"As If She Had No Secrets!"

Approach, Recognition, and Coming of Age
In Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women.

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The adult narrator has the ability to detect and tell about the confusion. I don't feel the confusion is ever resolved. And there is some kind of central mystery...that is there for the adult narrator as it was for the child...And the whole act of writing is more an attempt at recognition than of understanding, because I don't understand many things. Then writing is the art of approach and recognition. I believe we don't solve these things--in fact, our explanations take us further away.

Alice Munro (Mackendrick, 54)

People's lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing, and unfathomable--deep caves filled with kitchen linoleum.

Alice Munro (Lives of Girls and Women ,249)

A kind of proud humility comes across in both Alice Munro's interviews and her fiction writing. She stresses the limits of fiction and of self-knowledge, knowledge of others. Any writer potentially sets herself up as omniscient in her particular created world, but Munro creates characters with secrets, inner places that cannot be completely revealed, only sensed. For her protagonists, discovery of self and others vacillates between experiences of exposure and impenetrability. The second quotation given above is typical of Munro's insight within the framework of a particular narrative voice, in this case, Del Jordan's, protagonist of Lives of Girls and Women. This passage is key in Lives: readers remember it; critics cite it. It typifies Munro's approach, particularly within Lives. Del recognizes that people's lives share a commonality: their individual secrets. And, as critic Coral Howells points out, the sad and humorous
juxtaposition of "kitchen linoleum" and "deep caves" represents two poles in Munro's fictive world: realism and fantasy, the realistic surface of Munro's writing vs. the characters' hidden fantasies, wishes, and secrets (Howells, 73).

Munro's fiction contains these two elements at odds, in tension with one another, but they are, for her characters, part of the same process of reckoning with the world. Munro's protagonists, once inside the deep cave, find the familiar linoleum--and the cave itself becomes more mysterious because of this paradoxical discovery. Meanwhile, Munro herself seems to go through a similar process in the act of writing. Her likening of art to a pattern of approach and recognition is applicable to her work, and perhaps, to the work of many writers. Writers go into secret places, hoping to come out with something that can be recognized by, and shared with, others. Within Munro's work, a more specific pattern of approach and recognition occurs. Her characters approach the unknown, the other, hoping to find it comprehensible, make it recognizable, in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. The word "approach" suggests both an active, physical movement towards something outside the self and the mental equivalent of that kind of movement (e.g. I'm trying to "approach "Alice Munro's work.) It also suggests beginnings, and a basically linear movement, a movement towards something.

"Recognition" implies a re-thinking; the outcome of the approach is that the "other" is no longer completely separate from the self; it can be fit into a scheme of thought and is given familiar qualities. In Munro's work, of course, the self-aware protagonist realizes that the recognition is something limited, not a complete understanding; in
fact, it may be something created by the self as a way of comfort, a hedge against what is essentially unknowable.

This pattern of approach and recognition is particularly appropriate in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, which is a Bildungsroman, or, to use the term developed by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland's in *The Voyage In*, a fiction of female development. I would classify *Lives* even further: it is specifically a coming-of-age story. Munro's *The Beggar Maid* (originally published under the wonderful and appropriate title *Who Do You Think You Are*) could also be considered a fiction of female development, but one which covers a wider time frame than *Lives*. Here, Munro takes her protagonist from childhood in Southern Ontario to university, to life as an actress on the Canadian West Coast, through to her eventual return to her home area. In *Lives*, Munro's work is more compressed, without the large jumps in time of *The Beggar Maid*. *Lives* spans a time period of 9-10 years, with stories taking Del Jordan from age nine to nineteen.

While in *The Beggar Maid*, the protagonist actually reaches adulthood and returns to her home area within the book's action, in *Lives*, the experienced, adult protagonist is present only in an oblique way. The narrator is an older, more knowing Del Jordan who, the Epilogue implies, and most readers assume, has become a writer, although this is not directly stated in the narrative. In interviews, Munro herself has confirmed this intention; it was not present in the book from the start, but grew out of the writing of the Epilogue (Mackendrick, 25).
As critic Lorna Irvine proposes, perceiving Del as a future writer also leads to another way of perceiving Lives: as a fiction of female artistic development. (Mckendrick, 99) The book itself turns away from the conventions of the traditional (i.e., with a male protagonist) Bildungsroman. In their introduction to The Voyage In, Abel, Hirsch and Langland describe the traditional form of Bildungsroman, to seek out the common ground it may share with their concept of fictions of female development, and to make the differences clear as well. Early in this century, German writer Wilthem Dilthey described the Bildungsroman in this way:

A regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony. (Abel, Hirsch and Langland, 6)

Abel, Hirsch and Langland note, in reference to the traditional form:

Clearly, successful Bildung requires the existence of a social context which will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities, leading the young person from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity...In no single novel, however, does the developmental journey take such a smooth and uncomplicated course. (5-6)
This, they believe, is even more so the case in the female Bildungsroman (particularly of the 19th and early 20th centuries), since women's chances to participate fully in their particular societies have been severely limited. This difference is reflected by the respective conclusions of men's and women's 18th and early 19th century Bildungsromane. As Abel, Hirsch and Langland explain:

Even the [male] rebel's defiance and the [male] artist's withdrawal are conventional arrangements with society. Novels of female development, by contrast, typically substitute inner concentration for active accommodation, rebellion, and withdrawal. (8)

The Voyage In also links the structure of female Bildungsromane and the work of current feminist psychoanalytic theorists Nancy Chodorow, Jean Baker Miller, Carol Gilligan and Dorothy Dinnerstein. As Freudian revisionists, these theorists concentrate their attention on the pre-oedipal period, focusing on the infant-mother bond, which they believe results in an early sense of difference in males, and facilitates a sense of identification with the mother in females. They believe that this difference has consequences for later development in gender roles, encouraging a relational sense of self in women, and a more separatist one in males. According to Miller: "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships." Abel, Hirsch and Langland conclude:
Historically, only the masculine experience has been awarded the stamp of maturity; feminist theory suggests that the insistence on relationship reveals not a failed adulthood, but the desire for a different one. Female fictions of development reflect the tensions between the assumptions of a genre that embodies male norms and the values of its female protagonists. The heroine's developmental course is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine encounters the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships, especially those of early childhood. The deaths in which these fictions so often culminate represent less developmental failures than refusals to accept an adulthood that denies profound convictions and desires. (p.11)

The inclusion of these psychoanalytic theories gives Abel, Hirsch, and Langland's thesis an important psychological underpinning, acknowledging the fact that the dichotomy between self and other has roots deep in the psyche, as well as in social structures. At the same time, these theories are as rigid as the Freudian analysis they hope to counterbalance.

In her perceptive essay, "Changing is the Word I Want" Lorna Irvine carries pre-oedipal feminist theory into a full-scale analysis of Munro's narrative structure. She believes the most consistent element in Munro's writing is its fluidity, its element of transformation, which she associates with the idea of female ego as being without boundaries:

It is Munro's insistent illustration of flux that fascinates me--the fluid relationships between order and disorder, between stillness and movement,
and perhaps more important, between revelation and secrecy. The privileging of change seems to me to account for the peculiar ambivalence of a Munro story, an ambivalence that makes the reader indecisive about the meaning of the fictional experience. (Mackendrick, 100).

In contrast to Irvine's descriptions of fluidity and change, Munro describing her own writing, uses images which are more concrete and grounded:

So when I write a story, I want to make a certain kind of structure, and I know the feeling I want to get from being inside that structure...There is no blueprint for the structure. It's not a question of "I'll have to make this kind of house because if I do it right it will have this effect. I've got to make, got to build up a house, a story, to fit around the indescribable "feeling" that is like the soul of the story, and which I must insist upon in a dogged, embarrassed way, as being no more definable than that...Then I start accumulating the material and putting it together. I see how this material might go together to make the shape I need, and I try it...Every final draft, every published story, is still only an attempt, an approach, to the story. (Metcalf, 244)

While the feeling itself in the story may be fluid, something full of change and transformation, Munro speaks of inside and outside; boundaries are a given, just as they are within her stories. Munro is a perceptive writer because she recognizes the boundaries as a construction, and realizes they exist, and have to exist; they protect the central mysteries of writing, of life. Her sense of the central mystery of the story as something which is untouchable,
unreachable, also goes against the idea of fluidity. Munro's characters themselves have their central mysteries, and the relationships between characters often hinge, or founder, on this point; people can be named, and described, recognized but never fully known. A critic like Irvine, or a theorist like Chodorow, might argue that the recognition which follows the approach, both in the act of writing and in the writing's content, is a recognition of a shared identity and ego. Munro's women, the argument would follow, are inevitably connected by their commonality as women: the final message of her writing would be one of unity, the dissolution of boundaries. Yet it can be argued that the ultimate recognition for Munro's female protagonists is of difference, of the boundaries which set apart each individual, boundaries created by the self, boundaries shaped by society.

Abel, Hirsch and Langland do believe in a system of inner boundaries within the female Bildungsroman, represented by two plots, one surface plot which affirms social conventions, and is often governed by the old patterns of myths and legends, and a submerged plot, which calls the first one into question. It is possible that such a split may also exist in male Bildungsroman, although this kind of division is exacerbated by the specific socially limiting, psychologically crippling restrictions women have faced. On the more positive side, the editors of The Voyage In believe that the present is a time when the form of the fiction of female development is coming into its own, because late 20th century women have more social and economic options than their predecessors.
Seen in the light of Abel, Hirsch, and Langland's theories, Alice Munro's emphasis within Lives on individuality and commonality proves a crucial part of the book's nature as a fiction of female development. The fact that the book is specifically a coming-of-age novel also intensifies the importance of Del's concern with the individual and the shared, with self and other, since adolescents often struggle to make some sense of how they fit in the smaller society of their peers and the larger society around them.

Del's curiosity about the workings of the adult world, about the reasons and motivations behind people's actions, are reflections of the importance of social context in this book, as in any Bildungsroman. Although Munro's overall work contains stories set in all parts of Canada, she is often described as a regional writer, perhaps because of the crucial importance of the rural, small-town settings in her stories set in the '30s, 40s and 50s. In Lives, especially, the setting -- a small, Southern Ontario town in the mid forties to mid fifties-- is clearly a determining factor in Del's perceptions about women's roles, and relationships between men and women.

Structurally, Munro takes an approach which is unusual, but which seems natural for Lives, especially if the book is considered as a Bildungsroman. The most noticeable characteristic of Lives structure is its form as a short story collection rather than as a novel per se. Del's process of growth and development is shown as episodic, rather than as a perfect continuum. In the first three stories, Del, as a little girl, is more an observer than a central participant. She is central as a narrator who shapes the events, and
that who is involved in the action as part of a group. Yet, the stories focus on other characters. In "The Flats Road," Del and her family are witnesses to the arranged marriage of Benny and Madeleine; Del identifies herself as part of a family group, and much of the story is narrated in the first-person plural. "Heirs of the Living Body" is a further exploration of Del's identity as a member of a family—in this case, her extended family on her father's side. "Princess Ida" is Ada Jordan's story, as conceived by Del.

The next two stories fulfill a different function in terms of Lives overall structure. Here, Del describes two very different kinds of group rituals: her own investigation into rituals of religious faith, and her involvement in a school operetta, a group event which takes on special meaning for Del. The second story, "Changes and Ceremonies," also contains Del's close observations of a character outside her immediate family circle, her music teacher, Miss Farris. These stories also represent a shift from the more isolated rural setting of the previous ones; Del is becoming more aware of the social structure of the town of Jubilee.

Although the last three stories also incorporate many characters, and an awareness of the larger social patterns of which Del is a part, the attention of the narrative is concentrated on Del as a direct participant in the action. In "Lives of Girls and Women," Del, curious about Fern Dogherty and Art Chamberlain, is drawn, not exactly unwittingly, into Art Chamberlain's sexually exploitative manipulations. "Baptizing," the book's longest story, is shaped around Del as central character and participant, as she remembers and describes her sexual and emotional coming of age: her relationship
with Garnet French and her following decision to leave Jubilee. The final story in this triad, "The Photographer," which serves as an epilogue for the book, is the most centered on Del's perceptions and feelings; her older narrative voice, the voice of a mature woman writer, predominates here, and the conversation with Bobby Sherriff is the most clearly framed as a memory, more so than the other memories within the book, which are told in a less reminiscent way.

Although the stories are unified by Del's role as narrator and protagonist, a reader cannot help but be aware that they are separate pieces, each a full exploration in its own right of certain characters. Originally, Munro did try to write Lives as a novel, but she found it did not work successfully in that form; she decided to rewrite it into separate stories. The section that became "Princess Ida" was actually the start of the attempted novel, followed by the rest of the original text up to the section which later became "Baptizing." "The Flats Road" and "Heirs of the Living Body" were written after Munro's decision to divide and re-shape her work, and the epilogue came last. The importance of "Epilogue: The Photographer" to an interpretation of the rest of Lives is affirmed by Munro's thoughts on that section. In an interview with J.R. Struthers, Munro discussed her own struggles with the epilogue: "I took about half as long writing that as writing the whole book." She felt that the epilogue didn't fit psychologically or chronologically, that it introduced a new element, that of the artist as a young girl. "And yet," Munro explained "I found eventually that the book didn't mean anything to me without it." (Mackendrick, 24-25).
It is easy to see how the material covered in "Princess Ida" became the genesis for Lives. I can imagine a version of Lives which would begin with Ada's story as a preface to Del's. Instead, Munro chooses to ground the book in the context of Del's neighborhood and extended family; however, Ada's story unwinds throughout the book, along with Del's.

According to the revisionist Freudian psychoanalytic theories described by Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, the mother-daughter bond defines later development. Lives chronicles both the bond between Ada and Del, the similarities between them, as well as Del's efforts to set herself apart from her mother. Del's older narrative voice seems to be re-evaluating the past, seeing her mother in a more sympathetic light. All through the book, Del senses her mother's chief vulnerability: her sense of misplacement within the town of Jubilee, her needs for acceptance and for independence. By placing "Princess Ida" further back in the book, Munro has the more complex portrayal of Ada come later, preceded by Del's earlier, simpler perceptions of her. As a whole, Del's intuitions about her mother come in bits and pieces, many of them the result of the perspective of the older narrator; they overshadow her child's-eye view of her mother.

As a child and as an adolescent, Del often takes a distanced, self-conscious view of her mother. She sees the ways Ada Jordan does not, and cannot, fit Jubilee's social expectations; at the same time, she also clearly sees the contradictions within her mother's character. Her analyses of Ada Jordan's ways of thinking are often marked by this anger, while her descriptions of her mother's
physical presence are more tender. In "The Flats Road," Del, looking through her younger eyes, speaking with her older voice, has one of these gentler moments, as she describes her mother jokingly chiding Uncle Benny:

"Talk as if you're buying a cow," said my mother. But she did not really mind; she had these unpredictable moments of indulgence, lost later on, when the very outlines of her body seemed to soften and her indifferent movements, like the lifting of the plates, had an easy supremacy. She was a fuller, fairer woman than she later became. (Munro, 10)

At the same time, Del's response may in part come from her child's viewpoint; she sees her mother at ease in a familiar environment, doing something traditionally motherly. If Ada Jordan becomes more severe, less full and fair later on, it may be because of the struggles she will have to undergo to become more independent. She takes on her own job, earns enough money to gain her independence from her domestic Flats Road life, and, to a certain extent, from her marriage, although the dynamics of that relationship become less clear later in the book. While working to make her own way, she still wants to be accepted, to fit in somewhere, to belong to a community of people with similar values. And in rural Southwestern Ontario in the late '40s, the thing she craves proves elusive. She is less tolerant, more judgmental of the people around her because of her own frustrations, and also because she senses she doesn't fit their judgments.
The scene above is significant in part because Ada tolerates her husband and Benny's speculations about his new wife; they are talking as if Benny was buying a cow. Madeleine, no matter how unsympathetic a character, is put into a marriage, a domestic situation, without any choice in the arrangement. Ada Jordan, who appears at ease, is, Munro makes clear, frustrated by her life on the Flats Road. At this point, for Ada, comments about men's control of women have not yet begun to grate. Still, Ada is already sensitive to the social pecking order; she imbues the town of Jubilee with more appeal than it has because it is an alternative to the Flats road and her own roots deep in the country. Munro does not characterize Ada as a social climber, however, but as someone who is looking for a higher ground based on education and independence. This is what Ada wants, more than anything, for her own daughter.

While the older narrator is sympathetic to Ada, she also examines her with piercing criticism. In "The Flats Road" she uses both her child's acceptance and her older perspective to describe Ada's social categorizations:

The Flats Road was the last place my mother wanted to live. As soon as her feet touched the town sidewalk...a new sense of relief, a new sense of consequence flowed from her...Later on she was to find she did not belong in Jubilee either, but at present she took hold of it hopefully...and made sure it would notice her....As yet I followed her without embarrassment, enjoying the commotion. (Munro, p.8)

Del's voice here is knowing, but also sympathetic towards her mother's innocence. In the next paragraph, she becomes more
critical, showing her mother's snobbishness as the flip side of unrealistic idealism:

My mother was not popular on the Flats Road...She was on the side of poor people everywhere, on the side of Negroes and Chinese and Jews and women, but she could not bear drunkeness, no, and she could not bear sexual looseness, dirty language, haphazard lives, contented ignorance; and so she had to exclude the Flats Road people from the really oppressed and deprived people, the real poor whom she loved. (Munro, 8)

Ada Jordan is caught in a double bind; she tries to set up a way of judgment that is different from the ones she sees all around her (such as the attitudes of her husband's aunts) and, when it proves just as problematic, she ends up slipping back into, as Munro puts it, "the values of Jubilee." And as Del realizes from listening to her aunts, the values of Jubilee, of rural southwestern Ontario in the forties are ones of denial. Ambitions, hopes, and wishes are to be kept inside, as secrets. Ada, in response, is always turning outward, to the point of making herself vulnerable, even ridiculous, in Del's eyes. To her clients, her inlaws, and her fellow townspeople, Ada is puzzling, and sometimes foolish; their approach to her is one of flat judgement, as opposed to Del's, which is distinguished by her sensitivity to Ada's feelings and motives.

But Munro's characterization of Ada is not wholly created from an outside perspective. In "Princess Ida" Del tells her mother's story; Ada's attitudes and choices are suddenly seen in relation to her own voyage out. Although "Princess Ida" is Ada's story, Del's voice is the
controlling one within the piece. This story is the older narrator's approach to her mother's identity, her recognition of facets of her mother's personality which she was just beginning to see in her later childhood. Unlike other Munro stories, which move forward in a consistent fashion, the action of "Princess Ida" is grounded by the story within the story, Ada's account of her childhood as remembered by Del.

This inner story is the middle section of "Princess Ida," framed by an introductory section and a later section, which brings Ada's story into a new light. The first section describes Del's growing sense of ambivalence toward her mother, marked by her adolescent self-consciousness. In the early part of the story, Del approaches her mother from her great-aunts' point of view. These two women see domesticity as an appropriate and natural role for women, and they take their own role seriously. They are makers of delicious dishes (scones and lemon tarts), and keepers of "tender proprieties." For them, ironed blouses, unlike education, are a visible act of love toward a child. Del can see their point of view as well as her mother's, and is left ambivalent:

I felt the weight of my mother's eccentricities...the aunts would just show me a little at a time...I did want to repudiate her...at the same time I wanted to shield her. (Munro, 63)

Del's wish to shield her mother comes from her recognition of the common qualities they share: their love of knowledge, their quick intelligence, their ambition, qualities Del is already learning to hide.
But when Ada scolds her for her self-consciousness, it is clear that she overlooks Del's sensitivity. Del is becoming aware, both of the judgments of others, but also of their feelings, their vulnerabilities, which Ada's intellectual extroversion overlooks. At the same time, she still relies on Ada as her primary interpreter of the structure and workings of the world, principally of Jubilee, as shown in her account of their return to Jubilee from one of their journeys out to the countryside:

My mother would never let this sighting go by without saying something...And by these words, whether weary, ironic, or truly grateful, Jubilee seemed to me to take its being. As if without its connivance, her acceptance, these streetlights and sidewalks, the fort in the wilderness, the open and secret pattern of the town--a shelter and a mystery--would not be there. Over all our expeditions and homecomings, and the world at large, she exerted this mysterious, appalling authority, and nothing could be done about it, not yet. (Munro, 68)

Del is beginning to question her mother's definitions, to begin to develop her own. At the same time, her mother still influences her patterns of approach and recognition. In a more concrete way, Ada has made Del's knowledge of the world beyond the Flats Road and beyond Jubilee possible. Ada's financial independence brings her and her daughter out from the Flats Road and into Jubilee. Through her explorations of the town, Del begins to create her own interpretations of the town's structure, rituals, and secrets.
For Ada, town life proves dissatisfying. Del recounts her mother's unsuccessful attempts to find a niche in Jubilee, then follows with the story which lies at the heart of "Princess Ida": Ada's tale of her childhood experiences. Munro does not present this story directly through Ada's voice, as a dialogue between her and Del. Instead, Ada's voice becomes secondary to Del's as re-teller. In Del's mind, in her re-telling, the story takes on a primal quality, like a myth or a fairy tale. And like a myth or a fairy tale, the story remains an underlying constant in the lives of both Ada and Del.

Although Del tells of her mother's experience as an adult in a linear way, Munro herself suggests that inside a person's psyche, time runs in circles. "My mother had not let anything go," Del reflects, and recognizes that even her mother's tale of her childhood voyage out is circular; Ada can never completely escape (Munro, 72). Del comes to this knowledge by the end of the story. Before Uncle Bill's visit, she sees only stories of the past in terms of return, non-linear patterns: "Stories of the past could go like this, round and round and down to death" (Munro, 74). Uncle Bill's return, emphasizing cycle and transformation, suggests that stories of the present can be non-linear as well. The reason for his visit is ambiguous. He comes to see his sister and her family before he dies, and he wants to make amends, but whether this wish comes from his knowledge of his approaching death, or from some older, buried guilt, is unclear.

Young Del gives her mother's story an opening that echoes Genesis: "In the beginning, the very beginning of everything there was that house" (Munro, 73) The beginning here is not the word, which defines everything, but the house, which fulfills the same
function. Like Munro’s house of fiction, this house is built around the unexplainable. For Del, her mother’s past is as significant and as distanced as a story; the tale she constructs is her approach to the reality of her mother’s life. The original story which Ada tells both to Del and to herself is built around her painful early experiences, principally one of incest, which she cannot fully disclose.

For young Del, this element of her mother’s story remains clouded. The story itself remains in fairy-tale terms. Her mother escapes from the primal, frightening house and countryside and runs away into town, where she meets her “fairy godmother,” Miss Rush. Del believes that a fairy tale must end with marriage, but is dissapointed by this ending to her mother’s story. Marriage to Del’s father seems too ordinary. Young Del automatically looks to their marriage as the ending of the story, while her older self seems more aware of Ada’s goals and ambitions, which go beyond marriage. But Ada herself draws upon fairy-tale imagery in her choice of a nom-de-plume for her newspaper columns. She chooses Princess Ida, the name of a Tennyson heroine who, after fleeing from an arranged marriage to establish a college for women, eventually marries her intended betrothed, who courts her in disguise. Although Tennyson’s Princess Ida makes her voyage out into a life of learning, her eventual reward is a return to marriage. This choice of heroine is typical of Ada, whose unconventional attitudes have an underlying traditionalism.

Del’s feelings for her mother veer between embarrassment and admiration, assertions of their differences, and (sometimes grudging) recognitions of their commonalities. When Ada describes her own
feelings about the lives of girls and women, Del, in early adolescence, is quick to discount them:

My mother spoke to me in her grave, hopeful, lecturing voice..."There is a change coming in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had up till now has been their connection with men...No more lives of our own than domestic animals...You will want to have children though."
That was how much she knew me.
"But I hope you will--use your brains. Once you make that mistake of being--distracted, over a man, your life will never be your own." (Munro, 173)

Del, as an older narrator, can see the double message in her mother's words. As an adolescent, she reads the part of the message that urges sexual caution, and reacts skeptically. As an adult, she can also value Ada's belief in independence. Her description of her mother's "grave, hopeful, lecturing voice" is marked by this sympathy and skepticism. She sees the lacks in her mother's ideas, and can also acknowledge their insight. Ada may be lecturing, in part; she is also speaking from her own very deep beliefs.

A comparable dialogue between a mother and daughter takes place in Munro's "Friend of My Youth":

In later years, when she sometimes talked about the things she might have been, or done, she would say, "If I could have been a writer...then I would have written the story of Flora's life. And do you know what I would have called it? 'The Maiden Lady'...she said these words in a solemn and sentimental
tone of voice I had no use for... I was fifteen or sixteen years old by that time, and I believed I could see into my mother's mind... What made Flora evil in my story was just what made her admirable in my mother's--her turning away from sex. My mother had grown up in a time and in a place where sex was a dark undertaking for women. She knew that you could die of it. So she honored the decency, the prudery, the frigidity, that might protect you. And I grew up in horror of that ... dainty tyranny.... The odd thing is that my mother's ideas were in line with some progressive notions of her times, and mine echoed the notions that were favored in my time. This in spite of the fact that we both believed ourselves independent, and lived in backwaters that did not register such changes. It's as if tendencies that seem most deeply rooted in our minds, most private and singular, have come in as spores on the prevailing wind, looking for any likely place to land, any welcome. (Mukherjee, 31)

In "Friend of My Youth" the conflict between mother and daughter is specifically about sexual values, while in "Lives," Ada's use of the word "connection" broadens her argument to include any kind of relationship between women and men. However, in "Friend of My Youth," the older narrator recognizes that personal beliefs can actually be one with a larger pattern of sexual politics, which individuals unknowingly absorb. Ada, unlike the mother in "Friend," is already trying to connect her personal experience with the lives of other women and girls. Furthermore, the mother's attitude in "Friend" is an example of what Munro would call "the beauty of the negative," the value of denial that has a kind of strength.

Ada Jordan's ideas, in contrast, have both a negative and a positive reading. She hopes that women will be able to have relationships with men (or children with them, at least) and also
believes that women will have a sense of self. She can articulate the lacks--"all we have had"--but cannot completely explain her vision of the future. She believes that a change is coming, but cannot imagine the specifics. Within the certainty of her vision there is uncertainty: she can make the approach, but cannot completely make the recognition. Perhaps this is why Del, as an adolescent, can only read the cautionary side of her mother's words.

Munro draws her title from Ada's words, an interesting choice in comparison to her earlier working title, Real Life. The phrase real life echoes Del's thoughts at the end of her affair with Garnet, when she feels she is setting aside fantasy for the reality of adult life beyond Jubilee. "Real" implies the important, the significant, as well as the actual. Ada's words suggest that the only real life women have had is through a dependent relation with men. The title Lives of Girls and Women invites the reader to evaluate the book through Ada's words, and Ada's words through the content of the book.

The title is self-questioning as well. Picking up the book for the first time, a reader might expect to find a collection of numerous stories about women. But Munro's book cannot be classified as a celebration of women's collectivity. In all Munro, the divisions between people are as strong as their commonalities. To question Ada's words further: If all women have had is their connection with men, does the existence of this connection give them common ground with each other? And is Ada's statement true to begin with, in relation to the lives of other women and girls which Del observes?

Del herself breaks the groundwork Ada lays down. She becomes "distracted" over a man, but at the end of the book, her life
is still unquestionably her own. If Del's own existence presents a challenge to—or a reshaping of—Ada's idea, perhaps the rest of the book does as well. In her observations of women and men, Del again and again encounters "the central mystery" of the individual, private self. It can be argued, as Irvine does, that the climate of '40's and '50's small town life makes even greater shielding of the private self necessary on women's part. Ada's words suggest that a marriage connection with a man gives a woman a respected public identity. Single women, even woman as different as Fern Dogherty and Miss Ferris, are victims of public scrutiny and curiosity.

Irvine sees Munro's fiction as being in a constant state of flux and change, a view which contrasts with the language Munro herself uses to describe her writing process. At the same time, Irvine's sense for the tensions in Lives is acute. She tends to read these tensions as subversive, as a counter-plot, rather than as an inherent part of the structure of the book as a coming of age story. Irvine writes:

As Kermode suggests about complex narratives, Lives of Girls and Women does move in two directions, the one showing the changes in Del from her early years, through her adolescence, to a kind of artistic awakening, the other backtracking, revealing discordant memories, illustrating underground lives: the lives of women, secret, mostly unarticulated. The women of the collection thus pull against the straightforward development of the plot and will not allow clarification to occur. For the writer, these lives are hardly to be understood. They are unclear, both as individuals and as a class, their boundaries shift, they change. (Mckendrick, 108)
I would argue that, in Lives, it is not so much the identities of the characters themselves which change, as the way they are perceived by others. A character's action (such as Miss Ferris's seemingly unprovoked suicide) can cause rifts in her public persona, in the way others have chosen to categorize her, and can throw these definitions into question:

Miss Farris in her velvet skating costume...Miss Farris con brio...Miss Farris floating face down, unprotesting, in the Wawansh River...Though there is no plausible way of hanging those pictures together--if the last one is true then must it not alter the others?--they are going to have to stay together now.

(Munro 139)

As a girl becoming a woman and a writer, Del tries many approaches, wanting to define and recognize others. It is her awareness of her act of approach, her wish to recognize, which shows that she is a potential writer. Viewed in this way, the wish to articulate those unarticulated lives is both an inherent part of being human, and an inherent part of being a writer. At other times, the wish to approach and recognize can also be used as a form of distancing, or avoidance. In "The Flats Road" Del and her family, disturbed by Madeleine's anger, turn her into an anecdote, a story. She is acceptable that way, as a story and a memory. In real life, she is mentally disturbed, violent and abusive; she is also powerless, with a child out of wedlock, put into a marriage which is an economic transaction. Munro simply lets these facts stand in the narrative, tell their own story. Del's final comments, as an older narrator, are self-
knowing without being overtly critical, suggesting a resignation to the way things are:

After a while we would just laugh, remembering Madeleine going down the road in her red jacket, with her legs like scissors, flinging abuse over her shoulder at Uncle Benny trailing after, with her child... Uncle Benny could have made up the beatings, my mother said after a while, and took that for comfort; how was he to be trusted? Madeleine herself was like something he might have made up. We remembered her like a story, and having nothing else to do, we gave her our strange, belated, heartless applause.

"Madeleine! That madwoman!" (Munro, 27)

Del is aware that her family defines Madeleine by fictionalizing her. Her encounters with her cousin, Mary Agnes, who is also mentally impaired, increase her sensitivity to the rationalizations, the fictions, which people use to classify each other, particularly those others who don't fit the norms. Del is frightened by Mary Agnes both because she is different, and because she cannot comfortably belittle her, as her elders do. She realizes that Mary Agnes, like Madeleine, like Uncle Benny, has her own way of seeing which is just as complex as any other way. Del, with her child's eye honesty, innocence, and arrogance, can recognize others' classifications as false:

It often seemed then that nobody else knew what really went on, or what a person was, but me. For instance people said "poor Mary Agnes" or implied it,
by a drop in pitch, a subdued, protective tone of voice, as if she had no secrets, no place of her own, and that was not true. (Munro, 45)

At this age, Del sees her wish to look past adults' definitions as a way to security, particularly in the face of the greatest unknowns, such as death. Later, as an adolescent, she and her friend Naomi take a similar attitude in their quest for information about sex, as they try to see past taboos. In both "Changes and Ceremonies" and "Heirs of the Living Body," Del is caught by the wish to connect the physical and the more abstract (spiritual, emotional, psychological) aspects of death and of sexuality. Thinking like her mother, the encyclopedia seller, the lover of fact and information and connection, she feels that accumulated knowledge can be an approach to the unknown, a way of making it recognizable:

There is no protection, unless it is in knowing. I wanted death pinned down and isolated behind a wall of particular facts and circumstances, not floating around loose, ignored but powerful, waiting to get in anywhere. (Munro, 46)

At this point, Del does not yet realize that her need to pin down and isolate something potentially frightening is the same need which drives her elders to classify, to make up stories. As her mother tells her about Uncle Craig's death, she turns it into a story in her mind, imagining the moment of his death, even turning the words "heart attack" into a symbolic image. Later, she herself feels a fear of the unknown more immediately, first, when she turns away from her parents embracing, and then, when she wants to avoid the sight of
Uncle Craig laid out for burial. Munro shows the plain connection in Del's mind: "I was afraid they would go on and show me something I no more wanted to see than I wanted to see Uncle Craig dead" (Munro, 49).

At the funeral, Del moves through the house, avoiding the room where Uncle Craig's body is on display; she is only able to face that sight after her fight with Mary Agnes. When she bites Mary Agnes' arm, an action which she feels will take her outside the family, she ends up being redeemed, comforted, and reminded of her tangible, physical connection with the other people in her family, but even this tangible connection is inexpressible:

The house was full of people pressed together like blunt old crayons, warm, acquiescent, singing. And I was in the middle of them, in spite of being shut up here by myself...I was caught in a vision which was, in a way, the very opposite of the mystic's incommunicable vision of order and light; a vision, also incommunicable, of confusion and obscenity--of helplessness, which was revealed as the most obscene thing there could be. (Munro, 57)

Ironically, it is Del whom the Aunts choose to carry on Uncle Craig's family history, his own meticulously detailed way of trying to capture the connection between generations, through records of marriages, financial transactions, through numbers. Del rejects it because she sees it as something useless, useless in the sense that it cannot capture the tangible, the genetic link between family members, the blood tie that Del is beginning to recognize. Later, the older narrator admits, she also acknowledged her inheritance from
Uncle Craig in her helpless attempts to reassemble the factual details of Jubilee, wanting to capture the tangibles and the intangibles of the town, united together (Munro, 249).

Del’s recognition of the interconnectedness of family comes, appropriately, during a period in which she is becoming more sensitive to the connection between her parents. Munro makes it clear in "Princess Ida" that, at this point, Del is ignorant about sexual relationships between men and women. Still, the connection between her parents which she turns away from, is something both physical and emotional; she senses the privacy and intimacy of their relationship as she watches her father comfort her mother. Earlier in childhood, the existence of their relationship was a boundary against threatening elements in the outside world:

My mother sat in her canvas chair and my father in a wooden one; they did not look at each other. But they were connected, and this connection was plain as a fence, it was between us and Uncle Benny, us and the Flats Road, it would stay between us and anything. (Munro, 26)

Now that Del is more aware of the complexities of human relationships, the relationship between her parents becomes less of a given source of security, more of an unknowable; she sees them as vulnerable in their affection for each other: "I wanted to shout at them to stop and turn back into their separate, final, unsupported selves" (Munro, 49).

At first, she is the outside observer of others' relationships. She watches her parents, observes the unconventional marriage
between Benny and Madeleine, and the unusual marriage between Uncle Bill and Nile. In terms of nonsexual relationships, she sees how her unmarried aunts dote on Uncle Craig, building their lives around him. As she enters adolescence, Del takes on many approaches in her attempt to understand—or at least recognize—connections between women and men, the connections which, according to her mother, have been such a defining factor in women's lives. When she and her mother move to Jubilee, the Jordan family splits along gender lines. Living in Jubilee with her mother and their boarder, Fern, Del is living in a household of women.

At the age of thirteen, social interaction between boys and girls is very carefully negotiated, beneath an outer shell of insults, teasing, and cautious approaches. Del and Naomi, curious about their elders, build up stories about their operetta director, Miss Farris, and her supposed affair with the music teacher. Their way of approach to sexuality and relationships is through imagination: Del's, drawn from romantic images from literature, Naomi's from superstitions. Del's crush on Frank Wales begins when she sees him as magical and set apart in his role as the Pied Piper (someone who is a magical leader, who takes his followers over borders into the unknown.) She doesn't act on her crush, but keeps it as something secret, comforting, and inviolable.

A year later, Del remembers: "Naomi and I held almost daily discussions on the subject of sex, but took one tone, so that there were degrees of candor we could never reach" (Munro, 144). Del and Naomi are fascinated by physical sexuality; they want to know all the facts, particularly the more bizarre ones. Again, however, as Del
realizes, their way of approach is also one of avoidance of the more complex issues of sexuality. Del begins to recognize, that, while she can muster facts about sexuality, she cannot easily comprehend the emotions--particularly the emotional border-crossing--involved: "It was the stage of transition, bridge between what was possible, known and normal behavior, and the magical, bestial act, that I could not imagine" (Munro, 159). Out of curiosity, she lets herself be led into a strange encounter with Mr. Chamberlain, but finds no answers in his act of exposure; sexual communication is not involved, and Chamberlain puts Del in the role of a supposedly impressed (but in actuality, detached and somewhat puzzled) observer.

In "Baptizing," Del reaches an age where she is increasingly conscious of society's expectations of her role as a woman in sexual relationships with men. It is in this story that Del puts her mother's earlier admonitions and wishes to the test. In her last year of school, she is on the point of being able to fulfill her mother's wishes for her, the university scholarship which will take her out of Jubilee, and into a different kind of life from the one her mother has lived. She also enacts Ada's worst fears by becoming "distracted" over Garnet. In "Baptizing," Del chooses independence, first from her mother, then from Garnet. Yet, in both cases, her choices are not thought out; they are immediate and instinctual, signs that Del, in the process of approaching herself, recognizes her own mysteries.

Both Del and Naomi are extremely sensitive to society's definitions of women's roles; they can adopt these as possible ways of self-approach. Del is quick to spot Naomi's absorption of society's definitions, when Naomi speaks of her wish to have a "normal life":
What was a normal life? It was the life of girls in the creamery office, it was showers, linen and pots and pans and silverware, that complicated feminine order; then turning it over, it was the life of the Gay-la Dance Hall...listening to men's jokes, putting up with and warily fighting with men and getting hold of them, getting hold--one side of that life could not exist without the other, and by undertaking and getting used to them both a girl was putting herself on the way to marriage. And I was not going to be able to do it. (Munro, 191)

Del can define Naomi's approach in terms of a strategy, a pattern made up of tangible elements. These elements are both trivial, and in the eyes of the participants, crucial. Courtship and marriage are marked by consumer acquisitions because they are economic transactions. Naomi and her friends are getting hold of men and economic security. Naomi's route leads her to out-of-wedlock pregnancy, something which she has described in frightening terms since she was a little girl, calling up images of superstition and social stigmatism (babies with cauls, lonely women with secrets.) Her solution is a quick marriage, something which will at least be socially acceptable, and which will give her economic security. "I've collected all this stuff. I might as well get married," she tells Del, yielding to economic pressure and social tradition (Munro, 232).

Del herself is not invulnerable to the social expectations of her time, the idea of becoming a woman by being a good consumer, buying the right makeup, catching the right man:
It was sustained attention I was not capable of, though everything from
advertisements to F. Scott Fitzgerald to a frightening song on the radio--the
girl that I marry will have to be, as soft and pink as a nursery--was telling me
I would have to, have to, learn. Love is not for the undepilitated. (Munro, 178)

Furthermore, these messages suggest that women are not only
physically lacking, but intellectually lacking as well, something that
cannot be remedied by a little depilation. Del is even more
disturbed when these social messages strike at the private places of
her mind and imagination, as in her reaction to the article she reads
proclaiming women's small-mindedness:

I wanted men to love me, and I wanted to think of the universe when I looked
at the moon. I felt trapped, stranded; it seemed there had to be a choice where
there couldn't be a choice. I didn't want to read any more of the article but was
drawn back to it as I would be drawn back when I was younger to a certain
picture of a dark sea, a towering whale, in a book of fairy stories; my eyes
nervously jumped across the page, staring at such assertions as: For a woman,
everything is personal; no idea is of any interest to her by itself, but must be
translated into her own experience; in works of art she always sees her own
life, or her daydreams. (Munro, 178).

The article troubles Del at a deep, imaginative level, the level
that retains myths and fairy tales. The irony of the words themselves
becomes clear in relation to the larger ideas of Lives, which suggest
personalization of experience is not some particular female crime,
but something which all people do in order to define themselves,
others, and all the remaining unknowns of the world. Del senses part of the truth of this, realizing that, in her daydreams, her fantasies, in the novel she writes in her head, she is creating alternate definitions of the world, of herself. As an older narrator, she is conscious of her own act of shaping, looking back on her fantasies about opera:

It never occurred to me that I was doing what the article said women did, with works of art. I was shaken, imagining the other surrender, more tempting, more gorgeous even than the surrender to sex—the hero's, the patriot's, Carmen's surrender to the final importance of gesture, image, self-created self. (Munro, 181)

With her lover Garnet French, Del comes to discover another kind of surrender, which also takes place within the self: "the person's to the body" (Munro, 215). Yet, for all the simplicity of this surrender, it also, in this relationship, becomes linked to more complicated yieldings of self, and to Del's eventual knowledge that there are aspects of herself which she cannot escape. Part of Garnet French's appeal for Del is that he suits her fantasies, as well as representing the unknowns, sexual and mystical, that she tries to approach through those fantasies. Critic Coral Howells describes Garnet as Del's "gothic hero-villain come to life" (Howells, 82). Her feelings of attraction towards him are powerfully physical, as Del explains, without apologies:

Nothing that could be said by us would bring us together; words were our enemies...This was the knowledge that is spoken of as "only sex," or "physical
attraction." I was surprised, when I thought about it--am surprised still--at the light, even disparaging tone that is taken, as if this was something that could be found easily, every day. (Munro, 218)

Although the physical attraction is strong, it is strengthened by Del's imagination, which draws her to the recognition of the unknown in Garnet, "the whole thing in him that I was going to love, and never catch, or explain." (Munro, 211). Yet, it is the whole mysterious, wordless quality of their relationship which gives Del a sense of control; she feels passive, carried along by her emotions, but at the same time, the relationship takes on the quality of fantasy, working on a different level from everyday life for Del. She risks pregnancy without even a thought, despite the references to the negative effects of unwanted pregnancy that appear over and over throughout the book. She also goes along with Garnet's talk of marriage, risking hurting him, and herself. At the same time, Munro suggests that the responsibility does not lie all on Del's part; Garnet, in his own way, is imagining her, leaving out the parts which threaten him.

Del, however, makes her choices more consciously: "...I meant to keep him sewn up in his golden lover's skin forever, even if five minutes before I had talked about marrying him" (Munro, 234). Her relationship with Garnet seems to offer Del a way of approach to another person, and to the natural world, that is beyond judgement, beyond definitions. Del learns that she cannot completely let go of her defining voice; it is an inherent part of her, surfacing in the fantasies she builds around Garnet. She cannot discover Garnet's
secrets, know him in ways that are more than physical, that will truly satisfy the imaginative, defining parts of herself.

The baptizing encounter between Del and Garnet marks Del's awakening into disillusionment, her awakening to limits and boundaries. Her first meeting with Garnet is a sexual awakening, which takes place at a religious revival service, where people are seeking some kind of spiritual awakening, an encounter with the unknowns which religion hopes to capture. Del describes the course of her relationship with Garnet in terms of sexual approaches and boundary crossings. For Del, the end of the relationship also represents a crossing of boundaries, and, literally, a surfacing. Garnet tries to baptize her, to draw her symbolically into his religion and his life; the symbolism is clear, since Baptism is associated with the shedding of old selves, with the taking on of new names. With Garnet, Del comes of age sexually; by turning against his attempted baptism, she comes of age in a different way, as a thinking woman. This emotional coming of age is also marked by her recognition of her own, and Garnet's, individuality, and her sudden understanding that this recognition marks the end of the relationship. Munro implies that such a sudden, keen insight may be more accessible to someone Del's age than to an older person who has come to accept the ongoing process of approach and recognition:

We were close enough to childhood to believe in the unforgivability of some blows. We had seen in each other what we could not bear, and we had no idea that people do see that, and go on....(Munro, 236)
Munro also shows that, for Del, the moment of coming of age is a matter of necessary, instinctual choice: her struggle against Garnet in the river is pure survival instinct; later she recognizes that she was also fighting for the protection of her whole self. At the same time, Munro, through Del, suggests that such instinctual choices result in ambivalence:

I was free and I was not free. I was relieved and I was desolate. Suppose then, I had never waked up? Suppose I had let myself lie down and be baptized in the Wawanash River? (Munro, 235)

There is a possible answer to these questions: Del could have ended up voiceless, like Miss Farris, like Marion Sherrif, who cannot awaken, cannot resurface. Garnet's baptism of Del, Munro implies, however potentially threatening, is a symbolic drowning; but to choose to marry him would have involved a giving up of self, of voice, and of the parts of herself which he could not bear.

It is appropriate that "Baptizing," with all its power, involvement in the moment, is followed by "Epilogue: The Photographer," which is Del's final recognition of her voice as a writer, of her final coming of age as an artist, the coming of age which Munro suggests can never be complete. _Lives_ takes on the traditional Bildungsroman form of the voyage out: Del goes from passive childhood into active late adolescence. Her last decision within the book's chronological action (as opposed to the reflections and flashbacks of "The Photographer) is to take a journey, a journey...
that will take her away from Jubilee, out into what she calls "real life": a job in some larger city:

Cities existed; telephone operators were wanted; the future could be furnished without love or scholarships. Now at last without fantasies or self-deception, cut off from the mistakes and confusions of the past, grave and simple, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, lovers, I supposed I would get started on my real life. (Munro, p. 238)

Del, having ended her romance with Garnet, tries to find comfort in a new kind of romance, the romance of the traditional Bildungsroman: she will be the female equivalent of the young man in the fairy tale who goes out to seek his fortune. Her desire to model herself after this male bildungsroman role are also reflected in an earlier conversation she has with her mother in "Lives of Girls and Women." Del misconstrues her mother's ideas about self-respect, lumping them together with all the advice she's been hearing about women being cautious, particularly in sexual situations, to protect their reputations, but also in terms of life in general:

I felt that it was not so different from all the other advice handed out to women, to girls, that assumed being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences, and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same.

(Munro, p.173-174)
The taking-on and shucking-off of experiences, and the final conclusive, coming back proud, seems to have been the male prerogative in many Bildungsromane. Del's remark that she didn't even think about her choice reveals that she has absorbed the traditional patterns to the point that she does not question the dichotomy, just simply chooses which side she wants to be on. But her later image of herself suggests a recognition that fantasy and self-deception may be the inevitable results generated by the self as a part of the approach to new, and potentially threatening, experiences. She feels she knows better now, that she'll look things straight on.

As a nineteen-year-old, Del sees herself at the beginning of growing up and entering the world. A more conventional coming-of-age story, such as the movie plots she mentions, would hinge on the events beyond her decision to leave Jubilee. But Munro's book ends here. The Epilogue follows: the most introspective story in the book, in which the older Del re-evaluates her past. In the end, Lives, to use Abel, Hirsch, and Langland's term, is a "voyage in." Although the stories document the pattern of Del's voyage out, the collection also moves inward, as the older narrator goes back into her past. "Baptizing" represents the most inward part of that journey, as the older narrator approaches and recognizes her own adolescent self-centeredness. She has been on the journey out that her younger self began; now she is going back. The epilogue, with its chronological displacement, breaks up the book's linear pattern, brings out the
pattern of this other voyage. "Epilogue: The Photographer" suggests that the narrator has taken the voyage in, all the way to writing.

If this is a book about the voyage out of adolescence and the voyage in of personal and artistic self-knowledge (what Abel, Hirsch and Langland would call a novel of awakening), then Munro's use of the short story medium is particularly telling. Munro has always worked in the short story form, even for Lives and The Beggar Maid, which many readers consider near-novels. A bildungsroman in short story form subtly counteracts the linear form of such a work. Although each story can be interpreted as a stage, part of the whole, they have a depth and fullness which gives each story an individual character, more so than the chapters of a novel. In Bildungsroman form, this arrangement seems apiece with the attitudes expressed by Munro's comments on writing, the idea of art, and perhaps life as well, being a series of many approaches and recognitions; these become more complex, nothing is neatly resolved. In an interview with Anne McNeilly, Munro expressed a similar idea about the process of maturation: "I think there are flickerings of self-knowledge and self-doubt throughout your life, there isn't a plateau which people reach and then remain [sic]" (York, 48).

As a mature artist and narrator, Del is able to acknowledge that the unknown is not isolated in the realm of the imagination; everyday life is full of unknowns. As an artist, she is drawn by these unknowns, and can never completely reveal them, no matter how much she recognizes them:
And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing...every layer of speech and thought...every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together--radiant, everlasting. (249)

She wishes for an impossibility: yet, Munro's words also suggest that an artist's vision can bring with it a necessary humility, the result of working in paradoxes. With this humility may also come a certain redemptive vision, the vision which directs Munro's fully-developed treatment of her characters, marked by her respect for them. They are not only her creations; they are a means to approach and recognize life beyond the fictive world. As a writer and older narrator, Del herself perceives her world with this kind of humbling vision.

Critic Lorraine York, comparing Del and Rose, the protagonist of The Beggar Maid, has observed that Del, unlike Rose, is afraid to"look things straight on" (York, 30-32). She believes that, for Del, this kind of directness comes with mature vision. Rose, however, by looking things straight on, still comes up against their central mysteries, which she finds terribly disturbing. In order to survive, she becomes cynical, shaping various created selves. Not only does she choose theater as a profession; her acting also becomes a means of personal survival as she takes on many roles. Del's way of perception, as a writer, while less immediately direct, is a more honest way of approaching a world which, in the end, resists definition. Within the framework of Lives, Munro creates a character who is able, as a mature woman, to approach and recognize her own processes of definition of self, others, and world.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


"Yes, I said instead of thank you."


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