

STRUCTURE AND DETAIL IN LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

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In *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), and *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1975), the central, dynamic tension of Alice Munro's vision consists of a perceived split in the world of men between social survivors and inhabitants of "the other country," the latter a place made up variously of idiots, seniles, criminals, the fatally ill, and men of faith and passion. As this vision develops throughout her work, Munro increasingly recognizes the difficulty of defining the two sides of the split, of drawing a sharp boundary. Yet her perception of "the world" (a garrison of survivors) and of "the other country" (a land of misfits) remains central.¹ *Lives of Girls and Women*² is especially fascinating in terms of this bipartite vision. Made up of a series of individual but interrelated stories that form a novel, the main action of the book, paralleled from chapter to chapter, focuses on the protagonist's struggle to commit herself neither to the one side of the dialectic nor to the other. Del Jordan is, in her own words, "a chameleon," and each chapter of *Lives of Girls and Women* depicts a different crisis in her search for a liveable compromise between "the world" and "the other country." Adding to the tension of the dilemma and subtlety of the novel is the reader's sense that Del is inevitably moving closer and closer to a final decision, made all the more difficult because the border between "the world" and "the other country" is becoming harder to identify. Finally, with some surprise, the reader perceives that the repeated crises may well have been a dangerous illusion, diverting attention from the real threat to Del's identity — the little details of day-to-day life that Munro amasses with such care. I wish to concentrate here on the parallel crises from chapter to chapter and on the function of the mass of surrounding detail.

In Chapter One, "The Flat Roads," Del is still a child, assimilating knowledge of Munro's two countries by osmosis, but not yet involved in her coming struggle to keep a foot in both. Munro uses this chapter to set up the landmarks of her vision, part of which she accomplishes through symbolic geography; she sharply distinguishes between the town of Jubilee and the

¹See Rae McCarthy Macdonald, "A Madman Loose in the World: The Vision of Alice Munro," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 22 (Autumn 1976), 365-74.

²Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (New York: Signet, 1971). Further references to the novel are to this edition.

Flats Road where the Jordans and an assortment of drunks, bootleggers, and idiots live. In terms of characters, "the other country" is represented by the Jordans' eccentric neighbour, Uncle Benny, while "the garrison" is upheld in this chapter by Del's mother, Ada. A tortured and variable woman, Ada on some occasions speaks for "the world" and on others for what "the world" fears and despises. In this chapter her exuberant walks into town place her in opposition to the Flats Road misfits among whom she lives. "As soon as her feet touched the town sidewalk and she raised her head, grateful for town shade after Flats Road sun, a sense of relief, a new sense of consequence flowed from her" (p. 6). For Ada at this point, Jubilee represents society, sociability, propriety, and the suppression of the "drunkenness" and "sexual looseness, dirty language, haphazard lives, contented ignorance" that she has to put up with on the Flats Road. On the other hand, Del's father, chasing the dream of a successful fox farm, is content in this disordered setting. It is Uncle Benny, however, who epitomizes the pole of "the other country." For Benny, no possibility is eliminated. He believes in people making millions by raising rabbits and budgies. He believes in ghosts, the active spirits of the dead. It is at his shack that Del gorges her imagination on sensational newspapers that tell horrendous stories of violence and depravity. No such threatening vision of the chaos and potential terror of life is recognized by the garrison, and Del has enough intuition not to take these papers home where Ada will see them. But when Benny returns from an unsuccessful trip to Toronto where he has been searching for his wife, he tells a story of such loss and confusion and describes such a chaotic world that for a moment even Ada, clinging to her ordered garrison viewpoint, is made to face the dark side of life: "So lying alongside our world was Uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. . . . It was his triumph, that he couldn't know about, to make us see" (p. 22).

That the child Del does to some extent intuitively understand is evident from her sense of the little core of order represented by her parents' playing cards on a winter night once she is in bed:

And upstairs seemed miles above them, dark and full of the noise of the wind. Up there you discovered what you never remembered down in the kitchen — that we were in a house as small and shut up as any boat is on the sea, in the middle of a tide of howling weather. (p. 22)

This allusion to the Ark with its associations of both terrible chaos and faith in a Creator appears several times in *Lives of Girls and Women* and is also connected to Uncle Benny's vision. For, earlier in the chapter, he had pointed at a rainbow, that sign of promise and divine order, and cried, "'You know what that is? That's the Lord's promise that there isn't ever going to be another flood!' He quivered with the momentousness of this promise as if it had just been made, and he himself was the bearer of it" (p. 27). Just as

Benny's sense of life's potential for chaos cannot be found in the garrison, so neither can his ecstatic faith. When Del writes his address for him, she starts with his name and moves logically and empirically outward, ending with "The World, The Solar System, The Universe." Benny makes her add Heaven and tells her, "You don't even get to the end of Heaven, because the Lord is there!" (p. 10). The dimensions of "the other country" as revealed by Benny, a Munro visionary, present a double hook. By opening his mind to the chaos alive in existence, he is also open to the great possibilities of creation and joy, a knowledge sadly lacking in the town so ironically named Jubilee. Apparently one is not had without the other, and the image of the Ark, evoking both destruction and terror and faith in a Creator capable of such destruction, suggests the mystery of this truth. At this point in her life, Del can unconsciously share something of Benny's vision and yet not forfeit the security offered by her parents' marriage and her mother's ordered way of seeing. This is the easy part of her life, as the chapter title, "The Flat Roads," suggests. In later chapters, Uncle Benny is to appear only occasionally, however, and Del alone moves deeper into her dilemma willing neither to accept the consequences of the double hook of "the other country" nor to commit herself to the safe and joyless order of Jubilee.

In Chapter Two, "Heirs of the Living Body," Del herself confronts the dilemma of Munro's two countries. In this chapter, the garrison world is represented by Del's two aunts and an uncle on her father's side. Their bachelor and spinster household is a bastion of order. Uncle Craig is the direct opposite of Uncle Benny, for Craig perceives a reassuring pattern in everyday events:

Though my parents always listened to the news and were discouraged or relieved by what they heard (mostly discouraged, for this was early in the war), I had the feeling that, to them as to me, everything that happened in the world was out of our control, unreal yet calamitous. Uncle Craig was not so daunted. He saw a simple connection between himself, handling the affairs of the township, troublesome as they often were, and the prime minister in Ottawa handling the affairs of the country. (p. 26)

A servant of the order he perceives, Craig's life's work is a history of Wawanash County and a family tree. Both projects represent an attempt to reveal a "whole solid, intricate structure of lives" under the chaotic variety of day-to-day life, "a great accumulation of the most ordinary facts which it was his business to get in order" (pp. 26-27). It is fitting that a man who appoints himself such tasks is a township clerk, responsible for marriage and other permits, the regulating dispensations of the social garrison. Craig's two sisters, Elspeth and Grace, represent a more subtle aspect of the garrison. Their sphere is domestic, and they often find themselves opposed to Ada, who in this chapter represents a voice from "the other country." They are excellent housekeepers (enemies of those irregularities, dirt and odour) and

adept socializers who make Ada in "her directness, her outrageousness," seem innocent and ineffectual. Del, during her summer visits to them, is aware of the contrast and feels a tinge of betrayal towards her mother. Yet Del, unlike Ada, is sensitive enough to perceive the dangers in a world where conversation "had many levels, nothing could be stated directly" and where disapproval "came like tiny razor cuts, bewilderingly in the middle of kindness" (p. 31). The garrison world is structured so intricately that it seems just as hazardous as it is secure.

Del encounters death, the ultimate darkness, in this chapter when Uncle Craig dies and she attends his wake with her mother. In the presence of this undeniable manifestation of chaos, Del sees the adults around her grope for some ordered, defensive explanation. In Ada's case, death is the logical breakdown of the human body into its chemical components; this view permits her to deny the sense of death altogether and to speak merely of chemical change. Del is never as simplistic as her mother, but she too seeks the protection of 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." Failing this, she avoids viewing Craig's body and, when her retarded cousin tries to force her, Del bites her. To Del, this act signifies the first of the choices she must make between the garrison world and "the other country." She believes that by biting her cousin she has placed herself forever beyond the pale of family approval and will, therefore, be a free renegade from whom order and normalcy are no longer expected. Instead, the act creates a welcome sensation and confirms Del's position in the family as "a *borderline case*." Del has made an attempt at escape from the garrison and failed; she now has a vision of humiliation, "of confusion and obscenity — of helplessness" (p. 48) — the knowledge that unconsciously plagues "the world" and against which it builds its defences. In the same vein, when she does see Uncle Craig's body, she feels that "he was the terrible, silent, indifferent conductor of forces that could flare up, in an instant, and burn through this room, all reality, leave us dark" (p. 49). From outside "the world," Del might have coupled this dark side with the meaning of Uncle Benny's rainbow, but, newly initiated as a member of the family garrison, she grasps only the terrible half of the revelation.

The biting of her cousin and its failure to free Del from the garrison mark the beginning of her real struggle. Although the family has confirmed her as one of its members, she does not welcome its burden. When her aunts present her with the notes and unfinished manuscript for Uncle Craig's history of Wawanash County hoping that one day she will complete it, Del stows it in the cellar and forgets it until a spring flood destroys it. "I didn't look to see how it was damaged, or whether it could be saved. It seemed to me a mistake from start to finish" (p. 52). Del is a chameleon who appears to belong inside the garrison — her acceptance of the manuscript is her lip

service to its demands — but whose perceptions of its norms remain ironic and skeptical. For a brief moment, she has, almost accidentally, achieved this precarious position. The question is whether she can maintain it in the chapters to follow.

Chapter Three, "Princess Ida," though it shifts its focus to Ada, Del's mother, does not lose the main point of Del's dilemma. For, Ada, in her desire for acceptance and her inability to conform to the limitations of the garrison, is an adult version of Del's problem, and Del comes to recognize their similarity. Ada's affinity for the garrison stems from her fear of emotion, particularly emotion associated with sex. When Del tries to get her to declare that she has painted a picture out of love for Del's father, Ada indirectly denies this, and her remark reveals her concern for acceptance rather than feeling: "I don't want it hanging where people would see" (p. 60). She will only grudgingly admit that she married Del's father for love and emphasizes instead that "Your father was always a gentleman." Memories of her younger brother Bill are associated for her with unspeakable, unapproachable childhood sexplay. Passion and sex are parts of one's nature that cannot be controlled and, therefore, represent chaos and the outer darkness; the garrison rejects them in fear, and, in this, Ada is a thoroughly garrison figure. Ironically, however, Ada is the ardent champion of a different sort of passion, love of knowledge. Thus, she sells encyclopedias, a job that fittingly, in terms of Munro's symbolic geography, takes her out of town "over all of the highways and backroads of Wawanash County." Innocent that she is, Ada never understands that any passion is as damning as the next in the eyes of "the world" and that, to the garrison, "knowledge was just oddity; it stuck out like warts." She and Del rent a house in town, significantly leaving the unpretentious figure of Mr. Jordan behind on Flats Road, and begin their ultimately doomed assault on the garrison world. Throughout *Lives of Girls and Women*, Ada remains a pathetic and eccentric misfit who can never win acceptance by "the world," yet she never understands that "the other country" can offer its own joys.

Characteristic of this myopia is her account of her childhood and youth. Ada remembers growing up as a long, unrelieved fight for knowledge against terrible odds. Her most resented obstacle was her mother, a religious fanatic who spent a two hundred and fifty dollar windfall on Bibles, which Ada had to distribute "all over the country at the age of eight, in boys' shoes and not owning a pair of mittens" (p 64). This incident sums up her mother's eccentricity. At the end of the chapter, however, her brother Bill, now an old man dying of cancer, reappears from the past. Several things mark Bill as a character who transcends the garrison. In Munro's vision, mortal illness, a reminder of disorder and uncontrol, usually pushes a character into "the other country." Bill is also married to a young and delectable girl whose sexuality is apparent. And, when he takes Del to the grocery store, he buys with "an idiot largesse which threw the whole known system of rewards and

delights out of kilter." Clearly he is not now, if he has ever been, a character way of the exceptional or the spectacular, both anathema to the garrison mentality. It is Bill's memory of their mother that reveals Ada's deficiency. Whereas Ada's memory harbours the Bible incident, Bill remembers a caterpillar saved by the mother, resting in its cocoon all winter and miraculously appearing as a butterfly on Easter Sunday while his mother exclaimed, "Never forget. That's what you saw on Easter." There is an echo in the mother's cry of Uncle Benny's ecstatic proclamation of faith at the sight of the rainbow, and we are again aware of the double hook in "the other country." Crippled by her garrison views, Ada usually sees only the dark side of the hook, a view reflected in her question to Bill, "What's so good about Nature? . . . Nature is just a lot of waste and cruelty, maybe not from Nature's point of view but from a human point of view" (p. 73). Bill, on the other hand, has an intuitive perception of the hook's other prong, a perception revealed by his positive memories of his mother whose passionate faith placed her outside "the world."

This chapter reveals the complexity of Ada and, as if in a mirror, Del. Although it receives little emphasis here, Del, as in the last chapter, has again been confronted with a choice that may place her definitely inside or outside of the garrison world. The choice has been presented through Ada and Del's connection with her. Del, more subtle than her mother, clearly sees Ada's inadequacy in the eyes of "the world" and her own shame by association. She admits, "I myself was not so different from my mother, but concealed it, knowing what dangers there were." Del has again achieved a precarious position, this time deliberately, that neither commits her to the living death of the garrison — "people who all their lives could stay still, with no need to do or say anything remarkable" — nor exposes her to the danger of ridicule and vulnerability that belongs to "the other country." Thus, by the end of Chapter Three, a recurring structural principle in *Lives of Girls and Women* is established.

Chapter Four, "Age of Faith," concentrates, as the title suggests, on the question of God. Del's dilemma in this chapter arises from her own split nature. Apparently a member of the garrison, she nevertheless cannot shut her eyes to the looming outer chaos that more secure garrison members never acknowledge. A faith in God, she feels, is the only true defence against the terrors lurking just beneath the surface of things: "It seemed plain to me that this was the only way the world could be borne, *the only way it could be borne* — if all these atoms, galaxies of atoms, were safe all the time, whirling away in God's mind" (p. 84). Her awareness of the darkness recalls Uncle Benny's nightmarish description of Toronto and his horrendous newspapers, while her need for God, for the bright side of the hook, parallels his faith in the meaning of rainbows, God's covenant.

The two-edged image of the Ark is again suggested briefly in Del's description of Ada's reluctant admission of some godlike design or order.

"Not even she was prepared to say *Nothing*," and see herself and every stick and stone and feather in the world floating loose in that howling hopeless dark. No" (p. 84). Aligned with the garrison in this chapter, Ada uses the conventions of faith to hold off confrontation with the outer darkness. What Del misses in Ada's vague admission is what she misses in the United Church, popular choice of such garrison pillars as doctors, lawyers, and merchants; she finds no conviction, no passion. "What was chiefly noticeable in people's faces during the earlier, more God-directed parts of the service . . . was a kind of cohesive tact." With her "other country" perception of ever-threatening darkness, Del nevertheless remains a partially garrison figure, and the crux of the dilemma in this chapter comes when she realizes that a true faith must involve a passion and abandon that would exclude her from "the world":

Then I would imagine for a few precarious seconds a dense bright cloud descending on Jubilee, wrapping itself around my skull. But my eyes flew open in alarm; I was not able to let that in, or me out. Also I was afraid of bumping into something, being seen, making a fool of myself.
(p. 88)

Del has learned her aunts' lesson well. Finally she understands that the God of the flood, the God who could co-exist with the looming darkness of life, might "*be God not contained in the churches' net at all, not made manageable by any spells and crosses, God real, and really in the world, and alien and unacceptable as death*" (p. 96). There is no doubt that this is Uncle Benny's God, but Del, lacking Benny's unconcern for "the world" and marked by her mother's ambiguity, cannot surrender herself to such an overwhelming conception. That she has sought and grasped it mark her again as a chameleon camouflaging her differences within the garrison. That she has stopped short of surrender reveals the dilemma of her own nature and raises questions about the consequences of such sustained denial. When her little brother Owen, pupil of Del's religious questing, unexpectedly kneels to pray at the end of the chapter, Del recognizes her own emptiness and finds that "Seeing somebody have faith, close up, is no easier than seeing someone chop a finger off" (p. 97). This comparison is typical of Munro's use of images of physical deformity and injury to suggest psychological or spiritual maiming. The repeated process of Del's precarious compromise, though it keeps her apparently secure within the garrison, takes an invisible toll.

In Chapter Five, "Changes and Ceremonies," art is the lure to "the other country." Like great faith, art calls for a passionate commitment that is blind to the intricate, cautious rules of the garrison. For instance, in Jubilee, "reading books was something like chewing gum, a habit to be abandoned when the seriousness and satisfactions of adult life took over. It persisted mostly in unmarried ladies, would have been shameful in a man" (p. 99). Del

must lure Naomi, a friend who usually expresses a garrison opinion, into the library by finding passages about sex in the books she has read. Del's appreciation has been more sensitive and she "felt a slight sadness, handing this over. I was always betraying someone or somebody; it seemed the only way to get along" (p. 100). Ironically, Del has not yet realized that the person chiefly betrayed by such compromises is herself.

The central image of art in this chapter is the school's annual operetta. The operetta's director, Miss Farris, takes the place of Uncle Benny and Ada as a representative of "the other country." All the details attaching to Miss Farris — her hennaed hair, her costume-like clothes, her whimsical house — manifest her romantic and imaginative nature, a nature the garrison laughs at and fails to understand. Her greatest love is the operetta. As Del puts it, "The operetta was her passion" (p. 103), and that last word alone assures her failure in garrison terms. Del comes to understand that art, by its very nature, denies the artificial, self-perpetuating garrison order. The acknowledged social leaders may be chosen for supporting parts, but a good voice is the only qualification for the leading role, and good voices are granted willy nilly, a side effect of the whole chaotic underside of life that "the world" hopes to deny. Significantly, the operetta to be performed this year is *The Pied Piper*, a story of the children of a town lured away from their staid and prosperous parents by a magician. For a brief time each year, during the production of the operetta, this is what happens to the students of Jubilee. "Freed by the operetta from the routine of our lives, remembering the classroom where Mr. McKenna kept busy with spelling bees and mental arithmetic those not chosen, as someplace sad and dim, left behind, we were all Miss Farris' allies now" (p. 110). As a sign of her affinity for art and its passions, Del develops a crush on the boy who plays the pied piper.

The continuing dilemma of Del's chameleon nature reaches no marked crisis in this chapter, though, as in previous chapters, having gained insight into the truths of "the other country," she remains camouflaged within the garrison. With the rest of the operetta cast, she returns to the assured order of the daily classroom: "*Noses to the grindstone, shoulders to the wheel, feet on the pedals* — all these favorite expressions of Mr. McKenna's, their triteness and predictability seemed now oddly satisfying" (p. 116). Children of the garrison, Del's classmates have had their fill of disorder, perhaps sensing danger in venturing too long outside the walls of convention. That there is such danger is made clear at the end of the chapter when, four or five years later, Miss Farris commits suicide by drowning herself in the Wawanash River. As with all signs from "the other country," Jubilee finds this act "a mystery, presented without explanation, in all insolence, like a clear blue sky. No revelation here" (p. 118). The reader, however, may recall Miss Farris' comic and exasperated declaration at an operetta rehearsal: "I might as well leap off the Town Hall! I might as well leap now! Are you are prepared to take the responsibility?" This is Munro's question of the

garrison, leaving little doubt that life within its confines, no matter how apparently self-expressive, is not as safe as it seems. Like the chopped finger image of Chapter Four, Miss Farris is one of Munro's externalizations of hidden, inner damage, a sinister clue to the price Del pays for her continued social survival.

Chapters Six and Seven, "Lives of Girls and Women" and "Baptizing," form a companion pair that present two more dilemmas arising from Del's dual nature. In these two chapters, the temptation to step beyond the walls of the garrison takes the form of sexual passion. "Lives of Girls and Women" depicts the dark, repugnant side of sex; "Baptizing" shows the other, ecstatic side of the hook. As always when passion is concerned, "the world" admits neither one. Sex, as a necessity, lives an uneasy, half-hidden life within the garrison; the career of Del's friend Naomi illustrates this, whereas Del, as usual, is drawn beyond the garrison conventions to a more intense experience.

As the theme of sexuality is introduced in "Lives of Girls and Women," Del and the reader have increasing difficulty recognizing the limits of "the world" and "the other country." Munro reveals that, in fact, the division is not as simple as reaching the edge of town. For instance, situated in Jubilee, fittingly located behind the service station and filling much the same utilitarian role in Jubilee life, is a house of ill repute. Del is surprised by the everyday appearance of this place: "I did expect something — a foul shimmer of corruption, some emanation like marsh gas." Intuitively she understands the distinction between the prostitutes and "the world" and expects some clear dividing mark. For a moment in their wanderings about town, Del and Naomi come across peacocks, beautiful symbols of sexuality, "Glory in the cold spring, a wonder of Jubilee." Using geography symbolically again, Munro places the peacocks in the yard of the man who drives the Jubilee garbage truck; recognition of the possible beauty of sexuality cannot belong to mainstream Jubilee. The beauty of the peacocks touches Del, but that half of the hook eludes her in this chapter. Instead, she encounters Mr. Chamberlain, a boyfriend of Ada's boarder Fern. Mr. Chamberlain paws Del secretly and assumes her compliance in his plan to rob Fern of his old love letters. Essentially a garrison figure, Mr. Chamberlain's sexuality is furtive and deforming. He writes on an envelope, "*Del is a bad girl,*" and Del wonders about this interpretation of that whole secret half of herself that she has struggled to hide from the eye of "the world." Finally, abandoning herself to her sexuality and her desire for knowledge, Del submits to a rendez-vous in which Mr. Chamberlain drives her, again symbolically, outside of town. Del expects to be seduced, and her passive acceptance recalls once more her biting of her cousin and her expectation of some subsequent expulsion from the garrison. Faced with her continuing dilemma, Del has chosen, in this chapter, to step into "the other country." However, Mr. Chamberlain simply masturbates in front of her and

returns her to town. Apparently, in spite of her surrender, nothing has changed; Del returns to the garrison, and Mr. Chamberlain leaves Jubilee. Only now does Del begin to appreciate the intricacy of garrison boundaries, the pervasiveness of mere appearance and the difficulty of discerning limits. "My faith in simple depravity had weakened. Perhaps nowhere but in daydreams did the trap door open so sweetly and easily plunging bodies altogether free of thought, free of personality, into self-indulgence, mad, bad license" (pp. 144-45). Once more she has been confronted with the choice between two worlds; and, real though the division is and dangerous as trespassing can prove to be, Del has again maintained her chameleon position, hiding her intimations of "the other country" behind an appearance of normalcy and acceptance.

In the final beautiful chapter, "Baptizing," Del wanders farther than ever before into "the other country" and is confronted with the ultimate form of her dilemma; her decision is somewhat ambiguous because, in this chapter, the tendency for the division between Munro's two countries to blur is more pronounced than ever. By now, Del is becoming a woman, and the conventional roads to adulthood are well marked. Naomi follows them without hesitation, taking a job in an office, storing up a trousseau, going to dances, getting pregnant and married (an order of events conveniently overlooked by Jubilee as long as it ends within the norm). Naomi philosophically accepts her fate (unlike Del, she has visions of no other), yet part of her feels cheated, and she warns Del, "You better be careful."

"Baptizing" is the companion piece to "Lives of Girls and Women," and in it Del experiences the opposite half of the truth of which Mr. Chamberlain was the dark side. Del meets Garnet French at a revival meeting. Later she learns that he has been in jail, has been saved by the Baptists, and lives in Jericho Valley far outside of town, all details that indicate Garnet's dubious position in "the world." The road to Garnet's house passes through wild roses, thick bush, and a field of stumps, images suggesting the variety to be found in "the other country." Del and Garnet make love, and in this act she experiences the glory of the peacock, a complete release from garrison mediocrity:

The mouth closed frankly around the nipple seemed to make an avowal of innocence, defencelessness, not because it imitated a baby's but because it was not afraid of absurdity. Sex seemed to me all surrender — not the woman's to the man but the person's to the body, an act of faith, freedom in humility. (p. 181)

In her complete abandon, she forgets caution and burns her bridges. Her school work slides, and she fails to win the expected scholarship; that road to freedom, if it was one, has been lost. She is left with Garnet, and their passion suddenly seems to develop a second face. Garnet wants to get married, and he wants Del to become a Baptist. She senses that he wants

some kind of denial of her dreams — books, art, knowledge — which threaten him. They go swimming in the river and end by struggling over a symbolic baptizing. Del frees herself, returns home, and the relationship is over. Apparently another crisis has been faced, and Del has rejected the path to “the other country.” She seems to assess it this way, accusing herself of “matching my complexity and play-acting to his true intent” (p. 198). The reader, however, increasingly aware of the complexity of Munro’s divisions, wonders if Garnet, despite initial appearances, has not simply offered Del another route to the garrison. While in the water, Del has the sinister feeling “that he might drown me. I really thought that I was fighting for my life” (p. 198). Whether the drowning she fears symbolizes submergence in the garrison or an irrevocable surrender to “the other country” is finally impossible to decide, so complex has Munro’s vision become. In either case, however, at the end of this chapter, Del remains, as in other chapters, perched tenuously between the extremes in her own nature.

In the Epilogue to *Lives of Girls and Women* entitled “The Photographer,” no new dilemma is faced. Instead the consequence of Del’s sustained camouflage is suggested. The epilogue begins with Ada’s assertion that “This town is rife with suicides.” Del disputes this statement with reason and statistics, but, in a spiritual sense, in the same sense that Miss Farris’ suicide externalized her hidden inner pain and that of many seeming stoical survivors, Ada is right; her observation becomes a comment on Del. Del has, at one time, been writing a novel which is her unconscious exposé of “the world” and its pretenses. In her novel, Jubilee is distorted and darkened, and all its people become evasive madmen. “The main thing was that it seemed true to me, not real but true, as if I had discovered, not made up, such people and such a story, as if that town was lying close behind the one I walked through every day” (p. 206). The novel is the expression of Del’s continuing affinity for the vision of “the other country,” but also, in its gothic exaggeration, an indication of her simplicity, her continuing assumption that divisions are clear, that values are black and white; this was the mentality that expected the whorehouse to be covered in swamp gas and Mr. Chamberlain to turn her, in an afternoon, from schoolgirl to whore. In the period of the epilogue, however, the summer after Del has done poorly on her exams and broken with Garnet, she has forgotten the novel:

I had not thought of my novel. I hardly ever did think of it, any more. I never said to myself that I had lost it, but I believed that it was carefully stored away, to be brought out some time in the future. The truth was that some damage had been done to it that I knew could not be put right. Damage had been done . . . I had lost faith. But I did not want to think about that, and did not. (p. 208)

What Del has failed to realize, as the reader may not have until “Baptizing,” is that loss of “the world” or “the other country” may not be marked by crisis

or other definite, unmistakable signs. Little by little, in small ways, Del's continuing compromise between the halves of herself has had a price, a price suggested by her loss of the novel and Ada's remark about Jubilee's suicides. The irony is that although Del has seemed momentarily safe after each crisis of the progressing chapters and although she has seemed to maintain her inner individuality without sacrificing social survival, the very nature of her compromise has damaged and blunted her. The epilogue ends with a chance confrontation between Del and Bobby Sherriff, a boy who is home on holiday from an asylum. Incongruously serving her lemonade and cake, this character from "the other country" wishes Del well, smiles, and rises on his toes like a ballerina. The motion seems to Del, who remains semi-abstracted and self-absorbed, "to be a joke not shared with me so much as displayed for me, and it seemed also to have a concise meaning, a stylized meaning — to be a letter, or a whole word, in an alphabet I did not know" (p. 211). Lost as she is in the dullness and half-life of "the world," with her intuition of "the other country" damaged, Del fails to understand this sign, a beautiful gesture to the wounded part of herself. The one basis for optimism lies in her final decision to leave Jubilee and in the fact that all of *Lives of Girls and Women* is told, with benefit of hindsight, by an older Del who has presumably recovered her novel and its vision. This later novel is *Lives of Girls and Women* itself, less gothic and simplistic in its distinctions than the one Del was writing and, therefore, a truer revelation of Munro's divided world.

Lives of Girls and Women is constructed from chapter to chapter around a series of parallel crises in which Del Jordan must make a decision between "the world" and "the other country." Repeatedly, Del, either through choice or chance, ends in a compromise position, a chameleon within the garrison, uncommitted. As the chapters go on and Del grows up, a sense of tension grows; each crisis seems more serious, less easily resolved. The subtlety of the novel and of Munro's vision is demonstrated by Del's final, though perhaps only temporary, loss of "the other country" in herself. This loss has come not suddenly in the midst of one of the novel's crises, but casually, by stealth, amid the details of everyday life. The reader finally perceives that the repeated crises have been partial illusions masking a creeping decay and that day-to-day life is a greater illusion, "deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum." As with Uncle Benny, it is Munro's triumph "to make us see."