

# The Moons of Jupiter 1982

Excerpt from *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel* by W. R. Martin

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS VOLUME OF Alice Munro's stories shows both familiar and new features. It deals with strange oppositions and mysterious contradictions that ask for resolution or at least recognition. Also, like *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*--the previous collection of apparently unlinked stories--it has an integrity which, though less obvious than that in *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*, is as important as it is subtle. If *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* is a cluster of small constellations, *The Moons of Jupiter*--as its title suggests--has a tighter organisation and is more like a single system.

One of the first things one notices is that the stories are set in Ontario again, especially in small country towns. "*Dulse*" has its episodes mainly in the Maritimes, and "*Bardon Bus*" some as far afield as Australia, but only because characters in them, who live in Ontario, have travelled to these places. The second half of "*Connection*" is set in Vancouver, but here the narrator feels the powerful force exerted by Huron County over the great distance that separates it from the west coast. Martin Knelman reports that Alice Munro "believes now" [ 1979] that what "propelled" her to write about "her own material" was "the distance between Vancouver and Huron County. " <sup>1</sup>The *Moons of Jupiter* is clearly rooted in southwestern Ontario: the Hanratty of *Who Do You Think You Are?* reappears, and Logan and especially Dalglish are not altogether different from the Jubilee of *Lives of Girls and Women*. But there are heights and depths, even in rural Ontario; from it the imagination can reach to Jupiter and its moons.

Another general comment that might be made about *The Moons of Jupiter* is in point of style. The figures and ideas presented are less striking or sensational, the surface of words less coruscating than in *Lives of Girls and Women*, for instance. Thinking of Jane Austen again, one might remember what she half-seriously said of the "playfulness and epigrammatism of the style" of *Pride and Prejudice*: it was "too light, and bright, and sparkling." Her later novels were different, though never solemn, and greater.

But there is no sharp and distinct line in Alice Munro. In the first story in *The Moons of Jupiter* we find some of the earlier almost outrageous exuberance and mischief: "Poverty, to Richard's family, was like bad breath or running sores, an affliction for which the afflicted must bear one part of the blame. But it was not good manners to notice" (12); this has the bite and wit that reached its apogee in *Lives of Girls and Women* but is still a marked characteristic in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Instead of being conspicuously vivacious, paradoxical, droll and divertive, Alice Munro's style has become sparer, more exact and incisive. The change is partly a natural consequence of adopting third-person narration. One of the advantages of first-person narration is the opportunity for the fireworks of personal feeling, prejudice and animus. It is appropriate for reflecting the excitement of an imaginative girl like Del, who is making discoveries, judging rashly, and then reversing her opinions. The third-person is appropriate in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Because it gives us more direct, less subjective bearings on Rose's dilemmas on her journey to a balanced maturity and vision. This is not a simple matter, however. The third-person narrative in *Who Do You Think You Are?* still reflects some of Rose's feelings, sometimes quite directly, as in, for example, "She saw them [the Vancouvers] in her mind shaped

rather like octopuses, twitching in the pan. The tumble of reason; the spark and spit of craziness" (*Who*, 12), and some of the best stories in *The Moons of Jupiter* are narrated in the first person. There is

the interesting case of "*Dulse*," which was in the first person when it appeared in *The New Yorker* (21 July 1980), and is now narrated in the third person, perhaps because Alice Munro felt that as narrator Lydia was having to know and reveal too much about herself without the benefits of hindsight and a greater maturity.

Sometimes in this new volume Alice Munro attains the best of both, or several, worlds, in the manner of *Lives of Girls and Women*. In the first two stories and in "*The Turkey Season*," for example, there is the vigour, freshness or confusion of a young first-person narrator, but also the irony of a mature moral perspective that we saw emerging as early as "Boys and Girls" in *Dance of the Happy Shades*, but there is more emphasis on the fact that the narrator is telling the story and commenting on the events long after they occurred. This method accommodates very naturally that particular inward-turning or spiral development that Alice Munro's vision--as we have seen--so often generates. In "*Connection*," for example, as in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the narration moves quite clearly towards a reaffirmation, though with a difference, of the attitudes and values virtually disowned when the protagonist left rural Ontario. One result of this is that there is less fizz, but more salt, in the narration.

If there is often less liveliness in the new style and the method of third-person narration, there is also abundant recompense, enough fully to justify the selection of *The Moons of Jupiter* by the editor of the *New York Times Book Review* (4 December 1983) as one of the thirteen best books of the year. Although from the beginning Alice Munro has shown a strong architectonic sense, it is in her masterly control of detail, in the way in which she shapes and orders so much intellectual substance into a whole that is charged with meanings and is coherent without seeming contrived, that the new power is mainly felt. Gerald Noonan remarks on something like this apropos of *Who Do You Think You Are?*: "Munro's sense of life as paradox is not softened by the shift in technique; paradox is presented more directly."<sup>3</sup> Even when the material is as diverse and at first bewildering as it is in "*Hard-Luck Stories*" and "*Bardon Bus*," the details are skillfully placed and the instinct sure. In the revision of "*The Stone in the Field*," instead of the father "shaking hands" with his sisters, even if "quickly," as he does in the version in *Saturday Night* (April 1979), there is now "no touch" at all (25). Every stroke of the brush contributes to the complex unity of the whole.

The new force and resonance comes in part at least from a fuller command of allegory and symbol. We have seen allegory in, for example, the description of the Japanese garden in "*Memorial*" and the train's passage to its destination in "*Wild Swans*." But these are in a sense translations, and at the end of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, when Rose comes up against the difficulty of defining or expressing what she feels for Ralph Gillespie, she concludes that even translations are "dubious" and "dangerous" (*Who*, 206). The answer is implied in *The Moons of Jupiter*: these feelings, which go beyond sexual attraction, can be conveyed in poetic symbols. Only they have the capacity to convey this and other complex meanings, and they do this by virtue of their concentration and power. These symbols now sometimes emerge as titles, which indicates their new importance. Whereas before the titles tended to announce themes, such as "*Mischief*" and "*Providence*," or point to central incidents, such as "*Royal Beatings*" and "*Spelling*," now one finds titles like "*The Stone in the Field*," "*Dulse*," and "*The Moons of Jupiter*,"

which contain meanings that defy complete definition: they name objects that are symbols. Alice Munro probably aspired to symbolism from the beginning. She has said: "Things are symbolic but . . . their symbolism is infinitely complex and never completely discovered." <sup>4</sup> When we come to stories such as "*Prue*," "*Labor Day Dinner*" and "*Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd*," we shall see that Alice Munro evolves a mode that dispenses altogether with a reflector such as Del or Rose, and uses detached omniscience in the narration. It therefore relies almost wholly on the value of image, symbol and dramatic incident.

It may be significant that *The Moons of Jupiter* is the only volume since *Dance of the Happy Shades* that does not end with a reflection on the limitations of art. The closest that *The Moons of Jupiter* comes to this theme is a passage in "*The Stone in the Field*": the narrator can "no longer believe that people's secrets are defined and communicable, or their feelings full-blown and easy to recognize" (35). The next story is "*Dulse*," where the secret is communicated, but in a symbol.

There are various kinds of development in the volume. It is as if in this volume Alice Munro were bringing together the forms of the constellation and the pendant. But the progression is somewhat irregular rather than steady and arithmetical. Firstly, the protagonists are older in each story; at first they are young--one is a girl--then mature, then middle-aged. In the last stories several are elderly. The approach of age becomes a theme, and the problem is how to deal with it. Secondly, after the two opening stories, there is a concentration on personal attachments, and in general the progression is from an involvement with passionate sexual love in the earlier stories, to discoveries of something beyond physical obsession in the later stories. The relation between Valerie and her friends in "*Labor Day Dinner*," between Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd, between Wilfred and Mildred in "*Visitors*," and between father and daughter in "*The Moons of Jupiter*," are all different and not easy to define, but they are all beyond what we commonly mean by "sexual." Compared with the grossness in "*The Turkey Season*" and the scarcely disguised animality in "*Accident*," the later sentiments, though strong, are rarefied and elevated, though one hesitates to use the word spiritual.

In this volume it seems that Alice Munro is revolving in her mind a theme she mentioned to Carole Gerson after the publication of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and not long before the appearance of *The Moons of Jupiter*: "Whether you settle for a kind of freedom and happiness that doesn't necessarily contain erotic love, whether there is such a thing, or whether in choosing freedom you have to deliberately put that kind of happiness behind you, or whether everything's possible--I think it is, sometimes." The sexual bond is not devalued; it is seen as compelling, but the volume's enquiry reaches out to forms of attachment that are less substantial and rarer and in a sense therefore more mysterious and perhaps precious.

A study of the stories in their order in the volume will disclose how it is organised. The first two stand a little apart from the rest, as is indicated under "*Contents*." If they do not have all the brilliance of the stories that open the earlier volumes, they deal with a theme that is central in Alice Munro and, being solid achievements in themselves, they form an archway through which passes the road that winds but leads ultimately to the climactic story that gives its title to the volume. There we meet the most enlightened and least obsessive of all the strange varieties of love, but also death, and Jupiter, the greatest of the gods.

## The Opening Pair

### "CHADDELEYS AND FLEMINGS"

The first two stories, "*Connection*" and "*The Stone in the Field*," are put together for a reason that is obvious: in both there is a scrutiny of her antecedents by a girl or young woman who finds herself now in an

ethos altogether different. The first presents the narrator's mother's family and the second her father's. The question that teases her is: how is it possible that she draws her being from sources so diverse and apparently so unlike herself? It is a variation of the question that bore in on Del in *Lives of Girls and Women* and involved Uncle Benny, aunts and an uncle, and a dead cow. This narrator's mother's relations are "in favor of movement, noise, change, flashiness, hilarity, and courage"-- in a word, "fun" (16)--whereas the father's six elder sisters, all unmarried, live together in the house where they were born, rigidly confined within their simple but stern ethos; they resist all change and in fact "belonged in another generation" (22).

Thus the two stories stand at the opening of the volume like an entrance that the narrator must pass through before she can know or come to terms with herself and begin her life. Passing through entails acknowledging, accepting, and somehow resolving the oppositions and contradictions that meet in herself, or at least framing a view that will accommodate the strange incongruities. She is facing the sort of questions that Del met, but she is less lively and imaginative than the heroine of *Lives of Girls and Women*.

When she was a child her mother's cousins were exciting and amusing as visitors in the small Ontario town, but now the narrator is married to a Vancouver lawyer who--the case of Patrick and Rose is repeated-- taunts her with what he regards as an uncivilised "background" (12); but then again she feels guilty about her vulnerability on this score. She is another of Alice Munro's many intelligent, sensitive and morally perceptive protagonists who find themselves under pressure in the middle, between two opposites. But the signs are that she will escape from the snobberies and artificial gentilities that have her captive. She is already able to recognise and salute the courage and vitality that Cousin Iris represents, and in the last story in *The Moons of Jupiter* we find that she has left Richard (228), but only after having had two daughters by him.

The companion piece, "*The Stone in the Field*," presents a problem that is similar and yet different. Although the feeling here is less of shame and guilt than of incredulity: "I couldn't really think of her [one of her father's sisters] as my aunt; the connection seemed impossible" (22), her aunts do cause her to feel "bewilderment and unexplainable guilt" when she receives a card from one of them and realises that they "were still there, still attached to me" (31). They seem to belong to a primordial era. (There are stronger suggestions of this in the *The Moons of Jupiter* version than in the earlier version in *Saturday Night* [April 1979].) They live in a world felt to be antique: the gulf between them and the narrator is emphasised by the fact that her mother works with a dealer in antiques; "possibly the word antique was not known to [her aunts]" (28). In the end they have disappeared as completely as the stone in the field;

not only does their place know them no more, but it has been taken by people with an ethos altogether antithetical to theirs. A sentence that appears in *Visitors* is relevant here: "Brothers and sisters were a mystery" (212).

The name of the narrator of these two stories does not appear, but in the last story, *The Moons of Jupiter*, we recognize that we have the same narrator again with the same father, and her name is Janet. These three stories were removed--as we have seen--from *Who Do You Think You Are?* just before it was published. *Connection* and *The Stone in the Field* are accomplished pieces, and, in the youth of their protagonists and in the questions they raise, these twin stories constitute a fine opening for *The Moons of Jupiter*, but thematically and technically they remind one of *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* *The Moons of Jupiter* is another matter.

## Five Stories: From "Dulse" to "Prue"

### "DULSE"

The third story, *Dulse*, is still in a sense introductory, setting out before us a set of possibilities. The protagonist is forty-five, and works for a publisher. Divorced nine years before, now on the rebound from an affair with Duncan, a very detached and private person, she has withdrawn to "an island off the southern coast of New Brunswick" (36) as if to get as far away from human involvement as possible.

But she is soon playing Skat with three workmen of the New Brunswick Telephone Company, who are of course in a literal sense attaching the off-shore island to the mainland. Here we see Alice Munro's new architectonic sense working with allegory and other artistic structures: these three--the boss, Lawrence, Eugene and Vincent--provide a spectrum of choices. "She thought about what those men would have been like, as lovers." Lawrence, nearest her in age, is "cheerful, hearty, prudent" (51), but his "teasing amounted to bullying" (45); his approach is "vulgar," but he "would have been her reasonable choice" (51); Eugene, twenty-five, has "a masculine beauty that was nevertheless soft-edged, sweet-tempered, bashful," allows the other two to tease him (45), and "would be a grateful, self-forgetful lover" (51). Both Lawrence and Eugene are available: "she could have gone to Eugene, and earlier in the evening she could have given a sign to Lawrence" (50). But, strangely enough, it is Vincent, fifty-two, who interests her most: "she could not imagine him as she easily imagined the others"; she "was shy of thinking any such things about him," with his "courtesy and reticence and humor, his inability to better his luck" (51). It is Vincent--whose name means "winning" or "vanquishing"--who unobtrusively leaves her the bag of dulse, which was "so good for you" (47); this is a sign, but of a kind of love different from the love Lydia might have enjoyed with Lawrence, less physical, more refined. It is a mode that Lydia has yet to learn. She has already tried those associated with Eugene and Lawrence, but now Vincent opens up for her the possibility of a new kind of relationship.

It is significant too that Vincent seems to Lydia "the sort of man she had known when she was a child living on a farm not so different from his, the sort of man who must have been in her family for hundreds of years" (52). He is another kind of connection, spiritual rather than physical, though the refined affection involved--offered "from a

distance" (59)--is more fully manifest in the dying father at the very end of *The Moons of Jupiter*. In this way "*Dulse*" sets up a wide arch that spans the volume, and the end will in a sense be another return to the beginning, but with a difference.

One should notice the emphasis on Lydia's transition: "she had stopped being one sort of woman and had become another." It is as if her sex-appeal is failing: "people were no longer so interested in getting to know her" (36). She needs to discover a mode of love appropriate to middle-age, and perhaps old age. At the end of the story she is "getting to like" *dulse* (58), which is sweet by name and sustaining both physically and metaphysically, literally and symbolically.

The host and hostess in "*Dulse*" provide a comment on attachment and detachment, but more prominent and interesting is the elderly Mr. Stanley, who is a model of another choice Lydia might conceivably make: he has enclosed himself in a detached privacy by becoming a devotee of the writer Willa Cather, who has been dead for many years. Lest we or Lydia should feel condescending towards him and the "lovely, durable shelter he had made for himself" (59), he administers a polite but telling rebuke to Lydia. When Lydia almost scornfully suggests that Willa Cather could have had nothing helpful to say about married love, presumably because she was a lesbian, Mr. Stanley replies: "She knew things as an artist knows them. Not necessarily by experience" (57).<sup>2</sup> This is a truth that Lydia, though she is a poet, has overlooked. Nevertheless Mr. Stanley's solution is not open to her because she is the sort of person who needs human attachment, company and warmth; she will always be drawn to a game of Skat with a Lawrence, a Eugene, and perhaps a Vincent. "*Dulse*" is proleptic, indicating something of the scope of the volume as a whole.

### "THE TURKEY SEASON"

This story follows "*Dulse*" and with its atmosphere of brutality and coarseness--words like "gutter" and "gutting" strike at the very beginning a note that is sustained--it stands on the lowest rung of the ladder of relationships in *The Moons of Jupiter*. The narrator is--at the time of the events in the story--a fourteen-year-old girl, intelligent and refined enough to be in the Turkey Barn but not of it, and thus an effective commentator. She is another of the narrators in the middle, and again this narrator is looking back from her maturity. The centre of attention is Herb Abbott, the foreman, of unstated age, but apparently a good deal younger than Lydia in "*Dulse*."

At the heart of the story is a mystery, never fully resolved: how is it that a man as capable and, in a real sense, as distinguished as Herb, who is attractive to and sought after by three very different kinds of women--again as in "*Dulse*," Alice Munro achieves the effect of a spectrum by portraying Lily and Marjorie, the coarse and brutal voluptuaries, the genteel Gladys, and the young, "educated" (62), idealistic narrator, for whom Herb has something to do with "a sense of promise and . . . of perfect, impenetrable mystery in the universe" (68)--how is it that such a man should be drawn so compulsively to Brian, a mere boy of eighteen or nineteen, worthless, foul-mouthed and a ne'er-do-well, who "seemed just like somebody with a bad case of hiccups--his insistent sexuality was that

monotonous and meaningless" (69). It is not a question "of whether Herb was homosexual or not, because the definition is of no use to me. . . . He is not a puzzle so arbitrarily solved"(65). It is too slick an explanation; even if true, it still leaves the question of why Herb is drawn to someone of Brian's quality.

The narrator ponders "contradictions" (68) in the lives of Lily and Marjorie, and especially the question: "How could these women's hands be so gifted, so delicate and clever . . . and their thinking so slapdash, clumsy, infuriating?" (68). The mystery about Herb is a far more urgent one for the narrator, and for them all, and more baffling because his qualities are greater: he had "the efficiency and honor of the [turkey] business continually on his mind" (62), and his vulnerability is therefore all the more conspicuous.

What intensifies the mystery is that Herb, in his "dignity" (74) and aloofness, is something of a loner; he is "circumspect"(64) and keeps all his admirers at a distance. His surname, Abbott, has an effective resonance. And yet, "Isn't it true that people like Herb--dignified, secretive, honorable people--will often choose somebody like Brian, will waste their helpless love on some vicious, silly person who is not even evil, or a monster, but just some importunate nuisance?" (74); Brian, "mixing insult and provocation" and "turning all his assets into parody" (69), seems even lower in the scale than Lily and Marjorie, whereas Herb has some of the "courtesy and reticence" (51) of Vincent in "*Dulce*. " We are facing a mystery somewhat reminiscent of those that surround, for example--to take only one of Alice Munro's earlier books-- Uncle Benny, Madeleine Howey, Mr. Chamberlain and Bobby Sherriff in *Lives of Girls and Women*. At the end of the story, "Herb walked off by himself" (76), leaving us with the enigma: the strangeness of something as familiar as physical attraction, one of the most disconcerting faces that love can present.

"*The Turkey Season*" is one of the most successful stories in the volume. Its vivid images horrify, and the low dialogue is utterly convincing; it has a taut dramatic structure producing a climax that brings together the various threads. The ending is a triumph of sardonic irony: the turkey-gutters sing their coarse parody of "*We Three Kings*" and convert the dream of a white Christmas into a gory shambles to make a Christian holiday.

### "ACCIDENT"

Next comes "Accident, " which was moved up one place between the proof-stage and the publication of "The Moons of Jupiter" so that it comes before instead of after "*Bardon Bus*." Alice Munro made this change perhaps because, although like "*The Turkey Season*" it gives prominence to physical compulsion, "Accident" presents it in a form that is more familiar, and therefore perhaps only seemingly less mysterious and less coarse. The attraction here is one rung higher on the ladder, but the story is less successful.

"Accident" is the longest story in "The Moons of Jupiter", but not the best. One can see reasons for its place in the design of the volume. Herb in the previous story was perhaps thirty; here Frances, if she is the same age as her friends, is in her "early thirties" (82), and Ted, her lover, is "under forty" (83). The atmosphere in "Accident" does not reek as grossly of gore and sexuality as does that of "*The Turkey Season*, " but it is disturbing enough, having a

similar source in naked, unrefined sexual desire, a "painful kind of lust" (85). The story fits into the scheme of "The Moons of Jupiter".

"Accident" was first published in November 1977 (in *Toronto Life*); the second story published, "The Moons of Jupiter," appeared in May 1978 (in *The New Yorker*) and the third, "*The Stone in the Field*," (in *Saturday Night*) not until April 1979, almost a year later. The first two stories mark out extreme opposite limits in human relationships and so constitute a sort of frame for the volume. "Accident" may in some sense have provided the seed for the pendant that "The Moons of Jupiter" is. If this is so, one can see that it would occupy a significant place in Alice Munro's mind and I must therefore take up more space than usual to justify my relatively unfavourable estimate of the story. But first we must see how it takes its place in the volume.

It is a tragedy; the statement near the end of the story that, many years later, "inside she's . . . the same Frances who was there before any of it" (109), brings no comfort because here Frances's intelligent and ironic vision is trying to save her from bitterness. The truth is that, just as she used "[to shy] away sometimes . . . from hearing what people [had] to say" about Ted (80), so now too there are things that are "too ugly to think about" (109), or conclusions too ugly to come to. When she says, "We will have to be careful" (107), she means "careful to avoid admitting the truth." The poignancy of this conclusion perhaps redeems the story.

Frances's story is grim. She is not the narrator of the story, but she is a typical Munroian protagonist, a sensitive music teacher; her favourite composer is Mozart, who seems to connote the elegance, wit, and refinement of feeling that Frances finds so conspicuously lacking in Hanratty. Ted, a teacher of science, has "no interest in music" (105). Alice Munro sets up the same sort of unfulfilling relationship that there is in "*Dulse*" between Lydia and Duncan.

Frances is confined within the suffocating, small-town air of Hanratty and has to live with her mother, who is appallingly torpid, insensitive and self-centred: her only interest is in physical gratification, through food, not sex. Frances is also thrown together a good deal with her sister-in-law, in whom obsession with the physical takes the form of an "insider's knowledge" of an undertaker's procedures (92). Hanratty's preoccupation with the grossly physical expresses itself in humour too: Adelaide "had enjoyed a year or two of sexual popularity, or notoriety, puns being frequently made on her name" (95).

Frances really belongs to a sphere above the physical. To take one apparently insignificant detail, it is noticeable that "of course, Frances had forgotten" to buy the pork chops that her mother is looking forward to (91). We feel Frances's dissatisfaction--her "disgust" (96)--from the beginning in her impatience, irritations and restlessness. Her condition is almost aggravated by the fact that she once did escape, to the conservatory of music, for four years (80). We feel a great pity for her; the title of the story refers primarily to the accident that kills Ted's son, but more shrewdly to the accident that involves her sexually with one who is really so alien to her. She takes up with Ted because she must escape somehow from the dullness and limitations of Hanratty. The story is a tissue of unlucky accidents. Frances forgot the pork chops, but her mother at the crucial moment forgot to tell Frances "that the minister had phoned and wanted Frances to call him back" (105); he might perhaps have given her strength to refuse to marry Ted. When the titles of the stories in "The Moons of Jupiter" do not declare a symbol, they incline to an

irony that is absent in the titles of earlier stories: irony is pungent in "*The Turkey Season*," "*Hard-Luck Stories*," and "Accident," somewhat muted in "*Labor Day Dinner*," and pathetic in "*Prue*."

Although "Accident" is carefully structured, coherent, and in parts moving, its effects, compared with those in most other stories in *The Moons of Jupiter*, seem laboured; words such as "orgy" and "aphrodisiac" have been removed from the story since its first appearance, but the meanings are still so clearly emphasised that it brings to mind some of the early "formula" stories--"*The Idyllic Summer*," for instance. Frances's sensations during the lovemaking in Ted's supply room--"a sort of pantry" (82), which reinforces the connection between food and sex in Hanratty--are graphically conveyed, and what is constantly underlined is the physical and even anatomical detail--"the long stomach ulcer scar, the appendectomy scar" (86); there are "a human skeleton and a cat's, some bottled organs, or maybe organisms" (82) in Ted's supply room. This physical basis has been skillfully led up to from the beginning of the story, when Frances's irritability manifested itself physically. But, though we never lose sympathy with Frances, we weary a little of the demonstrations that in taking up with Ted she is making a bad mistake. Not only does she avoid the truth, but Ted is so clearly an unsatisfactory character from the beginning: even Frances knows that "his classroom behavior is different from what he has led her or anyone to believe" (79). A strange sort of split in him, a fundamental dishonesty, is constantly emphasised. He comes as close to the plain, unmysterious, unamusing, and really not very interesting villain of melodrama as does any character in Alice Munro. There is a curious animus against him: even the facts that he is "not in the war"--it is 1943--and looks "*Tartarish*" (83) seem to count against him. The presentation of Ted lacks the larger sympathy or understanding that embraces and takes delight even in villains and that Alice Munro showed in the portrait of, for example, Madeleine Howey and Mr. Chamberlain in *Lives of Girls and Women*.

The affair between Frances and Ted is unsatisfactory not only because Frances is doing some sort of violence to herself: both have to "make [a] switch" or manage a curious "crossover" (83) before they can make love satisfactorily, and their lovemaking is almost literally unhallowed. The regular and in fact routine assignation for their very deliberate lovemaking is at the church, indeed in the Sunday-school classroom, and moreover on a Wednesday night, presumably the most unsanctified time because the furthest removed from the Sunday morning church service. The weight of all these ironies is not qualified by any countervailing force. What one misses is a dynamic interplay between two modes or principles, almost equally valid, and working perhaps through some creative friction towards a resolution or epiphany. Frances is too passive a victim, the situation too static, and the irony that oppressively informs the comments on Hanratty is too persistently sardonic, as when Ted's young daughters skate to the "blurry music" of a Strauss waltz, and enjoy "in a subdued and guilty way, the attention their brother's death was bringing to them" (106).

Even the imagery seems sometimes too obviously allegorical and pat: the insistence on the narrowness of both the supply room (82) and the classroom (100), the two places where they make love, plainly makes them correspond to the town, Hanratty, itself, which is "such a narrow place, crude without the compensations of the wilderness, cramped without any urban variety or life" (96). Similarly the way in which Frances is "trying to get her [Plymouth's] spinning wheels out of a drift" (89) makes its point less subtly than the reader of Alice Munro expects. In method of

approach "Accident" is perhaps a transitional story. Alice Munro seems here to be working very deliberately with images, motifs, allegory and symbol to achieve an elaborate structure and a fully documented atmosphere but not to have arrived at the tact and delicate control that declare themselves apparently so effortlessly in "The Moons of Jupiter", " published only six months later.

It is interesting to notice that in "Accident, " by making Ted and Frances profane the United Church premises, Alice Munro is leaning on or referring to something like a traditional Christian framework of ideas. The very next story, "*Bardon Bus*," invokes the concept of the "soul" (111, 127), which goes back to St. Paul and beyond him to Plato, and "The Moons of Jupiter" uses machinery that goes back beyond Plato to the origins of ancient Greece. Alice Munro comes to master all the resources and traditions of Western art and civilisation, but meanwhile, in "Accident, " the effect of the Christian apparatus is to make the moral somewhat ponderous and the story rather obvious and uninteresting.

### "BARDON BUS"

"*Bardon Bus*" is interesting as a successor to "Accident. " It is a contrast in that its meaning is far from plain. Again, the protagonist is older: she is older than Dennis, who "must be thirty-five" (118) when she narrates the story. The story is about a crisis: she must accommodate herself to the loss of her lover, X, and, like Frances, to what she feels is the dullness of the quotidian. (Thus the two stories make a pair like, for example, "Marrakesh" and "The Spanish Lady" in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*.) As we have seen, this theme is at the very centre of Alice Munro's fiction, involving the familiar, the ordinary and the banal on the one hand, and on the other the strange, the exciting and the romantic. If life is to be fulfilling, the touchable and the profane must at some point meet the mysterious and the divine.

The narrator in "Bardon Bus" has at least once attained this transcendence, but only in Australia, which, with its "*jacaranda, poinciana, frangipani*" and "*kookaburras*" (119), is the exotic setting for her short

but supremely happy liaison with X: "everything seemed familiar and yet not to be confused with anything we had known in the past"; even shopping "for groceries at Woolworths" (112) was an intense experience. All sorts of antinomies, such as freedom and security, were reconciled: "We felt we knew the lives of the housewives. . . . This familiarity was not oppressive but delightful"; "we had a holiday of lightness of spirit without the holiday feeling of being at loose ends. " And all this time they went about their usual tasks: "Every day X went off to the university and I went downtown to the research library"(112-13) to work on the book of "family history which some rich people [were] paying" her to write (111). The story provides a glimpse of a happier, higher and fuller love relationship than any we have seen thus far in the volume, though Vincent's dulse gave a hint of something like it. But this happiness was all in "*Australia Felix*" (113); the narrator's problem-- and it is the one that Frances failed to solve in "Accident"--is that she feels very differently when, "lying on a mattress on the floor of Kay's apartment at the corner of Queen and Bathurst streets [in mundane Toronto], " she is aware of "the streets full of people going to

work, the street cars stopping and starting and creaking on the turn" (114); in the Australian city the prosaic-sounding "*Bardon Bus, No. 144*" (112) had connoted for her nothing but various excitements and intense felicity. This is an example of a much more successful, because less obtrusive but evocative, working of motif and symbol than we find in "Accident."

The situation in the story is thus far as it is in "Accident." But "Bardon Bus," though appreciably shorter, has a much fuller development and is among Alice Munro's best stories, presenting oppositions and interaction, and having a dynamic structure. This is easily seen by considering the character of Kay, who is in contrast to the narrator. Where the narrator fails, Kay succeeds, even in Toronto. It is true she lives on a farm outside, but she "keeps this place in Toronto" (115) and transforms it by, for example, making "the mattresses on the floor look more like divans and less like mattresses." In the same way she combines making her living as a "botanical illustrator, doing meticulous drawings of plants for textbooks and government handbooks" (114)--a disciplined and fairly humdrum occupation--with falling in love "wholeheartedly" (116) and frequently, having "daring, sometimes grotesque" affairs with many diverse men; "she never tires of a life of risk and improvisation" (115). One of her lovers, an artist, left "sketches, and a lavish horrible book on anatomy which showed real

sliced cadavers" and more (116); unlike poor Frances in Accident, Kay is able, if only temporarily, imaginatively to transform immediate, crass physical reality, and because she alternates "straightforward [and] analytical" with "mystical" phases (117), she is constantly "renewing" (122) herself, though usually only with difficulties and "struggle" (116).

This last concept--renewal--is introduced by Dennis, an odd and interesting character. Here again this story compares favorably with "*Accident*," where the meanings are so plain and so directly presented. Dennis might at first seem to have solved a problem like the narrator's: he is constantly travelling, is full of travellers' news and stories, and his life sounds exciting. But the reader begins to realise that his mode is even less satisfactory than the narrator's: he "always talked about the last place he'd been and the last people he'd seen, and never seemed to notice anything" in the here and now (119). Dennis is the variant of the narrator, her dreams and fancies, like his stories, being a means of evading the exigent present.

But she is also different from Dennis, and from Frances, and here again we see how much more dynamic or dramatic than "Accident" this story is. Whereas Frances is trapped from the beginning, and whereas Dennis's train of thought leads to "renunciation" and life-denying "deprivation" (122), the narrator of "*Bardon Bus*" has within her a vital driving force that is seeking a creative solution. We watch her attempt, incipient, and not getting very far perhaps, but suggesting the possibility of her rising above her "despair" (123). She is often in a bad way, one of those women, like the figures dug up in China, that "have to be put together and stood on their feet" by X (120); her desperation at her failure to achieve the romantic issue, her "desire, and longing, and hopelessness," bring her pornographic images which only deepen her despair (123); Alice Munro has described her state as "hysterical eroticism." But her very consciousness of the depth of her despair is perhaps a hopeful sign. At all events, after a vain attempt to renew herself by dressing in dramatic or provocative clothes, relying on external aids rather than inner resources, she arrives at a specially "low point" (126). She has another dream, which seems to offer

consolation with the prospect of an embrace of "souls, " but then--the dramatic dialectic is again remarkable—she realises that the dream is only "banality and innocence" (127) and "misplaced" (128).

It is at this point that she goes to Rooneem's, "an Estonian bakery where you can usually find a Mediterranean housewife in a black dress, a child looking at the cakes, and a man talking to himself"--a series of very ordinary sights. Although part of her is still on the lookout for X, another part realises that she has reached "the limit" of "the amount of misery and disarray you will put up with, for love" (127) and is now getting hold of "an uncalled-for pleasure in seeing how the design wouldn't fit . . . a pleasure in taking into account, all over again, everything that is contradictory and persistent and unaccommodating about life" (127-28). In other words, she is coming to terms with, which means finding some sort of pleasure in, reality. She knows now she needs "a deliberate sort of rest, with new definitions of luck. Not the sort of luck Dennis was talking about. You're lucky to be sitting in Rooneem's drinking coffee, with people coming and going" (128). (It is the sort of perspective realised by George and Roberta at the end of *Labor Day Dinner*. ") She will now have the insight and resilience to cope with the unpleasant surprise at the very end of the story which before would have seemed likely to extinguish her. There is a strong contrast between the merely ironic dramatic stasis in "Accident" and the dynamic inward- turning development in this story.

### "PRUE"

After "Accident" and "*Bardon Bus*," two stories about two different passions, we come to an ironic story in which there are liaisons and talk of marriage, but passion is notably absent. "The Moons of Jupiter", as a volume, has its own dialectic.

"Prue" is slight and cryptic. Alice Munro has described it as "a neater story than I usually write"; its neatness goes with the wry irony that informs it. Now the protagonist is well into middle-age--in her "late forties" (130). For some years she has had a partly-on-but-mainly-off affair with Gordon, who is a shilly-shallyer, a "helpless, baffled soul, squirming around inside his doughy fortress" (132); it is ironical that he is a "neurologist" (130). He seems to have allowed his interest in food and comforts--his house has four bathrooms (131)--to supplant his sex drive. A "quite young" and vigorous woman, whom Gordon thinks he loves, denied ingress to Gordon's house on a night when Prue is his guest to dinner, hurls her overnight bag at him, apparently out of frustration.

Gordon claims that he wants to marry Prue after he has got over "being in love" (132) with the younger woman; perhaps he is attracted to Prue because she is habitually "cynical" and "lighthearted, " "doesn't

take herself too seriously, " is "unintense, and civilized" (129), "bright, " and a "cheerful spectator" (130) who can speak "lightly" (132) of important matters; above all, "she seems to regard sex as a wholesome, slightly silly indulgence" (130).

Throughout the story the short clipped sentences generate a dry ironic humour, and the joke is largely at the expense of Prue, who is more aptly named than she admits (130). When Gordon leaves her alone early in the morning, she picks up a single amber cufflink from his dresser and carries it off before the arrival of Gordon's housekeeper, her

"friend from olden times. " She possesses herself of the cufflink not for sentimental reasons, not as "booty, " nor for its "ritualistic significance"; and she drops it into an old tobacco tin, where it joins several other ambiguous trophies, and "more or less forgets about it"(133). She does not have the passion to throw an overnight bag at Gordon, so her response takes a devious form, apparently obscure even to herself because she shows no sign of recognising it for the revenge it is. She so slenderly knows herself that her attitudes, and even her "English accent" (129), are artificially cultivated poses: she tells their friends that Gordon's attitude is "quite reasonable" (133), but her suppressed passions tell a quite different story.

In accordance with the method of constructing oppositions and contrasts that she employs so often and to such good effect, Alice Munro has in this story written a counterpoise to "'Accident, " and this may be why the stories were side by side in the proofs. In "*Prue*" a love relationship that denies or makes light of sexual intimacy is as incomplete as that between Frances and Ted, which had no element in it other than the sexual. Each story bears a truth that is complemented by the truth in the other, though the moral in "*Prue*" is more effective because it is glancingly and even wittily reflected. The two stories together make a sort of start line from which a story like "*Labor Day Dinner*" can go forward. "*Prue*" itself can be seen as a sort of slackwater: the flow of sexual passion has been denied and a new tide has yet to set in.

## The New Tide: The Last Five Stories

### "LABOR DAY DINNER"

This is a great story, and it is crucial in the plan of the volume. The main situation in the story involves a mystery. We have seen how prominent throughout Alice Munro's work is the juxtaposition of two apparent incompatibles: the legendary past and the mundane present of Becky Tyde or of Jenkin's Bend, the life-styles and ambience of the households of siblings or near relations (as in "*At the Other Place*" and "*The Stone in the Field*"), the scarcely comprehensible gulf between Uncle Benny and the Jordan family, who have him to eat at their table, or the immediate and powerful attraction between young people as different as Del and Garnet French, or Herb and Brian. In "*Labor Day Dinner*" the particular form that the mystery takes is the alienation or marital tiff between George and Roberta that can be so bitter and last for days, though they are both people of intelligence, sensitivity and goodwill and have a genuine though temporarily overlaid affection for each other. Roberta is roughly the age of Prue, though in fact a few years younger--forty-three (150)--and George is apparently younger still.

George is the more aggressive of the two, yet "he wants to go and find Roberta and envelop her, assure her--assure himself--that no real damage has been done. He hoped to be able to do that last night when they went drinking, but he couldn't; something still held him back"; "How out of [such happiness as they had known] could come such touchiness . . . such a threat of collapse he cannot imagine" (150). It is a portrayal of silent, relentless marital warfare, which had been touched on in "*Mischief*" and "*Connection*, " but not as fully and convincingly developed

as it is here, where we hear of "the great tactical advantage of being the one to whom the wrong has been done . . . the unforgivable thing said" (137).

It seems that the "physical attraction" (153) that Eva (in a jest that carries truth) suggests brought George and Roberta together, and that made their love bloom like an "amaryllis" (140), has weakened, or at least it needs the support of other feelings. Roberta realises that "sexual abdication is not enough" (156); she cannot settle for the sort of life Prue accepts. She was once happy, playing "giggling" games (148) on the beach with her first husband, from whom she is separated, but she is now "on the verge of being a nervous wreck" (147).

There are of course important differences between George and Roberta. He comes of central European working-class background, addresses himself to real and practical tasks such as scything the lawn and roofing the house. But he is primarily a sculptor. His habits and taste, firmly rooted in the work ethos, contrast with those of Roberta and her two daughters; they are of the sophisticated, pleasure-loving middle-class with interests and instincts close to the theatre and ballet. Roberta has a markedly eclectic taste in books; George complains of her "persistent wish to be admired and courted" (136), whereas he "likes working without spectators" (144). He is confident and assertive, and she tends to hesitation and self-depreciation. These differences might, however, be the basis of a good relationship between complementary individuals rather than causes of chronic matrimonial warfare between incompatibles.

The story describes the visit of George, Roberta and Roberta's daughters, Angela and Eva, to Valerie's country home for Labor Day dinner, and one hopes of course that somehow the occasion and the visit will produce a slackening of tension. George and Roberta arrive as if "they had been engaged in tender and lively conversation" on the way over (137). Valerie's home has a distinct but unpretentious style; here, "under the shade of two aloof and splendid elm trees that have been expensively preserved, " in a beautiful old Grey County house (134), there is a "household of many delicate checks and balances" (139). It is a sort of Eden, but precarious because achieved, or preserved, by human effort. Its ambience is established in the opening paragraph, and later we come to see it as a pattern for human achievement and survival, as it is indeed for marriage also: all require careful and "expensive preservation. " Alice Munro's art now conveys large meanings subtly and felicitously through paradigm and symbol.

There are several signs of the differences between the two families. Valerie sets much less store by her appearance than Roberta does: "You could never say that Valerie is looking to be courted or admired"; her "long, plain face seems to be crackling with welcome, eager understanding, with humor and intelligence and appreciation" (138). She was once a "school counsellor" (139), just as her daughter Ruth--who, with a similar disregard for appearances but a confident sense of family solidarity, wears her brother's shirt and "striped pajama bottoms" (150)--has "given up wanting to be an actress, " and is now "learning to teach disturbed children" (138).

The help that George and Roberta need is not easily come by. It cannot be ready-made or prepackaged and offered as Counsel or Guidance, even when it is of the kind that Kimberly, for whom "all the arguments have already been won" (156), seems ready to dispense from the New Testament. This "very clean and trim" girl, about whom "there is a slight feeling of an official person" (139), is the girlfriend of David, Valerie's son, but antipathetic to Valerie, who is however "not an un- Christian" (144). Valerie, who has worked hard at her beautiful house and garden and as hard at human relations--she "will throw herself headlong into any conversation to turn it off its contentious course"

(156)--even supports Kimberly against George in an argument about round and pointed arches, not merely to avoid unpleasantness--in fact all argument in her house proceeds in a civilised and enlivening way- but because she believes that "we are more than products of our upbringing" (157) and therefore argues that the adoption of the pointed arch in Europe was not simply the result of Arab influence but the expression of a deep religious sentiment. Valerie, who has gone beyond erotic love, which is "something [she] could do without being reminded of" (140), has a perennial faith in what might be called the mysterious valiance of the human spirit and refuses to be paralysed or dismayed by "all this talk about overpopulation, ecological disaster, nuclear disaster, this and that disaster, destroying the ozone layer--it's been going on and on, on and on for years, "because "here they sit, all healthy, relatively sane, with a lovely dinner . . . in the . . . undestroyed countryside" (157). And we feel she knows the effort that must be made and the price paid to save the countryside, and the human race, not to mention George and Roberta's marriage, from destruction. But George has been working at his house and farm for two years with the energy and devotion that Valerie has given to her house and garden for fifteen (141), and this suggests the hope that in the end George's comparatively stern work-ethic and Roberta's cultivated hedonism will, with the enlightened goodwill that they both show as well as with hard work, be able to live together in something like the harmony that Roberta's daughters' names express the hope of.

Valerie's spirited gratitude goes with, if it does not spring from, a sense of perspective and proportion. Something of the same feeling had stirred in Roberta the night before, at the drinking party, when, confronted by the story about the woman with a "front-end loader, " she saw "against what odds . . . love takes root and flourishes" (154). It stirs in George when he makes his "offering" about "a gibbous moon" (158). So when they narrowly escape a common death in a car accident on the way home, we assume without being told that they are ready, under the influence of Valerie, who knows how to live and even rejoice in the face of various kinds of "disaster" (157), and prompted by their own reviving impulses, to renew their relationship on a plane above and beyond the love that derives mainly from sexual attraction. In fact when Roberta "wavers on the edge of caring and not caring" (158), we might be reminded of lines that occur twice in T. S. Eliot "*Ash-Wednesday*, " and of the spiritual state they refer to. Labor Day has in the end achieved what it is designed for: an acceptance and celebration of labour and life. We realise that men must labour not only at their jobs, but at life itself: the verse in Genesis--"in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" -- takes on new meaning.

Again in "*Labor Day Dinner*" one can see a pattern of the spiral dialectic. Up to this point the volume has taken us through a landscape of contradictions and inconsistencies, but now, at the end of this story, there is a suggestion of a movement beyond the violence and irrationality of alternating sexual love and psychic hate and in a new direction, towards something like lovingkindness. The volume's dialectic is spiral. This movement gets under way without benefit of religious doctrine; it springs from impulses native to intelligent and ordinarily kindly people and it is helped by unconscious friendly example. George and Roberta will again see, as they once did, "the unlikely ways the stars tie up into their constellations" (150); they have begun with the "gibbous moon, " and from here the heavenly bodies are touched with a symbolic significance that is suggested in the last story, and in the title of the volume.

Something should be said about the way in which the story is told. By the simple device of using passages in the present tense for the story-line and laminating these with sections in the past tense, Alice Munro slows down the action so that central incidents are given full attention, but without making the action either confusing or tedious, because by this method she economically establishes perspectives that allow the reader to see the origins and the significance of the otherwise ordinary events. The story is technically very interesting, besides being one of the subtlest and most moving in the canon.

### "MRS. CROSS AND MRS. KIDD"

This story takes us forward in one leap from middle-aged characters to octogenarians; the two old women in Hilltop Home are the oldest protagonists in the volume and their story is the first of three stories in the volume about characters who are elderly; the others are *"Visitors"* and *"The Moons of Jupiter."* Like all the stories after *"Chaddeleys and Flemings,"* this is the story of an attachment between two people. But the attachment is as far removed from the sexual as it is possible to be. Nevertheless, as Alice Munro told Peter Gzowski in the interview on the CBC radio programme "Morningside" (21 October 1982), the story is "about love."

What is at first stressed are the differences and barriers that existed between the two when they were girls and young women living in the same small town. The differences seemed total--social, religious, intellectual, in the way they spoke, in the games they played, and in almost every conceivable aspect of life, even progeneritiveness. Eighty years have ironed out most differences, but not all: "they themselves are the only ones who can recall what separated them, and to a certain extent does yet" (161) when they come together as "old crocks" (178) in Hilltop Home, where a remarkably full life goes forward--games, jokes, visiting, alliances, and even falling in love.

They are alike in having a drive for influence and power; this is socially unexceptionable in both, yet it manifests itself differently in each. It partly separates them after their late coming together. When she encounters Jack, who has had a severe stroke at fifty-nine, Mrs. Cross "felt something stretching in her. It was her old managing, watching power"; this leads to her "takeover of Jack" (168), and the discontinuance of the two old ladies' card games. Soon Mrs. Cross is in a state something like love--maternal love: "Before she went to sleep, Mrs. Cross would go over everything that had happened with Jack that day" (173). Meanwhile Mrs. Kidd, left in something of a lurch, has "taken on" Charlotte (173), who, it is true, "was itching to be somebody's slave" (175). The two old ladies have "not had any falling-out or any real coolness" (174) however; they only spend less time together.

Alice Munro now gives a characteristically ironic turn to her plot: Jack and Charlotte become attached, leaving the two old ladies rather high and dry. But, again characteristically, she does not leave the story on a note of Maupassant-like sardonic irony. The old ladies heal the slight breach between them, and their second coming together reinforces the quite unsardonic irony that there can be real affection even in old age, when the basis for it is mutual need and loneliness. The comedy is poignant, but there is not a grain of sentimentality in the pathos.

The story is indeed remarkable for the spareness of the authorial comment: "Some people had nobody" (166) is typical of the terseness. And the moving attachments that we see are not expatiated upon but conveyed in an unobtrusive dramatic shorthand: Mrs. Cross comes "walk-

ing slowly behind Jack's chair, to help him steer" (179), even though Charlotte had taken over Jack's chair (177-78). Then, in a fine climax to the sequence, Mrs. Kidd, at some risk to herself, presses her wheelchair on Mrs. Cross, who was her social and is still her intellectual inferior, gives it a "calculated, delicately balanced push" to get Mrs. Cross to her door, and suffers a temporary collapse as a consequence (180).

Mrs. Cross is a companionable and generous soul whose goodwill is simple and patent, but Mrs. Kidd is more remarkable. Cultivated, tactful, self-critical--she checks herself for tending to boss Charlotte--with a pride and dignity that make her unwilling to be an object of pity and yet do not inhibit an uncondescending affection, she is a character of convincing distinction. With her dignity, insight and reticence, she might have been inclined to patronise or dismiss Mrs. Cross as ignorant, prying, and indeed "common," but in the final incident she unobtrusively risks her life for her, demonstrating a full sense of sisterly affection.

In "*The Turkey Season*" the attraction of Herb to Brian was mysterious, because they seemed to have so little in common, and also potentially tragic. Here the differences between Mrs. Kidd and Mrs. Cross are hardly less significant; the latter has of course none of the dangerous and slightly sinister aura that surrounds Brian, but the attachment is formed in spite of the differences. Because the upshot here is a happy one the force at work seems perhaps less mysterious, but hardly less wonderful. The story is simple and moving, not one of Alice Munro's profoundest, but a consummate piece of workmanship, typical in that it is a study in differences and similarities in which oppositions are broken down and transcended.

What is new is the spare style of the narrative, something like what we saw in "*Prue*," but without the underlying sardonic irony. Alice Munro's earlier successes were in the use of a first- or third-person reflector and a retrospective technique, as in *Lives of Girls and Women*, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, and more recently, for example, in "*Dulse*" and "*Bardon Bus*." Now, in "*Labor Day Dinner*," and more clearly in this story, she has mastered a detached, omniscient dramatic narrative of the kind that failed in "*A Trip to the Coast*" (*Dance*) and "*Accident*." "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" is especially fitting as a companion for "*Labor Day Dinner*," which it follows, because both reveal that the stream of human affection with its sovereign sanative power runs underground even when it is deeply buried by pettiness and prejudice. The story reminds one, in its scene and effect, of "*Spelling*" (*Who*) and also of some of the early chapters of *Lives of Girls and Women*. The perspective of old age can, like the fresh exploring imagination of an intelligent child, conduce not only to the forming of friendship but also to realising the solidarity of the human family.

## "HARD-LUCK STORIES"

This is a tough nut. In the first place the three main characters are a good deal younger than Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd, though their ages, and the name of the narrator, are unspecified. But the story is intriguing. The first step in cracking the nut is perhaps to notice that the narrator tells her story "turned mostly towards Julie" and away from Douglas, who in fact is the unnamed man that she "was in love with" (192) and who treats her so scurvily in her hard-luck story. (The hard-luck stories are arguably stories of good luck, of narrow or happy escapes.) Since the time of her story, Douglas has ditched the narrator in order to take on Julie. This behaviour is of a piece with a good deal of what is shown in the story, which is almost a catalogue of unhappy attachments: Julie feels that she has "missed out on every kind" of love, especially the sort involving sexual passion, in her marriage (182); the narrator herself is divorced, and in her story is being made use of by Douglas to "counter" (195) Caroline, whom he is in love with even though he describes her as "a sexual monster" (194); at the same time Caroline "arranged to have [her] old lover [Douglas] and her new lover together, just to stir things up" (195), and her new lover, Martin, treats and speaks about her unfeelingly.

The narrator tells Julie that there are "two kinds of love" (182)-- presumably passionate sexual love and a different relation in which the lovers might say, in Donne's words,

But we by a love, so much refin'd. . . . Inter-assured of the mind, Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse. ("A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning")

Disillusioned by Douglas's treatment of her--his "descent into love is swift and private and amazing" (185), and "before, during, and after making love, he kept on the subject of Martin" (194)--she seems, subconsciously at least, to want release from sexual connection. It is she who introduces Julie to Douglas, apparently hoping that he will like her, and perhaps wanting to "stir things up, " as Caroline does. She is attracted to a verse on a tombstone that speaks of "afflictions" borne a long time and of "ease" after "Pain" (196), and, while Julie looks at the "Roll of Honour" in the church, she is drawn to "a row of footstools, where people could kneel to pray" (196). At this crucial moment Douglas brushes "his hand down my back . . . [and applies] a slight pressure to the ribs" (196-97) while on his way to make an advance on Julie; the narrator is suddenly "stumped by a truth about myself, or at least a fact, that I couldn't do anything about" (197). It is an epiphany. She sees that Douglas, like Caroline, needs both kinds of love, or two different attachments at the same time: someone to like, and someone whom he will not necessarily like but can enjoy passionate sex with. On the footstools she sees the dove "with the olive branch, " and also a "trillium. " All three characters at this moment feel "an unacknowledged spring of hopeful ness" (197), but there are at least two different kinds of hopefulness involved. Douglas and Julie are no doubt a little intoxicated at the prospect of sexual pleasure, and the narrator, who has "published a poem or two" (193), is elated by her vision, prompted by these "ancient" and "homely" emblems (197), of a possible state of spiritual grace. Here we see again the marriage of the old and the new, the familiar and the strange, but now this is achieved dramatically in specific symbols.

Because the characters are comparatively young, one might have expected the story to be placed early in *The Moons of Jupiter*, but a reason for its being placed as late as it is is apparent: the concept of a mode of love other than the sexual is clearer than in any previous story, and this prepares us for other manifestations of love in the last two stories.

With her vision of grace and happiness the narrator becomes "boisterous" (197), but the fantasy that the three of them entertain of running away together to Nova Scotia, establishing a *ménage à trois*-- in order to become something like the triadic set in Yeats "*The Lady's Second Song*, " allowing "Love [to] cram love's two divisions / Yet keep his substance whole"--is clearly a ridiculous notion, a symptom in the narrator of dissatisfaction and frustration. For her this is a fantastic, unrealisable spiral development.

There is an extra irony, however: while for most characters in the story the sexual connection seems to produce an unhappiness that is sometimes savage, for Julie, the children's librarian, family hiker and health-enthusiast who is "virtuous at heart" (though she has had two "almost-affairs" [191] that "turned out very funny" [187]), sexual passion with Douglas brings revitalisation.

Alice Munro is now so completely liberated from strict observance of linear sequence that she here starts the narrative with an episode that occurs chronologically at the end of the sequence; in this opening Julie catches the narrator's attention "in a way she had never done before. It was the hat. I thought there was something gallant and absurd about it, on that tall, tomboyish woman" (181). But one supposes that Douglas, who is "a sort of pirate" (184) in affairs of the heart as well as of business--his surname is "Reider"--will eventually bring disillusion and unhappiness to her too.

Perhaps the obliqueness, ingenuity and complication of the strategy partly impede the effect in this story. These qualities certainly stand out in the context: it follows a simple story, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd, " and is followed by another that is simpler still--"Visitors. "

### "VISITORS"

"*Visitors*" is a straightforward story, except in its surprising ending. We have switched, as happened so often in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, from one social plane to another, from the emancipated, intellectually aware Douglas and Julie in the previous story, to the limited, but unpretentious, small-town life-style of Wilfred and Mildred; and the latter's cheerful, uncomplicated relationship is very different from that between George and Roberta in "*Labor Day Dinner*. " But in several other respects we are back on the track. Wilfred and Mildred are not as old as Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd, but they "had married in late middle age" (202) and might be described as elderly. Furthermore, they have given up sleeping together: with visitors in the house, they "had to share a double bed. They weren't used to it" (200). But Wilfred is able to make good-humoured and somewhat gross jokes about this (201), and later, though Mildred had stripped the bed the visitors had vacated, she "hadn't got it made up again, so she lay down beside Wilfred, on their first night by themselves"(215). This notation conveys that their easy relationship has gone beyond sexual intimacy, but has not rejected physical contact with the sort of bitterness that appears in the previous story: when they find themselves together in the double bed they goodnaturedly "aligned backsides" (201). After "*The Turkey Season*, " "*Accident*, " "*Bardon Bus*" and "*Hard-Luck Stories*, " we find here a milder climate of love; it is not sultry and sizzling, and on the other hand it is

not the chilly passionlessness that was in "*Prue*." But if Wilfred and Mildred have gone beyond sex, they cannot be said to have reached anything like a spiritual plane: Mildred explains that they are "not regular churchgoers" (202), and in fact they seem never to go at all. They certainly do not engage in any esoteric or private spiritual exercises.

That "*Visitors*" must appear somewhere on the same chart that plots the stories that involve sexual passion is clear from the brief history we are given of Mildred's apparently lengthy affair with a married man. Not only did he on his deathbed virtually deny the value and even the fact of his relation with her, but he misled her about the cottage at Amberley Beach: "She had thought all along it was in her name, but it wasn't" (203). Again a merely sexual relation--though "his need for her was so desperate," "it was never love" (204)--brought neither reward nor any valuable satisfaction. Mildred is an easy-going, unintellectual, "good-hearted" (204) woman--she thinks "cozily of her own life long ago" (205)--and has survived the affair without rancour or apparent hurt. She can even joke about it: "You know I'm secondhand goods?" (204). Wilfred too is generous, good-natured and friendly, as appears in his treatment of the waitress (204-5) and in his story about Blanche Black (207-8), which is a parallel to the account of his courtship of Mildred; he is not uninterested in "the subject of pretty girls and homely girls" (207), but he had remained unmarried, had engaged in friendly associations with women, without torridly passionate involvements, and had been more at home with the guys "in the bar . . . listening to the hockey game"(209). It is interesting that his connection with lake boats (202, 209) seems not to connote sexual looseness as it did in "*The Turkey Season*" (69); in "*Visitors*," as in "*The Moons of Jupiter*" (220), lake boats suggest merely liberation and freedom.

"*Visitors*" serves to give cohesiveness to the volume. Another motif resumed here--though it is related to the central pattern of attachments--is that which concerns cousins and siblings, prominent in the two opening stories. "Brothers and sisters were a mystery to [Mildred]. There were Grace and Vera [sisters], speaking like two mouths out of the same head, and Wilfred and Albert [brothers] without a thread of connection between them" (212). Grace and Vera are not twins, but their identity in appearance and behaviour is a comic undercurrent, and there is comedy too in the width of the differences between the two brothers.

Mysteries thicken at the end, however. Albert, who has seemed to be such a complete blank in conversation, either silent or curt and humourlessly literal, shows himself quick and passionate with imaginative interest--his "face was a bright pink and his eyes had a fierce, concentrating look" (212)--about the position and structure of the old, now demolished, family dwelling, which he recalls exactly and in detail, while Wilfred, usually talkative and jocular, is silent and even less attentive than Mildred, who politely shows "as much interest as she had energy for" (212).

Then Albert tells his story about the man who disappeared into the swamp. Here he discloses an imagination that, though naive, has a depth and intensity far beyond the range of Wilfred and Mildred; Mildred looks for a ready explanation--suicide, murder, "debt or . . . trouble about a girl." Albert's notions that the man "could have wanted to go wild" (213) and that he lived on "flesh" (214) suggest perhaps that he could comprehend, for example, the quite other existence of Uncle Benny, who lived in the swamp in *Lives of Girls and Women*. Wilfred and Mildred are confined in imagination to the actual circumstances of their lives in Logan. Mildred has perhaps never been much further from Logan than McGaw and Bullett Township, "forty-five miles" away (209), and even there all the common vegetation, apart from goldenrod and wild carrot, is strange to her, limited as she is to her small-town

world. Wilfred, although "he had worked from California to the Yukon and from the east coast to the west" (203), is as far removed from an awareness of Uncle Benny as he is from consciousness of heavenly bodies--whether a gibbous moon or the moons of Jupiter.

Alice Munro scores the difference between the brothers in part by indicating how they tell stories. Mildred reflects that if Wilfred had been telling Albert's story about the man's disappearance, it would have acquired "some kind of ending, "because in his stories "you could always be sure that the gloomy parts would give way to something better, and if somebody behaved in a peculiar way there was an explanation for it, " but Albert's story does not have these conventional features; it is "not a story, " Albert says, but "something that happened" (215). What sort of stories people tell, and how they tell them, are indexes to their characters, and also reflections on the relation between art and reality, as we see here and, for example, in Flo's stories in *Who Do You Think You Are?*

"*Visitors*" is a story that springs a surprise on the reader. We think that we have got Albert sized up, then we find we have not: he lives outside the comforts and confines of the ethos of Wilfred and Mildred and of conventional art. In his own way he is in touch with reality. This discovery further widens the gulf the reader sees between the brothers; but then again, in spite of this, when Albert's party has gone, the undemonstrative Wilfred has inexplicable "tears welling up in his eyes" at the thought that he and his brother "will probably never see each other again"(216). Wilfred sometimes has "wild dreams" (200) that disturb his sleep, and this seems to suggest that his incorrigibly joshing manner has thickly overlaid an unconscious awareness or *angst* that he will not admit and that we did not suspect. Again, when we think we have got the trick and hang of the thing, it suddenly transforms itself into something stranger and more mysterious than we thought it was.

### "THE MOONS OF JUPITER"

In the last story of the volume ageing culminates in death--the death of the father of the narrator, Janet, who was also the narrator of "*Chaddeleys and Flemings*," though in those two opening stories she was unnamed. "*The Moons of Jupiter*" is, then, in this as well as in other senses, a formal conclusion to the volume.

If the dates of first publication are not misleading, "*The Moons of Jupiter*" was written before all the other stories except "*Accident*," before the new narrative method matured. It is certainly in Alice Munro's tried and true mode of first-person narration, and none the worse for that. With "*Labor Day Dinner*" and "*Dulse*," it is among the most successful and moving stories in the volume, and worth the trouble of a close analysis.

The story provides a thematic as well as a formal close. In Janet's father's attitudes we find, on two fronts, unflamboyant models of what the volume has been feeling its way towards: an intelligent posture in a fully loving relationship beyond sexuality, and an attitude towards impending death. The first of these is defined mainly in the father's attitude to Janet, but before examining that we should look at the troubled relationships in Janet's family.

Janet, separated now from her husband (Richard) in "*Connection*," has her problems with her daughters: Judith, the younger, is jealous of Nichola, who is Janet's favourite, or at least her chief concern. In spite of this, Nichola is

"incommunicado" in Toronto when Janet visits from Vancouver. And though Judith and Don, "the boy she was living with, " meet Janet at the airport and make their apartment available to her, they avoid Janet by driving off to Mexico together the day after her arrival.

Moreover "Nichola and Judith were [only] sometimes on good terms" (221). It is clear that relations in Janet's family are uneasy and fragile. Every stroke and detail in the story is made to count: Janet notices and feels hurt and excluded by the way "Judith moved ahead and touched Don's arm" (223), and yet, long before, Janet "did not think it could ever be detected" when she "was touching [Nichola] with a difference" (229); Judith has clearly detected and resented her partiality to Nichola.

In the morning after her arrival Janet understandably "wanted to see somebody who wasn't related to me, and who didn't expect anything in particular from me, " so she rings Tom Shepherd, an old lover of hers-- he has the same name as Rose's rather casual lover (*Who*, 204), and is presumably the Tom in "*Providence*"--and is "answered by a machine" (223). She consoles herself with a morning glass of vermouth, and only then phones her father at Dalgleish, someone who might expect something in particular from her. Sure enough she finds that he is within fifteen minutes of driving himself to the Toronto General Hospital after a heart attack; almost immediately she hires a car, drives to Dalgleish, leaves with him at noon, and gets him to the emergency room at seven in the evening. She has responded to her father's need more dramatically than Judith did to hers, but apparently with something of the same merely dutiful attention. Janet herself comments on the similarity between herself and her daughters: "I did the same thing at that age" (222).

Between daughter and father there is a cross-current rather like that between daughter and mother: she had been "offended" that her growing up had been a blur to him even though she finds that her own children's early years had been a similar blur to her (222). And now she does not feel any "protest" at the doctor's bad news about her father and seems almost resigned to his dying. Also, I could hear him saying, Well, I didn't see anything about you in *Maclean's*. [Janet is a writer. ] And if he had read something about me he would say, Well, I didn't think too much of that writeup. His tone would be humorous and indulgent but would produce in me a familiar dreariness of spirit. The message I got from him was simple: Fame must be striven for, then apologized for. Getting or not getting it, you will be to blame. (219)

He is still in the country tradition of Jenkin's Bend, where "to be ambitious was to court failure and to risk making a tool of yourself" (*Lives*, 38); and it was Miss Hattie of Hanratty who said to Rose, "You can't go thinking you are better than other people just because you can learn poems" (*Who*, 196).

But Janet's attitude to her father changes in the story, which is in fact her account of her discovery of her father. She sees his unfamiliar "bare torso" (220), and this is correlative to her dawning appreciation of him as a human being, one who is capable of tragic experience, with a sense of his own "wasted life" (225), and yet he uses this term without self-pity; this culminates in Janet's "appalling rush of love and recognition" (226). The familiar, what has been taken for granted and overlooked, suddenly becomes wonderful and strange as well. By this point in the story the reader has seen enough of the father and his singular qualities to appreciate Janet's epiphany.

One of the most striking of the father's qualities is his resilience, his ability to accept, and then make the best of, the circumstances of life, to do "gracefully" whatever has to be done, even when under pressure. "He never made a fuss. " At the opening of the story he is in bed, the day after his admission, a country "workingman" (220) in a large city hospital, facing his serious illness and worrying about the expense of his semi-private room. Very soon his spirit is valiantly but unhistorically rising above his oppressions and expressing itself in his genially irreverent humour: he calls the large machine that he's "hooked up to" one of those "doohickeys" (217), is jocular about his tranquillisers-- "the happy pills" (218)--and about the "young fellow, the doctor, [who] might have been a bit too eager to operate. 'A bit knife-happy, ' he said. He was both mocking and showing off the hospital slang" (219). At first he is relieved that there is to be no operation, and he thinks of good reasons for avoiding one: "Think of the risk at my age, and what for? A few years at the outside. I think the best thing for me to do is go home and take it easy. . . . That's all you can do, at my age. Your attitude changes, you know. You go through some mental changes. It seems more natural" (220)--and by "it" he means death. It is clear that here he is rationalising a tame giving in or surrender. But on the fourth day he has made the courageous choice: "'Well, it looks like I'm going to have it'. . . . He had done a complete turnaround overnight. 'It looks like I might as well'" (224). We might remember Flo's remarkable turnaround in *Spelling*. "

His humour and imagination preserve him from the self-pity that Janet is sometimes on the edge of. This is shown in his "making fun of himself" even as he speaks of his "wasted life" and also, more subtly, when he quotes some verse: he knows that "lonely" and "empty" are not right to go with "seas, " and when he remembers "shoreless" (225) he is delighted and knows it is right because of its connotations. The other two epithets make too straight a pitch at pity, and moreover "shoreless" suggests the courage of the voyager as he sails out into the unknown. In the poem, Joaquin Miller's, once known to every schoolboy, it is Columbus setting out into the unknown seas, and in the story it is Janet's father facing the undiscovered country.

On the other front, that of a loving relationship, Janet's father has a word of advice that is of great significance in the general scheme of *The Moons of Jupiter*: "Keep out of your children's business. I tried not to say anything. I never said anything when you left Richard. . . . It wasn't any of my business. . . . But that doesn't mean I was pleased" (228). The attitude that Janet has criticised and even resented as something like indifference, here, in the hours that he knows may be his last, declares itself as a wise, considerate detachment that is informed by loving care. He might, for instance, have had his other daughter, Peggy, informed of his condition--"I guess we ought to tell them"--which would have been tantamount to a summons to his bedside, but he knows that Peggy is due to go on a trip to Amsterdam, where her husband Sam is attending a conference, and he does not want to have them "wondering about changing their plans, " so he does not let them know (227). With the same considerateness, which might remind us of Simon in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, he did not ask Janet about Nichola, not because he was not interested and concerned, but because he knows the subject is painful to her. And he can love and take pride in Peggy's husband as well as in her--while Janet indulges in a petty peevish dislike of Judith's Don: "I decided that his beard and hairstyle were affected" (222)--even though he makes "mild jokes" (227) at Sam's and Peggy's expense, such as we have seen him make at Janet's. It is again a case of caring while seeming not to care. This comprehensive, watchful but undemanding love expresses itself with restraint: when Janet takes leave of him at the hospital for almost the last

time, "we laughed, we kissed formally; I left" (228). Here is the relationship that Janet should try to establish between herself and her daughters, and she seems in the end to be nearer realising a notion of love that is "measured and disciplined" (230). She cannot help watching the crowd on Bloor Street in the hope of seeing Nichola, but she knows that Nichola "was one of the grownup people in the world now, one of the shoppers going home, " and "If I did see her, I might just sit and watch, I decided" (233).

Before he dies Janet's father achieves a quiet triumph in the hospital, making this initially strange and potentially inimical territory in a sense his own homely familiar stateroom: he "was sitting in a chair by the window. He was bare-legged, wearing a hospital dressing gown, but he did not look self-conscious or out of place. He looked thoughtful but good-humored, an affable host" (232). From this throne his courageously insouciant imagination makes the full range of human experience and knowledge a kingdom in which he feels as much at home as in his own back garden. He discourses and speculates philosophically, yet with a quick suspicion of cant, pretentiousness or high-falutin, like Socrates before the hemlock, on the deepest and highest topics: poetry, the existence of the soul, the experience of death, and also, casually and dispassionately, "practical details" (226) such as "his will, the house, the cemetery plot" (227).

Then, on what both he and Janet know might be, and in fact is, his last evening, because Janet has passed some time at the planetarium, the conversation turns to matters astronomical (232-33), introducing the vast scale of the universe and with it a sense of perspective and proportion even more striking than what appears towards the end of *"Labor Day Dinner."* With none of the advantages provided by the plush planetarium, which was occupied--ironically--by inattentive and restless schoolchildren and by one other unattached adult besides Janet, "who looked as if he might be here to keep himself from going to a bar" (230), the country workingman is able easily to remember all the planets, stumbling momentarily over the order only, and then, challenged by Janet, he goes on to name the moons of Jupiter, though not the "bunch of new ones"(232). He moves naturally from this engagingly slangy idiom--he is at a far remove from the simulated "awe" that the promoters of the planetarium "supposed they ought to feel" (231-32)--to say "gravely" that "the moons of Jupiter were the first heavenly bodies discovered with the telescope" (232), and then back again to his irreverent racy style to list the "girlfriends of Jupiter's" that the moons were named after and to wonder whether Ganymede was a shepherd (233). His courage and imagination--the way in which he makes the strange familiar and the mysterious in a sense touchable--might remind us of the father explaining the Great Lakes in *"Walker Brothers Cowboy"* at the very beginning of the first story in Alice Munro's first book; it is apt that the same process should be shown at the end of the last story of her fifth book.

Responding to the hospital's public address system, Janet takes her last leave apparently casually--"I'll see you when you come out of the anesthetic"--but "when I was at the door, he called to me, 'Ganymede wasn't any shepherd. He was Jove's cupbearer'" (233). These are his last recorded words, and of course the reader sees that they apply aptly to himself. "Any" is a masterly stroke of Alice Munro's art: it conveys with an aptly unpretentious, indeed colloquial force, that although we might mistake the father for a common and unremarkable man, a mere shepherd from Mount Hebron (24)--he has just been described as "bare-legged, " in a hospital gown--because he responds and does honour to the created universe he is much more like a cupbearer to Jupiter, its god. Moreover, like Ganymede, and Callisto,

whom, Janet tells us, Juno "changed . . . into a bear and stuck . . . up in the sky" (233)--Janet has taken from her father his courage, his tone, and even his idiom: "You've turned pretty cheeky now I'm going under the knife," he says (232)--he will be enskied in a sort of apotheosis, at least in Janet's mind.

It is in itself, for all its comparative brevity, a powerful and poignant story that deals with grand themes without any rhetoric or melodrama. Its construction is strong, and on a typically Munroian pattern: Janet finds herself in the middle, both a daughter and a parent, between positions potentially opposed. But she rises above the opposition. By becoming a loving daughter she gains the insight to become a more effectively loving and potentially beloved mother.

Besides being a splendid free-standing story, it is also a fine conclusion to the volume. It leaves us with an image that supplies not only the title of the story and the volume, but is also suggestive of the overall theme as well as of the structure of the book. The theme is human interrelationship, and the structure is that of a system made up of stories that are separate bodies, like moons, held together and in relation to one another by a central concept, appropriately represented in the image by the chief deity, *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*, (greater far than Venus!) who also invests with due importance the story that is--when one looks at it from another angle--the culmination of the pendant. The story may be in the old mode, but in establishing subtle parallels and potent symbols, it points forward to the new mode of "*Labor Day Dinner*," "*The Ferguson Girls Must Never Marry*" and "*The Progress of Love*."

*Lives of Girls and Women* was about girlhood, *Who Do You Think You Are?* about maturity and womanhood, and now *The Moons of Jupiter* deals with middle-age, senescence, and death. There is thus a continuity and coherence in the body of Alice Munro's work as well as in each story and each volume, and, since *Lives of Girls and Women* at least, each whole is greater than the sum of its parts.