Girls in Training] (129)
>
> *There was Betsy and Eva Trowell*
> *And Lucille Chambers as well*

There was Ginny Bos and Mary Kaye Trevelyan
And Robin Sands and poor Heather Bell. (130)

And maybe some man did meet her there
That was carrying a gun or a knife
He met her there and he didn't care
He took that young girl's life.

But some will say it wasn't that way
That she met a stranger or a friend
In a big black car she was carried far
And nobody knows the end. (140)

So of Heather Bell we will sing our song
As we will till our day is done
In the forest green she was taken from the scene
Though her life had barely begun. (156)

In "Open Secrets," the unexplained disappearance of Heather Bell is ritualized and circulated throughout the community: "There is a poem already made up and written down. . . . I've got it here typed out" (156), one woman tells another. In Munro's story, however, the poem's verses do not appear together; rather, they intermittently show up throughout her prose. Seen above as a complete poem in ballad form, it is, at best, a make-shift and uninspired song about the tragedy of Heather Bell's disappearance. The ballad form, which originated as a group or communal activity, was the traditional oral format for tragic stories. In her unusual representation of this amateur attempt at balladry, Munro points to

the way that stories convert individual fates into mythic narratives, a process that characterizes community. Two of the main characters, Frances and Maureen, and Munro's third-person narrator all interrupt the ballad story with their conversations and stories of life in Carstairs, a process that illustrates the impossibility of one final version of the collective life of women and calls, instead, for multiple versions. This is the "secret" revealed in "Open Secrets."

Munro's attention to the lives of others, the open secrets obscured by the "official story" is the impetus of this story and others in her collection. Especially in "Open Secrets," Munro presents layers of stories that all contribute to the story of the disappearance of Heather Bell, and in doing so, she reveals the way that story is constructed through communal relationships to it, and to the "daily procedures though which communities sustain themselves." In Munro's story, song, rumors, gossip, speculations, instructional tales, legal advice, pantomime, sex talk, all connect the characters and their stories to each other and to the "official story" of a girl's disappearance. For example, a conversation between Frances and Maureen adds another layer to the official story that simultaneously enriches it and questions its completeness. Frances's offhand comment about the weather interrupts the ballad's sense of continuity: "And they almost didn't even go. . . . Because of the downpour Saturday morning. They were waiting half an hour in the United Church basement and she [Miss Johnstone] says, Oh, it'll stop--my hikes are never rained out! And now I bet she wishes it had've been. *Then it would 've been a whole other story*" (129: my italics). Munro's authorial attention to contentious and alternative voices and versions destabilizes the official story. This confluence of stories resists the shape of one final version, instead, what is required is an innovative framework that can accommodate diverse, "other" stories of human interdependence: the

narrative of community.

Relationship to Language:
"An Activity Conceived of as Fundamentally Social"

Against the notion of any one, official version, both Atwood and Munro present a myriad of voices and versions competing for our attention. Often, in Munro's and Atwood's stories, no single protagonist is foregrounded; rather, several characters present their individual versions, which together come to represent the collective life of the community. According to Zagarell, this is a characteristic of the narrative of community: "the narrative does not feature individualized lives but develops an interdependent community network in which characters are portrayed with reference to how they intersect with and maintain the community. Each character's personality emerges through an activity conceived as fundamentally social, speech" (270).

Both Munro and Atwood pay careful attention to language in their writing, often in the form of their characters' speech. Both are aware, as women and Canadians, of being engaged in perpetual negotiation with the language system of the dominant culture, but both treat this engagement as a challenge rather than a burden. Atwood describes this challenge: "language is one of the few tools we *do* have. So we have to use it. . . even. . .though it's untrustworthy" (Hancock 209). Atwood is also aware of the challenge involved in representing the collective life of women:

> I write about women because they interest me, not because I think I ought to. Art created from a sense of obligation is bound to be static. Women are not Woman. They come in all shapes, sizes, colours, classes, ages and degrees of moral rectitude. . . . All of

> them are real. Some of them are wonderful. Some of them are awful. To deny them this is to deny them their humanity and to restrict their area of moral choice to the size of a teacup. ("If You Can't Say" 22)

The expression of a community-based vision through the deployment of multiple voices and stories is a commitment shared by both Atwood and Munro.

In "Wilderness Tips," Atwood offers several voices and versions of Wacousta Lodge, which together represent a communal struggle to survive in the face of declining prospects at the end of the twentieth century. Atwood's careful rendering of these various versions of Wacousta Lodge, the family's ancestral home, "built in the first years of the century by the family's great-grandfather, who made a bundle on the railways" (194), conveys the ubiquitous Canadian anxiety evoked by the presence of the wilderness and the struggle to survive. According to Zagarell, the narrative voices of some narratives of community are "exceptionally porous, always hospitable to the language and frame of reference of community members" (266). This is the case in "Wilderness Tips," where Atwood's sensitivity to the tenuous web of relationships between the various characters gathered at Wacousta Lodge and to their individual, apprehensive relationships with their communal past includes careful attention to their uneasy relationships with language as well.

Gathered together at the family vacation home are its middle-aged inheritors: three sisters, Pamela, Pru, and Portia, one brother, Roland, and Portia's husband and Pru's lover, George. Each has a different story of and relationship to Wacousta Lodge, and together, their stories offer advice, or strategies for survival in the face of a growing sense of dislocation and despair. George, the outsider, a Hungarian refugee turned corporate raider, loves the

tradition that Wacousta Lodge represents: "this lake, this peninsula, Wacousta Lodge itself, are his refuge, his monastery, his sacred ground," yet upon seeing it for the first time, his imperial tendencies take over: "He didn't want to desecrate Wacousta Lodge," the narrator explains sardonically, "he wanted to marry it" (193, 99). Roland feels a deep sense of loss at what Wacousta Lodge once symbolized for him: "Manhood with a capital M, courage, honour. The Spirit of the Wild," but, the narrator points out, he also realizes the absurdity of his attraction to this romantic language: "It was naive, pompous, ridiculous. It was dust" (209).

Roland harbors a deep resentment toward George, because Roland, a bland-faced accountant, understands that while he cannot live up to his grandfather's robber-baron heritage, his brother-in-law, George, can: "he's intolerable. Strutting around as if he owned the place. Not yet. Probably he'll wait for them to croak, and then turn it into a lucrative retirement home for the rich Japanese" (206). Roland's only response to George's greed, however, is to chop down the dying trees surrounding the lodge.

Pamela, a spinster professor, registers her response to her family and heritage in terms of word-play: "It was so lovely and quiet here during the war. . . . Hardly any motorboats, because of the gas rationing. More canoes. Of course, the road wasn't built then, there was only the train. I wonder why we say 'train of thought' but never 'car of thought'?" (197). Pru, the sister addicted to extra-marital affairs (including an ongoing one with Portia's husband, George) and a slave to fast-changing fashion trends, clings to Wacousta Lodge as the one constant in her life: "She wants everything on this peninsula to stay exactly the way it always has been" (197). Portia, the youngest, bullied by her sisters, married off at a young age to George by her mother, and humiliated by

George's affair with Pru, clings to the stability that Wacousta lodge represented in her childhood. Upon her realization that George and Pamela have betrayed her by having sex, Portia wades into the lake, feeling herself grow younger: "fifteen. . . twelve. . . nine. . . six. . . . On the shore. . . are the same rock, the same white stump that have always been there. . . . It's safe to be this age, to know that the stump is her stump, the rock is hers, that nothing will ever change" (215-16). In the face of the treachery and disastrous "slippage" that characterizes the world around them, each of Atwood's characters yearns for a return to the constancy that Wacousta Lodge represents. The name "Wacousta," of course has as its precursor the title of a famous Canadian romance written in 1832 by Major John Richardson about an Englishman who disguises himself as a noble Indian warrior to extract revenge from his enemy.

The notion of stability is part of the Canadian heritage that Atwood calls "the Grey Owl syndrome": "that curious phenomenon, the desire among non-Natives to turn themselves into Natives; a desire that becomes entwined with a version of the wilderness itself. . . as the repository of salvation and new life" (Strange Things 35). Grey Owl is the name and persona adopted by an English emigre to Canada who eventually became a renowned naturalist, speaking and writing on the subject as Grey Owl, an Ojibwe Indian, throughout Canada and the world. In her recent book of criticism, Strange Things: the Malevolent North in Canadian Literature, Atwood mentions several earlier Canadian authors who have followed this path, including John Richardson.

As the romanticization of the Indian continued in Canadian literature and as, Atwood explains, "motifs of revenge and warfare gave way to themes of nostalgia. . . living like the Natives in order to survive in the wilderness was translated into living like the Natives in the wilderness in order to survive. . . the

advancing decadence, greed, and rapacious cruelty of white civilization" (45). In her short story, "Wilderness Tips," Atwood challenges this motif in her description of Roland's nostalgia for his boyhood games of playing Indian inspired by an old book in the library at Wacousta Lodge. Entitled Wilderness Tips, this book is filled with advice on surviving in the wilderness and with romanticized images of the noble savage: "There was a lot about the Indians, about now noble they were, now brave, faithful, clean, reverent, hospitable, and honorouble" (208). The book bears "a photo of the author in a plaid wool jacket and felt hat" (202), and it sounds suspiciously similar to Ernest Thompson Seton's (also known as Black Wolf) Book of Woodcraft. Published in 1912, Seton's guide book attempted to provide the youth of that time with a constructive model for life. In Strange Things Atwood describes Seton's work as "a passionate hymn of praise to the virtues of the Ideal Indian-- 'the highest type of primitive life. . . a master of woodcraft and unsordid, clean, manly, self-controlled, reverent, truthful, and picturesque lives" held up as the "model for white men's lives" (46).

Utilizing this Canadian heritage in "Wilderness Tips," Atwood's strategy is to juxtapose the ideal life represented by Seton's book and her characters' nostalgic versions of the life represented by Wacousta Lodge with her story of the treacherous relationships of her middle-aged white characters at Wacousta Lodge. In the process, the romantic myths of the wilderness and its honourable inhabitants are destabilized. The characters' nostalgic versions of the communal life represented by Wacousta Lodge are countered with Atwood's story of late twentieth-century treachery and despair, a process which expands the nineteenth-century version of the narrative of community. In "Wilderness Tips," the nostalgic ideal of Wacousta Lodge cannot survive any more than can

the high-minded ideals espoused in Wilderness Tips. What survives are other voices that offer diverse versions of the past. The effect of the sum of these multiple stories is inconclusive, a distinctive quality of the narrative of community, through which, "the narrative makes central the process of storytelling and conversation" rather than emphasizing a sense of resolution (Zagarell 274). Offering increasingly heterogeneous and challenging visions of the collective life of Wacousta Lodge, Atwood expands the narrow, romantic story of the wilderness as a place of salvation and renewal. While "Wilderness Tips" offers a less than hopeful vision of the collective life of the present Canadian community, it is one that emphasizes the redemptive aspect of communal storytelling.

Notions of Subjectivity:
"Modes of Interdependence Among Community Members"

Focusing on communal storytelling as literary subject matter is one way to move the emphasis from self as individualized ego to self as part of the interdependent network of community, a shift that also corresponds with a shift from a masculine to a feminine concept of identity. The recent feminist advances in psychoanalytical approaches to gender differences in identity development as evidenced in Chodorow's and Gardiner's findings on identity formation--the boy's progress toward individual autonomy and the girl's more processual relational development--has opened the way for women authors and readers to interpret women's experience as different from men's and equally valuable. This shift in focus corresponds with the growing number of twentieth-century women writing from this vantage point, including Atwood and Munro. Both writers explore such differences in their works by problematizing

the notion of self, the search for self, the loss of self, the difference between the self and the other. Not only do they present characters who talk back to the masculine notions of identity formation that produce the dominant literature of alienation, but when the masculine patterns of autonomy do not respond to their characters' challenges, Atwood and Munro alter the conventional narrative patterns to fit the stories of women's relational identity development.

"Carried Away," the first story in Munro's collection, challenges the notion of a fixed and autonomous self. The story opens with the main character, Louisa, a young woman, reading a letter addressed to her, "The Librarian, Carstairs Public Library," "from a person you don't know and that doesn't remember your name" (4). The theme of identity confusion is present throughout the story. We see it in Jack Agnew's confusion over Louisa's name and in Louisa's confusion over Jack Agnew's appearance; she can't identify him when he returns home and comes to the library. This sense of bewilderment occurs again when Louisa, as an old woman, has a vision of a man who is supposed to be Jack Agnew, but appears to be Jim Frarey. Louisa tries to explain to Jack Agnew her muddled sense of identity by explaining her family's name for her: "They called me Mud because that was my son's name for me when he was a baby" (47). Her maternal relationship with her infant son, Billy (who appears as a major character in a later story "Spaceships Have Landed") generates more flux in her identity development. At the end of her life, Louisa is still searching for a clear vantage point from which to review her past. Her response to the "anarchy she was up against--a devouring muddle" (50) is an impulse to "talk back," to revisit her past and explore her life-story and relationships from new angles. She and Jack Agnew rehash old stories of their pasts, and each comes up with a different vision of the sense of life's constancy.

"Love never dies," he announces, but Louisa refuses to adopt his single-minded view: "She felt impatient to the point of taking offense. . . . Love dies all the time, or at any rate it becomes distracted, overlaid--it might as well be dead" (48). Her view of life is a transitory one, and she believes that romantic love offers only the illusion of permanence. Upon remembering her dead husband, she is reminded: "I wanted to marry him and get into a normal life" (49), and she understands this as her desire for temporary respite from life's anarchy. This respite becomes a comfort to Louisa when the "devouring muddle" of life overwhelms her. At the same time that her vision of Jack Agnew changes momentarily into Jim Frarey and then dissolves, she also realizes that she has mistaken a group of Mennonite travelers for the "Tolpuddle Martyrs." This confusion renders her temporarily disoriented: "Oh, what kind of a trick was being played on her, or what kind of a trick was she playing on herself!" (51). Instead of allowing her protagonist to be carried away by an overwhelming sense of loss and despair, however, Munro deters Louisa's confusion by returning to the story's beginning and the re-creation of missing information in the form of Louisa's arrival in Carstairs as a young woman: "She was glad of a fresh start, her spirits were hushed and grateful. She had made fresh starts before and things had not turned out as she had hoped, but she believed in the swift decision, the unforeseen intervention, the uniqueness of her fate" (51).

In "Carried Away," as much as her protagonist longs for one last clear view of her past as a summing-up or completion of herself, Munro seems wary of this possibility. As author, she is all too aware of the makeshift qualities of story, and of her own shaky identity as "creator." In this respect, there is a certain difference between Munro's early and current fiction. When she started writing, she recalls, "I made the glorious leap from being a victim of my own

ineptness and self-conscious miseries to being a godlike arranger of patterns and destinies, even if they were all in my head; I have never leapt back" (185) While this godlike stance can be useful, it is a tendency she now tries to resist. About her earlier stories, which supplied if not "happy endings" then at least a sense of narrative satisfaction, Munro comments, "something a bit more definite had to happen in stories than is the case now" (193).

"Carried Away" does not end with Louisa's discovery of a solid identity in a new beginning. Rather, Munro reminds us that the "patterns" of life are fraught with "Sudden holes, impromptu tricks and radiant vanishing consolations" (50) that deny us any sense of completion or finality. All that is possible for Louisa is the comfort of human connection that she feels, for example, in a fellow traveller's offer of candy and "soft conversations," "a blessing" that "promise[s] her some reasonable continuance" (50). In her role as author, Munro pays attention to both continuance and disruption. The momentary belief in the power of story, in "the swift decision, the unforeseen intervention, the uniqueness of [one's] fate" includes also the acknowledgement that such power is arbitrary and fleeting. "Carried Away" ends on this ambiguous and open-ended note:

> She could see the snow-covered hills over the rooftops. . . . The town was full of the smell of horses. As evening came on, big blinkered horses with feathered hooves pulled the sleighs across the bridge, past the hotel, beyond the streetlights, down the dark side roads. Somewhere out in the country they would lose the sound of each other's bells. (51)

For Munro, the author, and for Louisa, her protagonist, the promise of narrative completion is accompanied by the realization that loss of connection is

inevitable.

Both Munro and Atwood are aware, however, that what is also possible is the formation of new relationships. "So much for endings," writes Atwood in her critical commentary, "Happy Endings": "Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favour the stretch in between, since it's the hardest to do anything with" (173). For Atwood, ending connotes a completion or conclusion, be it in a story or in identity-development, and this final summing up is ultimately predictable and boring: "Eventually they die. This is the end of the story" (170). Atwood reminds us that the ending does not lie in the fairy-tale proclamation, "they lived happily ever after." Death as the end of all human lives is too predictable to stimulate interest; the challenge, therefore, lies with the unpredictable, the fresh starts and new discoveries, made possible by revisiting old stories that lie in "the stretch in between." A similar sense of unpredictability operates in recent theories of identity development. What is discovered between birth and death are gaps and faltering self-awareness, the open secrets of other versions of ourselves embedded in the old ones, of other identities waiting to emerge from previous ones. "True connoisseurs" reveal these open secrets through rejecting the notion of final destination, of story completion, or of integrated personality in favor of revisiting the stretch in between.

In "Hairball," Atwood introduces us to a protagonist, Kat, who is an expert at makeovers: new beginnings and unique and multiple identities. In her climb to the editorship of a Canadian women's fashion magazine, Felice-- the Italian word for "happy"-- Kat has learned the necessity to turn women's wavering self-awareness into full-blown anxiety: "you have to hit them with something new, something they've never seen before, something they aren't" (42). Suspended

in anxiety from one magazine edition to the next, her readers are refused any opportunity for a final summing-up or self-completion because some lack in them is always revealed, some new image to aspire to is dangled before them: "What you had to make them believe was that you knew something they didn't know yet. What you also had to make them believe was that they too could know this thing. . . that would give them eminence and power and sexual allure, that would attract envy to them--but for a price. The price of the magazine" (37). In "Hairball," Kat, being well-practiced in her own self-creation, is well-aware of the illusory nature of her readers' quest for "perfection":

> During her childhood she was a romanticized Katherine, dressed . . . in dresses that looked like ruffled pillow-cases. By high school she'd shed the frills and emerged as a bouncy, round-faced Kathy, with gleaming freshly washed hair and enviable teeth. . . .At university she was Kath, blunt and no-bullshit in her Take-Back-the-Night jeans and checked shirt. . . .When she ran away to England, she sliced herself down to Kat. It was economical, street-feline, and pointed as a nail. (36)

As street-smart Kat, she wins the editorship of the new magazine and the attention of her married lover and boss, Gerald, or Ger, as she has renamed him. Her creation back-fires, however, when Ger, taking on the sharpened personality of his name, fires Kat at a vulnerable time in her life (she is recovering from surgery for removal of an ovarian cyst), and replaces her with himself. Kat is outraged at his betrayal: "The monster has turned on its own mad scientist. 'I gave you life!' she wants to scream at him'" (45). Aware of working "the gap between reality and perception," Kat will not accept this twist of fate, characteristic of formulaic short stories, and Atwood also refuses to end

the story with the "happily-ever-after" formula. Instead, Atwood follows her own advice, "So much for endings," and goes for a fresh start.

The story begins with Kat, again in the position of the mad scientist, studying her benign tumor suspended in a bottle of formaldehyde on the mantelpiece: "She named it Hairball. It isn't that different from having a stuffed bear's head. . . or anything else with fur and teeth looming over your fireplace; or she pretends it isn't" (34). This grisly scene, with hints of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, reveals Kat's longing for a sort of completion through motherhood, and the freakish product of her longing is Hairball, symbol of a failed life. The fresh start for Kat comes near the story's end as she examines herself and her options:

> She stares into the bathroom mirror, assesses her face in the misted glass. A face of the eighties, a mask face, a bottom-line face; push the weak to the wall and grab what you can. But now it's the nineties. Is she out of style, so soon? She's only thirty-five, and she's already losing track. . . . Part of the life she should have had is just a gap, it isn't there, it's nothing. What can be salvaged from it, what can be redone, what can be done at all? (46)

What can be done is to concentrate, as Atwood advises, on "the stretch in between." The act of salvaging implies a rescue and a recycling of material. In her act of revenge at a lost life of domesticity, (the kind of "normal life" and respite from impermanence also longed for by Munro's character, Louisa) Kat focuses on this lost life by recycling her ovarian cyst in a most creative and diabolical way. Disguising Hairball as a chocolate truffle, she sends it to Gerald and his wife, Cheryl, for public discovery at their victory party: "She prints on the card: 'Gerald, Sorry I couldn't be with you. This is all the rage. Love, K'"

(48). The narrator informs us that "Cheryl will not distrust anything that arrives in such an expensive bag. She will open it in. . . front of everyone. There will be distress, there will be questions. Secrets will be unearthed. There will be pain. After that, everything will go way too far" (48). For the protagonist, Kat, this public revelation is a gesture of revenge for the pain she feels. Atwood, however, understands it as a strategy for survival: a way for Kat to share her anger and pain through communal storytelling. Perhaps what this note also implies is that everything will go way beyond the customary story ending, that Kat's life refuses to fit into the traditional narrative framework, and that female identity development refuses any predictable pattern.

Atwood does, however, offer a provisional ending to the story of Kat's endless grappling with reality and identity. So far, in her makeovers, Kat has gone from Katherine to Kathy to Kath to Kat to K. Atwood delays any final completion of Kat's transformation when Kat slips through the gap between reality and perception into temporary self-erasure:

> outside the window it's snowing, the soft, damp, windless flakes of her childhood. She puts on her coat and goes out. . . .The snow melts against her face like small fingers touching. . . . she doesn't feel guilty. She feels light and peaceful and filled with charity, and temporarily without a name. (48)

Atwood's narrative strategy in "Hairball" seems similar to Munro's in "Carried Away," in the sense that both disrupt the promise of narrative completion with the inevitable loss of connection, at the same time that both introduce an optimistic note and both understand that "beginnings are always more fun."

The perpetual negotiation of these Canadian women writers between narrative disruption and continuance is evidence of their ambivalence towards

modes of interdependence among community members. This situation brings to mind Zagarell's discussion of narrative of community, especially, women's negotiation between their own and the dominant culture's discourses in the form of a "double-voicedness" as well as a "profound ambivalence" toward this constant mediation, which "was a prominent aspect of nineteenth century middle-class women's lives" (260). The private and nurturing kinship of women's culture and the public competition and recognition of the dominant culture are difficult to mediate; a feeling of overwhelming dislocation and duplicity results from women's attempts to maneuver between these spheres. This sense of dislocation is evident in Kat's struggle to "make it" in the world of male competition, while she struggles with the loss of the nurturing side of her life, until she finds herself crazily talking to a hairball: "'Hairball,' she says. 'You're so ugly. Only a mother could love you.' She feels sorry for it. She feels loss" (47). Atwood's ambivalence towards the affirmation of self through communal affiliation is evidenced in her depiction of Kat reduced to talking to "herself."

Loss of identity is a major theme in another Atwood short story. If "Hairball" ends with Kat feeling "light and peaceful" and "temporarily without a name," "Weight" features a middle-aged first-person narrator with no name, whose unceasing maneuvering between the worlds of communal affiliation and individual competition has produced a profound sense of ambivalence. In the story's opening, Atwood captures the female protagonist's acute sense of dislocation:

> I am gaining weight. I'm not getting bigger, only heavier. This doesn't show up on the scales: technically, I'm the same. My clothes still fit, so it isn't size...The heaviness I feel is in the energy

> I burn up getting. . .through the day. It's the pressure on my feet. It's a density of the cells, as if I've been drinking heavy metals. . . . It's all getting to be too much work. Some days, I think I'm not going to make it. I will have a hot flash, a car crash. I will have a heart attack. I will jump out the window. (173)

The loss of identity so carefully described in these stories can be connected to the pressures of perpetual negotiation between the cultural spheres as much as it can to any sense of a failure to achieve autonomy. Even if the continual adjustments undergone by the narrator are "getting to be too much work," rather than seeking an "unforeseen intervention," a "swift decision," and "the uniqueness" of their fate as solutions to their identity confusion, both Kat and the protagonist of "Weight" can only seek provisional endings. In "Weight," the main character claims that "I no longer think that anything can happen. I no longer want to think that way. *Happen* is what you wait for, not what you do; and *anything* is a large category" (187).

Despite her denial of the possibilities of any solution, at the story's end the protagonist finds herself pretending that her actions will make a difference in the lives of women. She is desperate to believe that the unscrupulous methods she employs to get money to fund Molly's Place, a shelter for battered women, will make a difference in the world and somehow make her actions less contemptible. Torn between the reality of what she must do to survive in the dominant culture, and the altruism of her attempts to help other women and to keep the memory of her murdered friend, Molly, alive, she explains how she will walk in the cemetery, "pick out a tombstone," and "pretend it's hers" (187). Her deliberate movements in the cemetery toward some sort of resolution to her self-contempt is a metaphor of women's careful maneuvering between a

subordinate and a dominant culture and the sense of duplicity and disjunction that accompanies such movement. "I will bend," the protagonist says, "I will touch the ground, or as close to it as I can get without rupture. I will lay an invisible wreath of money on [Molly's] grave" (187). At the same time that we cannot ignore her duplicitous actions in getting the money, we also recognize the "honorable" motivation which prompts them as the protagonist attends to voices other than her own. Throughout "Weight," she carries on a silent conversation with Molly: "Molly. . . We don't see eye to eye on some things and you wouldn't approve of my methods, but I do what I can" (187). This sort of attention to other voices and talking back to them is a creative narrative strategy, an expansion of the communal modes of interdependence that characterize the traditional narrative of community, which Atwood makes available to women negotiating the isolation and despair of their world.

Munro is also acutely aware of the powerful effect of narrative upon people's lives. She explains that every story is about "the ways people discover for getting through life" (Hancock 108). For Munro's characters, survival means constructing identities and stories in order to add dramatic shape to their often chaotic and shapeless lives. Munro's fascination with the way we employ pretense in our lives is evident in the careful way in which she details "how people set up and play out roles, invent their pasts, make drama of their lives" (Hoy 9). The title of her previous collection, Who Do You Think You Are? conveys the feelings of intense self-consciousness and shame that accompany such deception, and Munro's reference to this earlier title in "The Albanian Virgin" reaffirms her strong fascination with her characters' pretenses. She talks back to her own earlier story collection as she reinterrogates this dramatic strategy.

In "The Albanian Virgin" the two female protagonists, Charlotte and Claire, discuss Pretenders to the throne of England, including Mary Shelley's fictional character who pretended to be a Pretender, "the little Prince who was murdered in the Tower" (121). Charlotte is fascinated with this behavior: "The question I always think about Pretenders like that is who do *they* think they are? Do they believe it's true or what?" (120). Their off-hand discussion of Pretenders prompts Claire to attempt to add dramatic shape to her own life story: "I was surprised at how eager I found myself, at last, to tell my story. . . I was looking forward to telling the truth, or some of it, in all its wounding complexity, to a person who would not be surprised or outraged by it. I would have like to have puzzled over my behavior in good company" (120-21). Claire's desire to revisit and revise her life story within a community of women is in keeping with a communal mode of identity formation, while her urge dramatically to reshape her life story parallels Munro's narrative fascination with multiple realities and their inconclusive validation of each other (Hoy 14). Munro's interrogative treatment of story and communal identity formation introduces a heterogeneous vision of modes of interdependence among community members that challenges and problematizes the interrelational aspect of the narrative of community. For Munro, our sense of identity depends not only on the communal sharing of stories, but more importantly on which stories we share or don't share.

At the end of "The Albanian Virgin," Munro does not share the more predictable story, Charlotte's death: "Charlotte did not die. At least she did not die in the hospital . . . the next afternoon, her bed was empty and freshly made up" (125). Instead, Munro opts for the unpredictable and fresh start by revisiting and salvaging Charlotte's story of escaping from Albania. Earlier,

Charlotte had interrupted this story at the point where she was on a boat leaving Albania, by declaring "That part is not of interest" (109, 124). When Munro finally returns to that part, we finally understand that the Franciscan priest followed her to Canada: "when the boat came into the harbor at Trieste he was waiting on the dock" (128). When the priest helps Charlotte escape from her captors and Charlotte finds herself attracted to respite in surrender to romantic love, Munro acknowledges the appeal of the conventional narrative pattern of romance: "She had not understood how much she depended on the smell of his skin, the aggrieved determination of his long strides, the flourish of his black mustache" (109). Rather than opt for the predictable "happily-ever-after" ending, however, Munro chooses to salvage the "stretch in between," characterized by the processual nature of Charlotte's identity, which results in the unpredictable disruption of traditional patterns of autonomy. Instead of following the conventional narrative pattern of romance-- rescue and respite-- Munro ignores linear development and chronological sequence in favor of her episodic presentation of a woman's existence. In "The Albanian Virgin" neither Munro nor the priest lead Charlotte to a final destination; rather they must be content to wait for and to follow her.

Treatment of Form: "Rooted in Process"

Munro's innovative treatment of the short story, which features the alteration of existing narrative patterns of the genre in order to fit the unpredictable form of women's identity development, makes clear the close relationship between notions of subjectivity and story form. This relationship calls to mind Zagarell's explanation of the recent "discovery" of the narrative of community as a genre. She links genre theory, identity theory, and feminist

theory in her discussion of the recent challenges to the construction of the literary canon and to the construction of subjectivity:

> the questioning of the monolithic self. . . has thrown into relief other assumptions that formerly discouraged serious study of extended non-novelistic works of narrative prose. . . privileging the individual informs the novel's early appearance, purposes, and structures. . . . feminist scholarship has been. . . instrumental in reconceptualizing literary history in ways that make an enterprise like the identification of narrative of community possible. Renewed attention to texts by, about, and/or featuring women has shown that the narrative impulse has long include supraindividual concerns. (255-56)

Such supraindividual concerns, according to Zagarell, are central to female identity formation and to the narrative of community.

These concerns appear prominently in Munro's story, "The Jack Randa Hotel," where, in lieu of linear development, the story opts for a more episodic presentation that emphasizes subjectivity as an ongoing process. The story opens with its main character, Gail, sitting in a plane "on the runway, in Honolulu" (161) wavering between Canada and Australia. The middle-aged protagonist has left her home in Walley to follow her former lover, Will, who has abandoned her for Sandy, a younger, Australian woman. After selling her small dress-shop, Gail has left without telling anyone where she is going. To dramatize her flight, she has cut and dyed her hair, and put on a "dress of a kind she would never usually wear" (169), and, later, we discover she has adopted a new identity, that of a dead woman, in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Still in Canada, Gail senses the impermanence of her life, especially when visiting the home of Will's mother, Cleata, who is also Gail's close friend:

> This bare-fronted pre-Victorian house in Walley, and the veranda, and the drinks, and the catalpa tree that she was always looking at. . . . All the trees and streets in Walley, all the liberating views of the lake and the comfort of the shop. Useless cutouts, fakes and props. The real scene was hidden from her, in Australia. (168)

Gail's perception of life's makeshift quality is underscored by the fact that when they were together, Will taught high-school drama and Gail was a costumer, or made "handcrafted" clothes as she liked to call them.

In this story, too, a talking back and forth goes on. Munro's third-person narrator questions the main character's identity, "What sort of a woman did she think she was making herself into?", and then responds, "That doesn't matter. It is a disguise" (169). The pointed question indicates Munro's conscious recognition of her own and her character's awareness of the necessity of pretense, the necessity to give life and fiction dramatic narrative shape. Gail continues to lose herself in her search for Will in Australia: "Would anybody know Gail? With her dark glasses and her unlikely hair, she feels so altered as to be invisible. It's also the fact of being in a strange country that has transformed her" (170). Like Kat, Gail's transformation and the fact that she "did not tell anyone where she was going" (169) offer temporary respite from the old habits of her life with Will, which she feels are tinged with pretense. Will's romantic view of her as "brave and generous and resourceful and gifted" is seen by Gail as showing "a touching innocence" (170). She, on the other hand, perceives herself as "anxious and desperate" (166), and the burden of deceiving Will to fit the dramatic role in which he has cast her, causes Gail to

carry on imagined conversations with him, "trying to think up clever and lighthearted things to say" (162).

As Gail's journey to Australia becomes more and more motivated by her need for escape than by her wish to pursue Will, Munro's story strays farther from the conventional narrative path. Increasingly, Gail becomes intensely and ironically conscious of the contradictory interconnections in her life. Her new flat on Hawtre Street in Brisbane and her new identity as Ms. Catherine Thornaby, whose recent demise leaves the flat available to Gail, provide her refuge from her old life with Will, even though she has traveled thousands of miles to be near him, and Will has recently written a letter to Ms. Thornaby, which has been intercepted by Gail. Visiting a nearby lending library, Gail "calls to mind" the woman who runs it when she decides to respond to Will as Catherine Thornaby. Of the librarian, Gail thinks, "There is Catherine Thornaby, dead and moved into a new existence a few blocks away" (175).

Munro's surrealistic weaving together the threads of human alienation and connection calls to mind her earlier story "Who Do You Think You Are?" and the protagonist, Rose's, perception of the missed connection between herself and an old classmate, Ralph Gillespie. Although they lost touch after high school, Rose still feels that they are connected as co-pretenders: "she felt his life, close, closer than the lives of men she'd loved, one slot over from her own" (206). "The Jack Randa Hotel," with its references to misunderstood names, false pretenses, and missed connections, revisits the notion of interchangeable lives and identities one slot over from each other. Will's correspondence with the dead Ms.Thornaby, Gail's false identity as the dead woman, and Gail's connection of Ms.Thornaby with the lending librarian, are all indicators of the transitory and transitional nature of identity at the same time

that they emphasize its interwoven aspects.

In "The Jack Randa Hotel," the narrator further reveals to us that Gail is not the protagonist's real name. Her real name is Russian, "Galya," a name she discarded when she left her distant life with her family--a life, the narrator tells us, "she could still salvage. . .if she wanted to" (175). The idea of salvaging, of rescuing and reusing material, permeates this story. Gail's continued correspondence with Will under false pretenses, and the fluent and "fine nasty style" of her letter writing, strikes her as having been gotten "out of some book" and shocks her into thinking that " she has certainly gone too far" (178). Her discomfort with her artful dissemblance is underscored when, during her morning walks, she encounters birds, flying over the river, "smaller than gulls. . .their bright white wings and breasts. . .touched with pink." They are Galah birds, she is told, a name that sounds "something like her childhood name" (179). These birds, with their unsettling familiar names, are one of several incidents in the story involving name confusion. Gail mistakes the name of the exotic blooming trees, *jacaranda*, for Jack Randa, and soon after that her landlord startles her by "calling her false name" (182). Munro's artful juxtaposition of these distant lives, temporary names, false identities, and impersonations reveals their interconnections. Identities, after all, are interchangeable; they can be salvaged, rescued and recycled to provide refuge from any tendency toward self-completion.

After writing several letters that reveal his growing dissatisfaction with his present wife, and his near-discovery of Gail's identity, Will realizes that he is corresponding not with Ms.Thornaby, but with Gail. "Gail. I know it's you" he writes. This discovery of Gail's former identity triggers, unexpectedly, not Gail's happiness at the possible recovery of her life with Will, but her flight, involving a

new disguise: "Her clothes can stay behind--her humble pale-print dresses, her floppy hat." Stripped of her camouflage, and her false identity, Gail must run for her life. "Otherwise," the narrator asks, "what will happen?" and answering her own question, she responds evasively, "What [Gail] has surely wanted. What she is suddenly, as surely, driven to escape" (188). The narrator talks back to herself in an attempt to understand why Gail's actions do not follow the prescribed narrative pattern for living happily ever after through self-completion. Gail should run to her prince rather than flee from him. She should accept the unforeseen intervention that will bring them together.

In her story, Munro pairs the death of Cleata from a distance (Gail learns of Cleata's death from one of Will's letters to Ms. Thornaby), with the close-up death of a stranger, the man who lives in the flat downstairs from Gail. It is his hand that she holds, while "impersonating" a person to whom he might be connected: "his companion, the red-haired young man, or some other young man, or a woman, or even his mother" (186). She holds on to the dying man "with great force. . . enough force to hold her back, when she would have sprung towards Will" (187). Like Rose and Ralph Gillespie, Gail feels that this stranger's life is "closer than the lives of men she's loved, one slot over from her own." In its suggestion of a temporary refuge for transients, "The Jack Randa Hotel" is thus an appropriate title for a story about the confounding combination of human dislocation and connection.

Munro's vision of the transitional and transitory nature of identity parallels her treatment of narrative patterns as salvageable and recyclable. They can be altered to fit the processual nature of female identity formation. Munro as author is also aware of her pretender status where the pretense lies in creating art through some kind of narrative order. At the end of the story, Gail finds

herself in the airport on her way back to Canada buying a present to send to Will, a small round box made by Australian aborigines. The decoration on the box triggers Gail's memory of a day when she and Will witnessed "hundreds, maybe thousands, of [migratory]. . . butterflies hanging in the trees" looking like "flakes of gold tossed up and caught in the branches," and there ensues for Gail a kind of salvaging: "On that day, Cleata had already begun to die and Will had already met Sandy. This dream had already begun--Gail's journey and her deceits" (189). The butterfly as symbol of metamorphosis is used by Munro as metaphor of Gail's existence. The collection of memories of her past, however, do not form any final sense of self-completion for Gail. Instead, they appear and disappear in a disjunctive and dream-like jumble, and Gail feels no compulsion to find order and meaning in them other than to weave them into her future life. In "The Jack Randa Hotel," the pretense of any kind of narrative order or control is exposed and alongside it is revealed the duplicity and dislocation women feel in maneuvering within such order and control. This perpetual negotiation, says Zagarell, makes women "highly adept at balancing divergent, often contradictory systems of value and discourse and [gives] them special skill in the kinds of mediation that. . . are fundamental to narrative of community" (260).

At the end of "The Jack Randa Hotel," the narrator talks back to herself one more time, when she questions the purpose of Gail's gift. This self-interrogation carries echoes of the author questioning her role as artist or "god-like arranger of patterns and destinies": "What could you put in a box like that before you wrapped it up and sent it far away? A bead, a feather, a potent pill? Or a note, folded up tight, to about the size of a spitball. *Now it's up to you to follow me*" (189). I would argue that the direction contained in this metaficional

statement is less to follow than to take the initiative. Thus, similar to her narrative strategy in "Carried Away," Munro leaves it up to the reader to decide whether or not to follow this new narrative path. This option also reminds us that "It is through our words. . . and through our conversations with each other, that we have the power to re-create our worlds" (Clark 9). In "The Jack Randa Hotel," author, narrator, characters, and readers talk back and forth and perform interdependently "the small-scale negotiations and daily procedures through which communities sustain themselves," and, in this case, the story itself. Furthermore, the relational process through which this nurturance takes place can be seen as a kind of "salvaging" of the short-story genre from the end of the century's "wreckage" of cultural loss and despair.

In Wilderness Tips and Open Secrets, both Atwood and Munro grapple with conflicting versions and experiences of identity development, and they both explore their female protagonists' alienation from the accepted path to individuation. Instead of presenting separateness and distance as the desirable path to healthy ego development, they challenge these ideas and suggest the way that they result in women's profound dislocation. As we have seen, both collections contain stories in which women disappear, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently: Kat in "Hairball," Gail in "The Jack Randa Hotel," Charlotte in "The Albanian Virgin," Molly in "Weight."

Both collections also contain stories of lost girls, that is, stories of the mysterious and ominous disappearance of young girls from their communities, and this motif is accompanied by the devastating understanding that the disappearance is due to adolescent girls' struggle to negotiate male patterns of narrative and identity. In a critical commentary on her writing about the experience of teenage girls, Munro explains the great barrier to self-discovery

that these girls face:

> up until the time she is twelve or thirteen years old a girl feels free, able to think of her future in terms of action, to dream of adventure, heroism, power. With the full realization of her sexual nature a change is forced on her, partly from within, mostly from without. (This was true in my generation and, it goes without saying, in previous generations; I have hopes it is much less true today.) She understands that, for her, participation in the world of action is not impossible, but does hold great dangers. . . .The full human powers she thought she had are seen to be illusory. *She cannot make herself*; a definition of herself, as a woman, is waiting for her. Unless she has fantastic strength or stubbornness she is going to accept that definition or at least compromise with it. This is painful; something crippling is happening to her. ("Author's Commentary" 185-86; italics mine)

If she cannot define herself as a woman, but must, instead, fit the male definition awaiting her, the adolescent girl is indeed crippled in re-creating herself and her world. Munro's view is similar to de Beauvoir's: "One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as 'feminine'" (qtd in Waugh 9). Furthermore, while the masculine definition of healthy identity attained through personal independence and autonomy is held up to a girl as the pattern for selfhood, this definition of personhood is ultimately denied her. What is offered to her instead is personal restriction and dependency attained through her status as feminine

subject, "other."

Patricia Waugh suggests that contemporary women writers' awareness of women's status as "other" than self, a split which is historically constructed and "necessarily rests masculine 'selfhood' upon feminine 'otherness,'" results in these writers' treatment of the objective status of women as "constituted through a male gaze" (8). Under this system, women become commodities and men become consumers. In the scene in Atwood's "True Trash," where the male adolescent campers spy on the sunbathing waitresses, Atwood's pointed awareness of the power of the male gaze to objectify women is obvious:

> The waitresses are basking in the sun like a herd of skinned seals, their pinky-brown bodies shining with oil. . . . Donny has the binoculars, which are not his own but Monty's. . . he rents them out to the other boys, five minutes maximum, a nickel a look. . . . Donny has already seen everything worth seeing, but he lingers on with the binoculars anyway, despite the hoarse whispers and the proddings from those next in line. He wants to get his money's worth. (1-2)

As Atwood presents it, however, the objectification of women through a consumer/commodity system can be as damaging to men as to women. Thus, when Donny overhears an older counselor talking about one of the waitresses, he realizes his own complicity in this harmful system:

> it's about Ronette. Darce is talking about her as if she's a piece of meat . . . . "Summer sausage" is what he calls her. This is an expression Donny has never heard before, and ordinarily he would think it was hilarious. . . . Donny feels as if it's he himself who's been smeared with words, who's had his face rubbed in

> them. . . .He does the only thing he can think of. . .he pinches Monty's binoculars and sinks them in the lake . . . . there's an unpleasant conversation with Mr. B. in the dining hall. Or not a conversation: Mr. B. talks, Donny is silent. He does not look at Mr. B. but at the pike's head on the wall, with its goggling voyeur's eye. (20)

Donny's feelings of affiliation with the waitresses and his resistance to the objectifying power of the male gaze result in his dismissal from the camp: "The next time the mahogany inboard goes back into town, Donny is in it. His parents are not pleased" (21). The system that "necessarily rests masculine 'selfhood' on feminine 'otherness'" punishes both adolescent boys and girls if they attempt to resist their prescribed roles.

With respect to women, however, Munro tends to associate this oppression with her own and previous generations, and she seems to believe that "it is much less true today" ("Author's Commentary 185). Unfortunately, Munro's hope is not borne out, according to Mary Pipher, the author of Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls: "girls today are much more oppressed. They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture. . . . They know that something is very wrong, but they tend to look for the source within themselves or their families rather than in broader cultural problems" (12-13).

Girls like this wander throughout Atwood's and Munro's stories, girls lost in the male patterns of narrative and identity development. Pipher describes the adolescent loss of self in terms that help to explain why such subjects are attractive to storytellers: "Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the

Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle" (19), and she mentions women writers "such as Sylvia Plath, Margaret Atwood and Olive Schreiner" who "have described the wreckage" of adolescent girls (19). Pipher's explanation of the damage is that "girls realize that men have the power and that their only power comes from consenting to become submissive adored objects," and she also cites de Beauvoir's views on the wreckage of adolescent girls: "Girls who were the subjects of their own lives become the objects of others' lives. . . . girls stop being and start seeming." The necessity for girls to re-learn who they are according to societal norms, says Pipher, results in self-deception, "girls become 'female impersonators' who fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces," and eventually "this gap between girls' true selves and cultural prescriptions for what is properly female creates enormous problems" (21-22). Girls must go underground, or worse, a kind of drowning occurs, which Pipher compares to the fate of Shakespeare's heroine, a young woman destroyed by cultural expectations:

> As a girl, Ophelia is happy and free, but with adolescence she loses herself. When she falls in love with Hamlet, she lives only for his approval. She has no inner direction; rather she struggles to meet the demands of Hamlet and her father. Her value is determined utterly by their approval. Ophelia is torn apart by her efforts to please. When Hamlet spurns her because she is an obedient daughter, she goes mad with grief. Dressed in elegant clothes that weigh her down, she drowns. (20)

Understanding the reason behind this "drowning" is important for a therapist like Pipher as well as for a writer like Atwood, who sums up her personal

experience with adolescence in her usual laconic style: "We were told that there were certain 'right,' or 'normal' ways to be women, and other ways that were wrong. The right ways were limited in number. The wrong ways were endless" ("If You Can't Say Something" 15).

Although the tragic drama of loss of self may be what initially attracts Atwood, I believe that she is equally interested in the power of story to change these girls' lives, to recover them. Atwood understands that the tragic drama of a sudden disappearance is attractive subject matter that first serves to capture our attention, whereupon the conventional narrative pattern of loss can be skillfully altered to reveal new paths for negotiating between girls' true selves and the cultural prescriptions for female identity. This kind of storytelling makes it possible for a woman to re-create herself, that is, to define herself as a woman, without losing her full human powers.

This is the challenge Atwood faces in "Death by Landscape,' in which she pairs the dramatic sudden disappearance of a thirteen-year old girl, Lucy, during a summer-camp canoe trip with the tragedy of an older woman, Lois, and her loss of pre-adolescent sense of power. This pairing is not a coincidence. Lucy and Lois were best friends the year Lucy disappeared. Looking back on her life at Camp Manitou, a girls' camp, appropriately located on Lake Prospect, the memory of the expression of her full human powers both embarrasses and thrills Lois. She is embarrassed at the campers' appropriation of Native culture, but thrilled with the sincerity with which they expressed their powers. In looking back at this time in her life, Lois focuses on her past innocence:

> Once she loved the campfire, the flickering light on the ring of faces, the sound of the fake tom-toms, heavy and fast like a scared

> heartbeat; she loved Cappie [the camp director] in a red blanket and feathers, solemn, as a chief should be, raising her hand and saying, "Greetings, my Ravens." It was not funny, it was not making fun. [Lois] wanted to be an Indian. She wanted to be adventurous and pure, and aboriginal. (110)

Lois's desire for independence and autonomy is stirred up by Cappie's romantic description of the impending canoe trip, and yearning for the romantic quest of the journey for self-discovery, she is captivated by Cappie's words, "You go on big water. . . .You go where no man has ever trod. You go many moons." At the same time that Lois remembers Cappie's romantic proclamations, however, Atwood's third-person narrator debunks them: "This is not true. They are only going for a week. . . .The canoe route is clearly, marked. . . on a map, and there are campsites with names which are used year after year" (110), which reminds us that the romantic quest is just an illusion. Starting out, not alone, but in a canoe with a counselor in the stern, Lois, nevertheless, insists on playing the role of lone initiate: "[She] feels as if an invisible rope has broken. They're floating free, on their own, cut loose. Beneath the canoe the lake goes down, deeper and colder than it was a minute before" (112). Lucy's response, however, shakes Lois's girlish belief in the old male pattern of the initiation journey, where one survives the tests of nature and returns to the tribe a "man." After the first day out, Lois is startled when Lucy says, "It would be nice not to go back" (113). Not understanding Lucy's wish to abandon this male quest, she asks, "To camp?" and Lucy replies, "To Chicago. . . I hate it there" (113). The only response Lois can think of, however, indicates the faulty nature of her own imagined adventurous course toward independence: "What about your boyfriend?"

Lucy resists Lois's attraction to the conventional plot of identity development, and her refusal to enter into such a story carries echoes of a similar authorial resistance on Atwood's part. Lucy will not buy into Lois's romantic ideas about their canoe trip. She has other ideas about it. Rather than viewing it as a quixotic quest, Lucy seems to see it as a way to escape from the impending wreckage of her adolescent life. While Lois's thirteen-year-old life has remained "placid and satisfactory," Lucy's life is already on the fast-track toward self-destruction:

> She doesn't like her stepfather, but she doesn't want to live with her real father either, who has a new wife. She thinks her mother may be having a love affair with a doctor. . .she's seen them smooching in his car, out on the driveway when her stepfather wasn't there. It serves him right. She hates her private school. She has a boyfriend, who is sixteen. . . . She describes to Lois what it is like when he kisses her--rubbery at first, but then your knees go limp. She has been forbidden to see him, and threatened with boarding school. She wants to run away from home. (109)

Lois has much less experience than Lucy with the social pressure to be someone she is not and with the adult world's failure to connect with the trauma of adolescence. Perhaps, in part, this is due to the fact that "Lucy was from the United States, where the comic books came from and the movies," and Lois, a Canadian, has been spared an overwhelming saturation with American culture's prescriptions for femininity. Perhaps, too, Atwood is suggesting that it is the way that the Canadian identity is tied to a history of colonization and subversive maneuverings within dominant cultures that saves Lois from the

clutches of a full-blown identity crisis. If you carry a sense of self that is indefinite to begin with, it may be easier to deal with identity confusion down the line. If you live with the concept of survival as a central cultural symbol, then negotiating challenges to one's sense of authenticity is a daily practice.

Lois, nevertheless, still holds out hope for the power of the old stories to offer her authenticity. When the canoeists reach their next campsite, Lookout Point, Lois feels compelled to climb to the top, even though Atwood questions the romantic notion of attaining a clear vision when Lois recalls that "it was called this because, although the site itself was down near the water on a flat shelf of rock, there was a sheer cliff nearby and a trail that led up to the top. The top was the lookout, although what you were supposed to see was not clear. [The counselor] said it was just a view" (113-14). Both Lois and Lucy make the climb and sit near the cliff-edge looking at "the sheer drop to the lake and a long view over the water, back the way they've come" (114-15). This sight brings out very different responses from the two girls: Lois continues to adhere to the old script of independence: "It's amazing to Lois that they've traveled so far, over all that water, with nothing to propel them but their own arms. It makes her feel strong. There are all kinds of things she is capable of doing" (115). Lucy, however, has already thrown that hackneyed script away: "It would be quite a dive off here," she says, and when a startled Lois questions how she could think such a thing, Lucy responds with a parody of Lois's earlier thoughts at the start of the journey, " It's really deep. It goes straight down" (115). For Lois this deep and wide expanse of water is an invitation to self-discovery; for Lucy it becomes an opportunity for self-erasure. Lucy tells Lois she has to pee, and when Lois steps out of sight and waits, Lucy disappears.

In "Death by Landscape" Atwood subverts the dramatic story of a girl's

disappearance in the wilderness by turning Lucy's disappearance, seen conventionally as a tragic and mysterious loss, into an opportunity. Perhaps it is possible for Lucy to leave the journey and the story she recognizes as leading her nowhere and begin anew. Hints at the possibilities of self-transformation abound in Atwood's description of Lucy's disappearance:

> Lois. . . waited. She could hear the voices of the others, talking and laughing, down near the shore. . . . Off to the side, in the woods, a raven was croaking, a hoarse single note. She looked at her watch: it was noon. This is when she heard the shout. . . it was not a shout of fear. Not a scream. More like a cry of surprise, cut off too soon. Short, like a dog's bark" (116).

Lucy's shout of surprise mingled with the single hoarse note of the raven (Lois and Lucy belonged to the Ravens, one of camp's "totemic clan system[s]") seems to hint at a fate for Lucy other than death. While ravens were associated throughout Europe with death, an association that Poe transformed into the phrase of "Nevermore," Barbara G. Walker tells us that "among the Eskimo, Siberians, and Indians of some northwestern American tribes, Raven was a major god who married the Great Mother, brought dry land out of the sea, and finally sacrificed himself to provide magical wisdom for men" (408). Atwood's fascination with primitive lore is interwoven with her knowledge of classical mythology when she also alludes to the classical myth of Daphne who foiled Apollo's attempted rape by turning herself into a tree. Lucy's disappearance is connected with two stories of transformation. Her "cry of surprise" could be associated with being ravished by the primitive Raven god, and when the adult Lois remembers the event, Lucy's disappearance is connected to Daphne's metamorphosis into a tree: "Who knows how many trees there were on the cliff

just before Lucy disappeared? Who counted? Maybe there was one more, afterwards" (121).

Throughout the rest of her life, Lois is haunted by the memory of Lucy, and she refuses to believe in the finality of Lucy's disappearance, even though no trace of her was ever found. In her life as a mother and wife, Lois experiences a sense of incompleteness: "as if she was living not one life but two: her own and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not let itself be realized--the life of what would have happened if Lucy had not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time" (120). The feeling of being lost has haunted Lois her entire adult life, coming to her through the early loss of her girlhood friend and of her girlhood sense of power. She no longer feels capable of doing anything; instead, "stirring from this space, is increasingly an effort." This apathy, however, does not stop Lois from listening for the voice of her old friend. "[She] sits in her chair and does not move. . . .She hears something, almost hears it: a shout of recognition, or of joy" (121).

Lois refuses to accept the final disappearance of her friend in the same way that Atwood conversely resists the conventional ending held out to both her characters: loss of the power to define themselves. The characters, so close in childhood that "they signed their letters LL, with the L's entwined together," remain interdependent even after the disappearance of Lucy. In "Death by Landscape," Atwood re-creates their identities through foregrounding their on-going relationship. The one constant and concrete thing in Lois's life is her collection of landscape paintings. They are by Canadian artists, the Group of Seven, who pioneered a new kind of painting for the Canadian scene: "Lois has two Tom Thomsons, three A. Y. Jacksons, a Lawren Harris . . . an Arthur Lismer. . . a J. E. H. Macdonald. . . a David Milne" (102). Their depictions of the

same sort of maze of lakes and rocks and trees into which Lucy disappeared, offer Lois hope about Lucy: "Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere." The paintings offer a sense of unlimited existence: "There are no backgrounds. . . no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. No matter how far back in you go, there will be more" (121). In these landscapes, behind the trees, instead of annihilating aspects, Lois sees escape routes and limitless, transformative possibilities for Lucy: "if you walked into the picture and found the right tree, it would be the wrong one, because the right one would be further on" (122). The small paintings on Lois's wall cannot contain Lucy.

Similarly, Atwood understands that Lucy and Lois cannot be contained in her short story. Consequently, she finds escape routes from the old narrative paths to identity achieved through independence and autonomy, and she offers her characters the transformative power of re-creating themselves through their interconnection. The dramatic story of a lost girl is "saved" from a conclusive and tragic ending by the coexistent story of strong girlhood relationships. Through her innovative subversion of traditional narrative patterns, Atwood recovers the lost girls, Lucy and Lois, from the wreckage, and rescues the readers from our need for final closure.

Munro is equally aware of our attraction to stories of dramatic disappearances and tragic outcomes. In fact, the title story of Open Secrets deals with the same subject matter as Atwood's "Death by Landscape," but Munro takes our attraction to tragedy a step further, and to a greater degree than Atwood, she explores the relational properties of story-making. Indeed, her story of a lost girl seems to comment on Atwood's earlier story, "Death by

Landscape," and to extend Atwood's challenge to authorial control. In "Open Secrets," Munro's description of Maureen's perception of the landscape--"the unruly trees along the river" forming "a ragged sort of wall with hidden doorways and hidden paths behind it where animals went, and lone humans sometimes, becoming different from what they were outside" (139-40)--recalls Atwood's rendering of Lois's vision of the terrain. "Death by Landscape," with its depiction of a retired Lois isolated in her Toronto high-rise condominium, lacks the plethora of contentious voices that Maureen, the protagonist of "Open Secrets," must negotiate in her rural community. Lois, after all, hears mainly the voice of Lucy, and she only vaguely recalls another voice--"Cappie's desperation, her need for a story, a real story with a reason in it"-- which pressures Lois to alter her story by getting "Lois to supply the reason, to be the reason" (119) for Lucy's disappearance. Maureen, in contrast, is inundated with voices and versions of Heather Bell's disappearance from all parts of the community, and Munro's evenhanded attention to these multiple and contradictory versions creates a sense of her abdication of authorial control. This, of course, is not true. On the subject of the inevitability of authorial control and responsibility, Munro is in agreement with the narrator in 'Open Secrets," who explains, "the story can't be rehashed forever" (160). While this is true-- Munro's and Atwood's stories must end-- both authors' preference for provisional endings indicate their resistance to a final version.

The story's relation to other stories can, however, be uncovered and, in this way, stories are always being rehashed. In "Open Secrets" Munro "rehashes" not only Atwood's "Death by Landscape," but also Munro's own earlier short stories. Heather Bell's disappearance, for example, triggers Maureen's memory of herself at that age and the old parts of herself that have

vanished: "Was it possible? There are times when girls are inspired, when they want risks to go on and on. They want to be heroines, regardless. . . . To be careless, dauntless, to create havoc--that was the lost hope of girls" (139). Maureen's lost hope recalls the protagonist of an earlier Munro story,"Miles City, Montana," who experiences the near-tragedy of her daughter's drowning. The protagonist admits to "looking for a place to hide. . . so I could get busy at my real work, which was a sort of wooing of distant parts of myself" (88). The connection between all these stories is a drowned or missing child, literally and figuratively. In the stories, this lost girl operates as the catalyst for the recollection of parts of oneself that have vanished. In "Open Secrets" this tragedy brings back to Maureen distant parts of herself: "She remembered how noisy she had been. . . . A shrieker, a dare-taker. Just before she hit high school, a giddiness either genuine or faked or half-and-half became available to her. Soon it vanished, her bold body vanished inside this ample one. . . .She developed the qualities her husband would see and value" (139). These mature qualities are displaced and challenged when a tragedy, like Heather Bell's disappearance, occurs. Then Maureen turns to her real work, searching for distant parts or versions of her vanished self.

As a story writer, Munro, like Atwood, is drawn to the shock value of a girl's sudden and tragic disappearance, but is also drawn to the communal repercussions of the event as well as to the relational aspect of the story's construction, which reveals "storytelling as a positioning and repositioning of reciprocal voices" (Zagarell 274). Moving beyond the drama, Munro soon gets busy listening to all the distant versions of self-loss that the actual disappearance triggers. The initial story reveals "a whole other story" or stories operating as contentious voices and versions of both Heather Bell's and other

sorts of vanishing, that force themselves into definition and prominence. If, as story readers, we pay attention to all these versions of loss, our growing perception of the relationship between these seemingly unconnected voices uncovers an aspect of identity whose strength lies in interconnectedness. The more we pay attention to the multiple voices and versions of the story, the more we are forced to acknowledge and listen to distant parts of our selves. When we do, we will find ourselves, like Maureen, "looking into an open secret, something not startling until [we] think of trying to tell it" (160). That something is the realization that our communal power to re-create over and over the story of women's lost identity can transform it from one of human failure into a story of human survival.

The short story's function in the twentieth century is tied to its adaptability as a literary genre and to the flexibility of its framework to hold all the voices and versions of the self. In this way, the short story has the potential to play a role similar to that of the narrative of community: to present a new narrative of the self that emphasizes the role of an interdependent network of community which enables one to face the world with hope rather than the conventional narratives which lead one to face the millennium with isolation and despair. As Gail Gilliland observes, the short story is "especially well adapted, as a small and flexible literary entity, to provide some balance to the nihilism and textual self-destruction apparent in so many of the so-called major works that make up the accepted canon of contemporary literature. The short story, because of its very brevity, can play an affective role in literature that can make it great" (51).

The affective role of storytelling also makes it valuable in psychotherapy. Thus, to Pipher, in the face of her clients' "problem-saturated stories," storytelling has a powerful role as a purveyor of hope: "It's the therapist's job to

help clients tell more powerful and optimistic stories about themselves. . . . the client isn't the problem, the problem is the problem," and thus,"solution talk" is preferable to "problem talk" (250). Pipher goes on to explain that therapists can assist the empowerment of families by "helping them tell new stories about their own functioning." Instead of using the traditional language of psychology--which to Pipher is biased against the communal aspect of families in the way that "words of distance are [regarded as] positive (independence, individuation and autonomy)"--Pipher stresses the language of closeness, "dependency and enmeshment" (251)--which traditional psychologists tend to see as negative.

This therapeutic aspect has long been known to women, who, historically, have not come to story telling as literary art, but rather through the oral traditions that stress the collaborative and interdependent nature of story and which are the precursors to the narrative of community. Ancient communal traditions of folktale, legend, and gossip are characterized by their processual and episodic tendencies, and Wilderness Tips and Open Secrets present stories that follow these narrative patterns and tendencies. The oral tradition is a prominent feature in both story collections, as a way of commenting on and rehashing other stories and even transforming them to fit women's needs to negotiate between their experience and the story patterns that have so strongly determined their lives.

In Atwood's "True Trash" for example, the waitresses pass around True Romance magazine and share the sleazy stories of teenaged girls' sexual experiences. In doing so, they also participate by making editorial comments: "The waitresses are reading out loud. They are taking turns: their voices float across the water, punctuated by occasional snorts and barks of laughter. . . these are not success stories. True Trash, Hilary calls them. Joanne calls them

Moan-o-dramas" (3-4). The waitresses exchange snide remarks and jokes about the heroine's sexual attraction to the motorcycle-riding bad boy: "'If she does that, she 'll be a Fallen Woman, capital F, capital W. . . .She'd have to Repent, capital R.' The others hoot. . . .The girls in the stories make such fools of themselves" (5). Collective cynicism in the face of romantic "schlock" is one way for young women to negotiate the rocky terrain of their sexuality.

Munro's story, "The Albanian Virgin," also deals with the powerful pull of romance on women as they try to come to terms with themselves. In the story, Claire, who is writing her thesis on Mary Shelley's later novels and also bears the same name as Shelley's stepsister, admits that what she is really drawn to is "Mary's life before she learned her sad lessons," when she took her "unwed honeymoon with Shelley" that included "the other women who had hated or envied or traipsed along" like Harriet, Shelley's first wife," who later committed suicide (112).

Mary Shelley is a central touchstone in both Munro's and Atwoods' collections. Shelley's Frankenstein, an early example of "short fiction," is something of a precursor of the modern short story. As well, the story of a mad scientist's creation of a monster was written by a woman who had experienced not only difficult childbirth but also the death of her baby. Frankenstein embodies the theme of the "monstrous" responsibility of creating life. Similarly, in such stories as "The Albanian Virgin," "The Bog Man," and "Hairball," both Atwood and Munro "labor" to "deliver" their writing from romantic plot lines in order to give birth to storylines that accommodate women's lives.

In "The Albanian Virgin," Claire is fascinated with the romantic story of women's sexual abandonment, and is also involved in one herself: married to a dentist, she is having an affair with a married graduate student who lives with

his wife in the basement of their house. Claire does not tell her lover about her fascination with Shelley mainly because she does not want him to think that she draws "some sort of comfort or inspiration from this mishmash of love and despair and treachery and self-dramatizing," but what ensures that her story will be different is the fact that her lover's wife did "not behave like Harriet. Her mind was not influenced or impeded by literature, and when she found out what had been going on, she went into a wholesome rage" (112). As a result of Sylvia's wholesome rage against her husband and Claire's mishmash of love, Claire wakes up from her romantic stupor and leaves both her husband and her lover.

Oral tradition also plays a large role in the therapeutic aspect of this story when Claire meets Charlotte, an old woman who tells Claire the story of the abduction of a young Canadian woman in the mountains of Albania. Charlotte's story carries the long-ago ring of folktale, the mystery and intimacy of gossip, and the digression of personal narrative. Charlotte presents her narrative concoction to Claire, who is visiting her in the hospital:

> "What do you think I've been doing? I've been making up a story, for a movie! I have it all in my head and I want you to hear it. You will be the judge if it will make a good movie. I think it will. I would like Jennifer Jones to act in it. I don't know though. She does not seem to have the same spirit anymore. She married that mogul."
>
> "Listen...(Oh, could you haul that pillow up more, behind my head?) It takes place in Albania, in northern Albania, which is called Maltsia e madhe, in the nineteen-twenties, when things were very primitive. It is about a young woman travelling alone. Lottar is her name in the story". . . and she continued.

> Yes, yes, she said at last, I know how it goes on, but that is enough for now. You will have to come back. Tomorrow. Will you come back? (86)

This story-telling scene between Charlotte and Claire demonstrates the processual quality of the narrative of community, as Munro weaves together old wives' tales, gossip, rumor, folk-tales, and nineteenth-century romanticism to produce a story capable of maneuvering between women's lives and the constraint of traditional story patterns.

The way that gossip, a practice relegated to women, has a transformative power over the traditional story patterns is explained by Atwood when she describes it as "an overhearing of things we aren't supposed to hear. . . .From all these scraps of voices . . . even from the ominous silences. . .we patch together for ourselves an order of events, a plot or plots" (iii "Reading Blind"). Atwood's concept of women piecing together fragments of stories in order to create a larger, intricate design, calls to mind Showalter's theories on the way that a blending of "history, genre, and theme" offers a context for understanding "the forms, meanings, and narrative traditions of American women's writing" ("Piecing and Writing" 227). Furthermore, Showalter, argues that the short story is best suited to the art form of "piecing," or salvaging material and recycling it in a quilt. Thus, in the short stories of Atwood and Munro, "the fragmentation of women's time, the dailiness and repetitiveness of women's work" (228), is recycled.

In Munro's short story, "The Jack Randa Hotel," it is also by listening to scraps of women's voices that the protagonist, Gail, is prompted to patch together a provisional identity for herself in a new country. After her lover leaves her for another woman, gossip (pieces of women's stories) fills Gail's

life:

> After Will went away, it seemed to Gail that her shop was filling up with women. . . . It was like the long-ago days before Will. Women were sitting around in ancient armchairs beside Gail's ironing board and cutting table. . . drinking coffee. . . .Stories were told about men, usually about men who had left. Lies and injustice and confrontations. . . .They were fiendish and childish. What could you do but give up on them? In all honor, in pride, and for your own protection? (163)

The exchange of these preposterous stories escalates into "underground quarrel[s]" between the women, which produces an agitation in Gail that can only be calmed by shifting from coffee with friends to drinks with Will's mother,Cleata. While the communal aspect of gossip can be a solace, Gail also understands that the negative aspect of gossip can keep her stuck in her present life. "The things she and Cleata didn't talk about--Will's present defection, [Cleata's] illness" (164), and the envelope with Will's return address in Australia left in plain view in Cleata's house, ultimately prompt Gail to sell the shop and leave for Australia without telling anyone her destination. As Gail's new life unfolds, "The Jack Randa Hotel" takes on an increasingly patchwork design in which a makeshift and roundabout order of events is constructed from scraps of voices and ominous silence. Ironically, it is in her new dislocated and camouflaged existence that Gail finds refuge, a fact she makes clear in her note to Will: "*Now it 's up to you to follow me*" (189).

The transformation of self through women's story-telling and gossip is a major theme in Atwood's stories as well. In "The Bog Man" the protagonist, Julie, a university student, is "inwardly. . . seething with unfocused excitement,

and looking for someone to worship." As a result, Julie abandons herself to Connor, her married archeology professor: "She saw him in glorious and noble isolation, a man singled out. . . like a saint in a medieval painting, surrounded by a golden atmosphere of his own, a total-body halo. She wanted to be in there with him, participating in his radiance, basking in his light" (81). The story contains various versions of Julie's love affair with Connor, which change over time and Julie's retelling. Initially, the story focuses on Julie's trip to Scotland with Connor on an archeological expedition, then on her growing disenchantment as she recognizes the folly of her inflated concept of Connor, until finally, "She no longer wants him. The divinity is going out of him, like air. . . . She is mourning his collapse" (95).

The way that she recovers, in turn, also has much to do with the way that she reconstructs her love story, as the narrator points out: "She revises Connor. She revises herself" " (80). The story's first line, "Julie broke up with Connor in the middle of a swamp" (79), has been constructed by Julie after her acknowledgement that it was really a bog, not a swamp, and the narrator explains that she changed the word because she "prefers the sound of *swamp*. It is mistier, more haunted. *Bog* is a slang word for toilet. . . .So Julie always says: *I broke up with Connor in the middle of a swamp* " (79). Julie's revision in order to make things sound more romantic matches her revision of the break-up itself. The third-person narrator reports that Julie left Connor only after his refusal of her proposal of marriage, a very unromantic situation. Such comments on Julie's revision of the story to make her affair seem more romantic serve as a form of gossip; the narrator is revealing information to us that we aren't supposed to hear, and this information disrupts our notion of the traditional pattern of romantic love and self-abandonment that initially propels

Julie into an affair with Connor. As well, this disruption challenges the male pattern of an autonomous self that the older Julie adopts in retelling the story. At first, Julie longs for the drama of self-sacrifice (like the human sacrifice of the bog man in Connor's archeological dig) in romantic love; later, Atwood presents Julie's increasingly insistent and disruptive revisions until Connor is no longer the center of the story and she is. The older Julie has resorted to the male pattern in her storytelling.

The processual quality of the narrative of community is, nevertheless, very much present in "The Bog Man." Through Julie's ongoing revisions and the repetitious act of telling the story, it becomes a story in progress whose real protagonist emerges through the social activity of speech. After leaving Connor, Julie did not speak at first about their breakup because it was "painful. . . in too complicated a way" and because "she did not know what it was about." Gradually, however, as Julie becomes aware of the story's evolutionary quality, "after she was married, after she was divorced, she began to tell the story of Connor once in a while." She tells her story only to women. "It became part of an exchange," we are told, "the price she was willing to pay for hearing other, similar stories" (97). This communal exchange continues over time, and through repetition the story evolves until Julie emerges at its center, instead of Connor:

> The story has now become a story about her own stupidity, call it innocence, which shines at this distance with a soft and mellowing light. . . . And yet everyone of its physical details is clear to her. . . With each retelling, she feels herself more present in it. Connor, however, loses in substance every time she forms him in words. He becomes flatter and more leathery, more life goes out of him,

> he becomes more dead. By this time he is almost an anecdote, and Julie is almost old. (98)

In a strange twist of roles, Julie has transformed herself into the archeologist with Connor in the role of the bog man. Atwood's version of Julie's story, "The Bog Man," with its distanced third-person narrator, acts as an adjustment to Julie's changing constructions of Conner and herself, which the reader must adopt and use to make a final revision. By invoking the processual nature of storytelling and conversation, Atwood makes clear that stories, like communities, "take form through negotiation among diverse, often recalcitrant components" that must be "continuously reintegrated" (Zagarell 271).

The short story's affective role and its capacity to provide a framework that is flexible enough to allow the transformation of "problem saturated stories" into stories of success, point to another aspect of its affinity with oral tradition that is present in both Atwood's and Munro's stories. Commenting on the way that women's stories become family legends, Bettina Aptheker observes:

> Many of women's stories have never been written. They form an oral tradition, passed on from one generation to the next. Sometimes they are just seen as anecdotes about family "characters" and their antics. Sometimes they are teaching stories. They are about having respect, about having decent values, about how to live properly, about how to survive. (qtd in Gilliland 130)

It is significant that Aptheker refers to survival rather than success as a subject of women's teaching stories. Perhaps survival also more precisely describes the subject of Atwood's and Munro's stories: survival connotes hope without a necessary happy ending that both writers tend to eschew. More that that,

survival recognizes the power of the obstacles that one has to contend with.

Atwood's recent critical study of Canadian literature, Strange Things, explores the resonance that the story of survival and death carries for Canadian writers, male and female: in Canadian literature the North came "to be thought of as a frigid but sparkling fin de siecle *femme fatale* who entices and hypnotizes male protagonists and leads them to their doom" (3). According to Atwood, however, twentieth-century Canadian women writers look to the wilderness as neither female nor male, but as a neutral reflection of the human mind and a source of strength and renewal (102-03). In two of her recent stories, Atwood refers to the story of the nineteenth-century Franklin party's failed expedition to discover the Northwest Passage. The expediton failed due to all the members' gradual deaths from lead poisoning. In "Weight," Atwood's narrator, who has lost her best friend, feels "as if I've been drinking heavy metals" (173), and in "The Age of Lead," the protagonist, Jane, struggles to go on after the death of her friend, Vincent, while she watches a documentary about the Franklin Expedition. Munro also refers to the Franklin Expedition in her story, "Carried Away." One of the books that Jack Agnew has taken from the library is Sir John Franklin and the Romance of the Northwest Passage by G. B. Smith. Thus the obstacles to survival that the Canadian wilderness presents resonate in Atwood's and Munro's stories.

In "The Age of Lead," interspersed among the story of the Franklin Expedition and Jane's struggle to go on after Vincent's death, are survival lessons from Jane's mother in the form of her personal story of the consequences of being young, female, and foolish. Unfortunately, in her mother's case, Jane herself is the consequence:

> Consequences: the weightiness of the body, the growing flesh

> hauled around like a bundle, the tiny frill-framed goblin in the carriage. Babies and marriage, in that order. This was how [her mother] understood men and their furtive, fumbling, threatening desires, because Jane herself had been a consequence. She had been a mistake, she had been a war baby. She had been a crime that had needed to be paid for, over and over. (157)

Over and over, Jane is told this story and warned about the treachery of love, until she conjures up this bizarre and cautionary image:

> She could picture love, with a capital L, descending out of the sky towards her like a huge foot. Her mother's life had been a disaster. . . .It was Love that was responsible, and in the face of Love, what could be done? Love was like a steamroller. There was no avoiding it, it went over you and you came out flat. (159)

The lesson for Jane over time has been to remain resistant in the face of love in order to have a life without consequences. Her best friend, Vincent, also takes to heart a similar lesson from his mother, so that the two of them join together in a campaign against the steamroller of Love. In high school they "made fun of going out" together and went to the prom dressed campily and "tangoed around the gymnasium. . . .Vincent with Jane's long pearl necklace clenched between his teeth" (160). They went to great lengths to declare their independence from Love:

> As he dipped Jane backwards, he dropped the pearls and whispered in her ear, "No belts, no pins, no pads, no chafing." It was an ad for tampons, but it was also their leitmotif. It was what they both wanted: freedom from the world of mothers, the world of precautions, the world of burdens and fate and heavy female

> constraints upon the flesh. They wanted a life without consequences. Until recently, they managed it. (161)

The consequences of avoiding love, however, weigh as heavily on Jane as all the fleshly burdens her mother had described. After a lifetime of mutual appreciation between Jane and Vincent, Jane sees Vincent through his death at forty-three from an unknown virus. Alone, she faces a life of desolation. Jane and Vincent have learned their lessons much too well: "Their mothers had finally caught up to them and been proven right. There were consequences after all; but they were the consequences to things you didn't even know you'd done" (168). Atwood's point seems to be that if Love with a capital L can be avoided, death can not, and that perhaps the steamroller is not Love but Despair. The "real" ending, death, looms large in this story about survival in a world that spurns love, but where human connection is seen to offer some sense of respite from desolation. In this way Atwood's story adds an alternative vision to the mothers' stories of the disastrous effects on women of love with a capital L.

While "The Age of Lead" or, for that matter, any of the other stories in Atwood's and Munro's collections, cannot be seen as "success" stories, that is, stories with wholly positive outcomes, they are stories that teach respect, decent values, and survival skills in the face of the certainty of death. They serve as a refuge from the overwhelming despair of the age. Like ancient fables, they provide brief insights into the human condition, and serve as small "messages in a bottle." As Gilliland puts it: "This respite need not be grandiose, no more than an island must be large to offer refuge to a shipwrecked crew. The short story, that "brief prose tale". . . may be the very genre that can offer this retreat" (60). The stories of Wilderness Tips and Open

Secrets contain new lessons and revelations about the lives of women's and about the life of the short story. Atwood's and Munro's treatments of both the collective life of women and the interdependent relationship among the stories within their collections, produce internal innovations that energize the genre as it advances towards the next millennium.

CONCLUSION

"Stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions"

Reflecting the effects of gender and nationality on their treatments of experience, language, subjectivity and form in contemporary narrative, the stories of Atwood and Munro offer innovations in the short story, and the authors provide revised frameworks with which to face the world. Even their titles, Wilderness Tips and Open Secrets, speak to the idea of offering new advice for and revelations about women's lives, and of transforming the short-story genre itself. Atwood, in her attraction to the literal and figurative Canadian wilderness, to the art of survival within its harsh confines, and Munro, in her fascination with the infinite possibilities of open-endedness in the short story, create stories that face the end of the century and the approaching millenium with extraordinary wisdom and insight. This prescience is instrumental in their creative shaping of the short-story genre as the appropriate vehicle for their revelations.

The primary critical contribution of my own study, as I see it, is to expand Zagarell's theories of the narrative of community by showing how the notion of a relational world view can function as a point of departure for new directions in writing and innovations in the short-story genre. Thus playing off from the feminist concept of "gender bending," I view the imaginative strategies of Atwood and Munro as a kind of experimental "genre-bending": they create short stories that recall the genre's relationships to other storytelling traditions, and, in turn, stretch the short-story framework to include alternative visions of

human identity and relationships. By focusing on themes of self-discovery and self-alienation among Canadian women writers, my study of Atwood's and Munro's fiction reveals a contradictory experience of identity that is provisional and permanent; unstable and consistent. Their mutual interest in the relational nature of identity formation may explain their attraction to a genre embodying the elusiveness and malleability of the short story. My pairing of Atwood and Munro as Canadian contemporaries and innovators within the short-story genre creates a sort of literary community in itself. Further, my study reveals how these two writers "talk back" in their fiction about their concerns as women and Canadians and about each other's writing, which provides their readers a model for viewing the world relationally.

Unanswered Questions

My approach in this study is eclectic, and thereby I hope provocative. In devising a methodology that draws from postmodern theory, feminist theory, New Historicism, and Reader-response theory, my goal is to uncover a multiplicity of readings-- to "throw the windows open on inappropriate and unforgettable scenery." Thus my objective was neither to attempt a full application of any of these theories, nor to arrive at any definitive reading of Atwood and Munro's stories; rather my concern was to use various theories to uncover some of the questions that the work of Atwood and Munro pose but leave unanswered.

Clearly, my methodology draws most heavily on postmodernist and feminist theory, and mainly because such critics are centrally concerned with the problematization of gender relations and the concept of the autonomous subject. These concerns raise questions about certain characteristics of

community: How should community be defined--i.e., as something amorphous or as a self-contained unit? Is community itself a concept that needs to be problematized? Is a "collection of short stories" a good model for the notion of community?

While it is my hope that my invocation of New Historicism illuminates the late twentieth-century and Canadian context of Atwood's and Munro's work, I realize that it does not explore the full range of the historical period within which they are writing. One concern that remains to be addressed is the present-day politicization of the creation of community. Some questions that surround this issue are: who gets to define community? what are some of the political, economic, and social agendas that underly the impetus toward community? what are the effects of these on community formation?

If one looks at Reader-response theory's elucidation of the reciprocal relationship among writer, work, and reader as a community-building experience, then my study's concern with community only hints at the new directions in which Reader-response theory can lead us. Still to be explored are such questions as how is a reader-response community formed? how does the reader become part of it? in such a community, who is the audience? how far can this community be expanded? The relational motif embedded in reader-response theory offers implications for the formation of a new paradigm for reading, as well as posing questions about the full consequences, both positive and negative, of community.

Counter Arguments

A theme arising from my study is the despair over the disorder and violence of the present twentieth century, and apprehension at the impending

new century and millenium. An initial objection might be made that this is an unduly pessimistic view of our century; for example, much human progress has been made, especially in the area of technology. Other critical arguments might insist that the dramatic marking of time's passing is less a real historical event than a powerful construct, and that, in any case, the passing of time greatly affects storytellers, whose role to pass on memories of the past makes them acutely sensitive to time's passing. Another objection might be my strong focus on the effects of gender and nationality on Atwood's and Munro's innovations within the short-story genre. Additionally, arguments (such as those brought up by New Historicism) could be made that other influences exist to explain Atwood's and Munro's affinity for and approach to the short story. A final charge that might be launched is that my focus on the narrative of community is a regressive approach and that what is involved here is simply warmed over regionalism. I believe, however, that the essential spirit of Atwood's and Munro's stories--survival in a time of despair--calls for a relational reading.

New Directions

In contrast to reading for individual identity formation, reading for an understanding of community can lead us to an increased awareness of the hybrid nature of genre development. Rather than the pursuit of singular and specific genre definitions, we might come to an increased awareness of how genres and narratives are interrelated. Further, in reading for community formation, we would include the positive and negative consequences of the relational aspects of community, for example the fluid, transitional, and inclusive character of community versus its tendency toward stasis and

exclusivity. In this kind of reading, we would give up the pursuit of a single final solution or judgment, and instead would explore a multiplicity of non-closure. This brings up the question of the evolution of the short-story genre. As Atwood and Munro stretch its framework to accomodate their explorations of community, is there a breaking point? Can we still see any connection at all between contemporary practice and the short story as Poe defined it, or do we need to devise a new generic term?

The examination of Atwood's and Munro's writing opens up avenues to other writers and works, such as their contemporaries, Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine and Amy Tan's Joy Luck Club, both of which are concerned with the relationships among several women of maginalized socio-political status, and which counterbalance individual stories and the collective life of the community. On the basis of this relational approach to their writing, one could look for further links to Atwood and Munro, both those who came before them and those who follow.

My pairing of Atwood and Munro brings about another direction to be explored in the form of comparing and contrasting the writers' relationships with their readers/audience and the way each author positions herself with respect to her characters. Many studies have compared and contrasted the two famous Canadian writers, but not from this specific perspective. Differences exist between their methods of engagement with their readers and characters: Munro's is entered into with a generosity and respect that results in a sympathetic relationship with readers and characters and elicits genuine responses, whereas Atwood seems at times to adopt a "superior" pose or views the "other" as alter-ego, which can seem self-conscious and manipulative.

Also evident in their recent story collections are similarities between the

two writers' thematic concerns. Both ritualize the ordinary existence of Canadian women, and problematize issues of identity. Atwood's and Munro's mutual interest in the contradictory and processual characteristics of identity, its often transitory and consistent nature, draws them both to the short-story genre, a genre flexible enough to accommodate both the old narrative patterns of dislocation and self-alienation and to broader paths that explore human connection and familiarity.

In my present study, I have used such a relational world view as a departure point for my exploration of Atwood's and Munro's innovations in the short-story genre. Both authors are drawn to the seductive power of the literary tradition of romance, especially, its ability to shape our ideas about identity, as well as to such oral traditions of storytelling as legend and gossip. Further, both authors engage in ongoing dialogues with these traditions, challenging certain traditions while yet working within them. Carolyn Heilbrun reminds us that story traditions such as these "have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives" (37). While my study reveals Atwood's and Munro's relationships to a multiplicity of storytelling traditions, it also presents their use of the short-story genre as a departure point to alternative paths for human identity and relationships and a model to readers for collective engagement with storytelling and with each other.

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