

Chapter - 4

Munro and Bond – Parallel Palettes

“The man who lives in a small community lives in a much larger world”

- G. K. Chesterton (*Heretics*)

The present chapter aims to examine the portrayal of provincial life in literature, specifically focusing on the works of Munro and Bond. To depict how Munro and Bond represent the complexities and subtleties of small-town life in their respective works. Also, to know about the similarities and differences that has been observed in their portrayal of small-town dynamics. Furthermore, the chapter aims to discourse how these authors explore the unique qualities and challenges associated with living in small communities. The research, moreover, aims to know about the insights that can be gained from their examination of provincial life in terms of societal norms, relationships, and individual experiences. This study seeks to deepen the understanding of the representation of provincial life in literature and provide valuable insights into the nuances of small-town dynamics as depicted by Munro and Bond.

Comparative Literature is the term, that has been first verbalized by the famous Victorian poet and literary critic, Mathew Arnold in the year 1848. The phrase *Comparative Literature* is first used by Mathew Arnold in his unpublished private letter to his mother, which is quoted by George William Russell in his edited work *Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888*, which remarks:

How plain it is now, though an attention to the comparative literatures for the last fifty years might have instructed any one of it, that England is in a certain sense far behind the Continent. In conversation, in the newspapers, one is so struck with the fact of the utter insensibility, one may say, of people to the number of ideas and schemes. (10)

This letter has been kept unpublished till 1895. The phrase has been verbalized when Arnold tried to translate the Ampere's use of "histoire comparative" which is quoted by Wellek and Warron in Basnett's *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (38).

Mathew Arnold defines the term *Comparative Literature* in one of his conferences titled, "On the Modern Element in Literature", which was dated on 14th November, 1857. In the work, "On the Modern Elements in Literature", under the book, *Essays by Matthew Arnold Including Essays in Criticism, 1865 On Translating Homer and Five Other Essays*, by Mathew Arnold edited by Francis William Newman, where Arnold defines comparative literature, "Everywhere there is connexion, everywhere there is illustration: no single event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures" (456). From this quote, Arnold explains that without any connection or explanation related to the other works, the literature will never be understood. He also states that, there is no place without connection and literature is better understood because of comparison.

In the article, "On Comparative Literature", Elmas Sahin questions why a researcher should compare literatures and what are the benefits the researcher gets by comparing literatures. Sahin also gives the answers for the questions raised by her about comparative literature, "A comparative study of different literatures will present us rich knowledge of literatures, languages, cultures and identities of other nations, thus comparisons of products of the different literatures will get a chance for us to recognize both our values and the others closely" (8). Like answered by Sahin, the comparative literature plays a main role in the aspects of world literature where the differences and similarities has been recognized through comparing literatures. *Comparative literature* is a literary answer about national and international literatures to improve the understanding of literatures in common terms.

Comparative Analysis is an independent discipline which allows to study different literatures from the viewpoint of comparison. Here, the motive of the *comparative analysis* is not to point out which literature is superior compared to the others, but to get a better understanding of the different types of literatures. Henry Remak opines *Comparative analysis* emphasizes on different sides such as translation studies, sociology, critical theory, cultural studies, religious studies as it is an interdisciplinary branch of study, where Susan Basnett has quoted the definition given by Henry Remak in her book, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, as “Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the boundaries of a particular country and it is the study of relations among the literatures and other scientific areas of knowledge and belief” (31).

Furthermore, the *comparative analysis* goes beyond national borders, languages, time, genres. This analysis also works on to study and scrutinize people, customs, behaviours, myths, history, philosophy and social movements. Also, Susan Basnett in her book, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, remarks, where Rene Wellek quotes the definition of comparative analysis specified by Van Tiegham, “the object of comparative literature is essentially the study of diverse literatures in their relations with one another” (27). This definition opens the access of discussing language, literature and culture beyond the boundaries to compare one country to the other.

Comparative Analysis works on to bring out the best by comparing one literature to the other. Here, comparing literatures is to embrace the best and not to discover the superior among them. Likewise, Samuel Johnson in *The Preface to Shakespeare* outlines, “without the knowledge of many mountains, and many rivers; so, in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with others works of the same kind” (3). Like said by Dr. Johnson, without comparing, the best qualities of the literatures will never be

known. Only by comparing one country to the other, the differences, similarities, literatures, languages and the culture of the two countries will be acknowledged.

To understand the term *Comparative Literature* or *Comparative Analysis* in a better way, the comparatists found different types of school and the two foremost schools are the French school of Comparative literature and the American school of Comparative literature. The French school of Comparative Literature thrived in the nineteenth century as a method of comparative literature to explore the historical study of the associations between the literatures. This school mainly focused on the historical study and the French scholars set a boundary to compare literatures, where Basnett remarks, “French scholars spent a considerable amount of time and energy trying to confine comparative literature within boundaries, delineating precisely what could and could not be considered proper to the subject” (32). The French school of comparative literature believes in the factual evidence and historical consciousness; thus, it does not pave the way for aesthetic discipline.

The American school of comparative literature is diverse from the French school, where this school widened the prospect of comparative literature. The American school of comparative literature bloomed during the middle of twentieth century, where the aspects of comparing literatures has become “descriptive and synchronic” (31) according to Wellek which has been quoted by Basnett in the book *Comparative Literature: An Introduction*. The American school of literature has rooted in the nineteenth century in earlier works, where Charles Mills Gayley has voiced the primary form of the definition of American school, “by insisting on the importance of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, social science, religion and art in the study of literature” (33). The scholars of the American school highlight the importance of aesthetic discipline in the study of comparing literatures. The American school of comparative literature is the proof of the definition derived by Remak about comparative literature, where the study of literature is outside the boundaries of a country and also about

the relations between the literatures, which also gives importance to psychological and sociological approaches.

The current chapter hinges on the application of the *Parallel theory*, a comprehensive approach that spans a diverse array of literary works. The primary theoretical foundation shaping this investigation is the Parallel analysis within the American school of comparative literature, where Dr. S. Chellaiah in his book titled, *Comparative Literature: Its Theory and Practice*, opines that, “Parallel theory defines the investigation of two authors or works without necessarily implying any direct causal relationship between them” (25). Departing from the limiting approach of the French school, which restricts literary comparisons, the American school adopts a more expansive perspective and methodology. The Parallel Analysis, endorsed by numerous comparatists from Eastern Europe and America, provides a broader viewpoint and methodology for comparing literatures and other academic domains.

In his work titled, *Linguistics and the Study of Literature* under the title, “Literature and Language Teaching and the Nature of Language,” Michael H. Short quotes Russian comparatist Lorenz Konrad, who defines that this theory has evolved from the identification of similarities in the social and historical evolution of people. According to Konrad, “the theory has resulted from the idea of similarities found in people’s social and historical evolution, which represents the synchronization in the development of literature” (156). In the realm of research, *comparative analysis* examines similarities or differences between subjects. Central to this is the *parallel theory*, which suggests that similar patterns can arise in separate locations or times without direct interaction. Imagine two unrelated individuals simultaneously conceiving the same idea without ever meeting.

Parallel theory elucidates phenomena like the pyramids of Egypt and the Mayans; both civilizations independently constructed similar structures. In the book titled *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, and Application*, S. Totosy Zeptnek opines, “In

literature, parallelism appears when tales from different cultures resonate with matching themes, like the widespread flood narratives. However, the theory requires judicious application. Similarities don't always denote shared origins; coincidences are plentiful" (3).

Scholars believe that parallelism is possible because of the harmonious nature of the human psyche as part of a social establishment. Ihab Hassan, an American scholar who propounded *Parallelism* states, "harmony is at the root of all creation in general and in human beings in particular. Undoubtedly the concept of 'parallelism' focuses on the semblance between the literatures of different people who have evolved in the same way." (*Wisdomlib*) Hassan further reiterates the point by stating an example, "there would be no room for Goethe's story *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* or Fitzgerald's translation of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* as examples in foreign countries if people were not prepared (mentally or culturally) for absorbing all these works' ideas, philosophies and concepts."

Human shared experiences further bolster *Parallel theory*. Universal needs and emotions mean cultures can produce akin stories or art. Different families might have unique lullabies, but all use them to soothe infants, where Rachel Teresa O' Connor Evered in her work titled, *Singing Me to Sleep: A History and Analysis of Lullaby from Around the World*, opines, "Lullabies are an extremely powerful musical tool that humans have developed out of a desire to bond with one other, soothe the infants, and others" (14). Recognizing genuine parallels versus mere coincidences is crucial.

The *Parallel theory* offers a lens to understand connections across history and geography, underscoring humanity's shared experiences despite the diverse backgrounds. *Parallel theory* is a significant concept in comparative analysis because it helps researchers see patterns. They can see how problems and solutions repeat across different cultures and times, painting a bigger picture of the human experience. It is all about seeing the links and patterns in the world. It is a reminder that even in the big, vast world, there are threads that tie

things together. Understanding the key parts of this theory, one can see those connections more clearly and appreciate the shared journey of humanity.

Parallel theory encourages to transcend traditional boundaries and look beyond language and culture, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive view of world literature. It helps to bridge cultural gaps and promotes cross-cultural understanding through literature. In the article titled, “American School of Comparative Literature”, Mustafa Al-Hemeedawi remarks about Parallelism theory as the theory that does not give importance to connection but deals with the texts or works having comparable frameworks or realisms, “It does not give importance to the link of causality. It gives no importance to influence. There is a possibility of dealing with literary texts not being in contact of whatsoever kind, but having similar contexts or realities” (4). Bijay Kumar Das states the nature of comparative literature as, “the analyses of similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. Its further studies themes, modes, conventions and the use of folk-tales, myths in two different literatures or even more” (1). Likewise, the Parallelism theory has a wide-range of methods in comparing the literatures to bring out the individuality of the literatures.

Throughout the ages, certain thinkers have been fascinated by the similarities they saw in different cultures, times, and places. These thinkers became the champions of the *parallel theory*, pushing it forward and giving it depth. One of the earliest and most influential figures to delve into parallels, especially in myths and religions, was Sir James George Frazer. His magnum opus, *The Golden Bough* (1890), compared myths from diverse cultures. Frazer suggested that similar mythological structures appear across cultures because of shared human concerns, like life, death, and nature. In the realm of psychology and philosophy, Carl Jung proposed the idea of the ‘collective unconscious’. He believed that all humans share a set of memories and ideas, which could explain why different cultures have

similar myths, symbols, and stories. While not strictly about *parallel theory*, Jung's ideas certainly whirls around the same fascinating territory.

Expanding on both Frazer's and Jung's work, Joseph Campbell, with his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, explored the parallel structures of hero myths around the world. He proposed the 'hero's journey,' a narrative pattern that appears universally. Campbell's work has had a profound influence, especially in literature and storytelling, showcasing parallelism at its finest. Another towering figure in comparative religion and mythology is Mircea Eliade. His work often delved into the similarities of religious experiences and symbols across cultures, emphasising the idea that humans have a shared spiritual heritage.

In the article "What is Parallelism in literature?", Jeremy Cook remarks, "In literature, parallelism is used to convey messages of morality and emphasis ideas". In the literary arena, there are numerous unnamed scholars who, over the years, have identified parallel themes, motifs, and narratives across texts from disparate cultures. Their collective work has underscored the universality of certain storytelling elements, emphasising the interconnectedness of human expression. While these advocates pushed parallel theory forward, it's also worth noting the critics who added depth to the conversation. By challenging and refining the theory, they ensured it underwent rigorous examination and did not become an overly simplistic explanation for cultural similarities. The journey of the parallel theory in philosophy and literature has been a collaborative effort of thinkers across ages and domains. Each advocate, with their unique perspective, has enriched the tapestry of this theory, making it a robust tool to understand the shared threads of human thought and creativity. Their collective work is a testament to the intriguing intersections of human culture and the shared stories that bind the people.

In the vibrant world of literary analysis, the *parallel theory* has found a special place. Scholars and readers alike have often been struck by the uncanny similarities between stories

from different cultures, epochs, or regions. Using the parallel theory, literary analysts dig deep to uncover the shared themes, motifs, and narrative structures that bridge seemingly unrelated tales. For instance, the classic ‘hero’s journey’ might manifest in an ancient Greek epic, a Renaissance play, and a modern novel, all echoing the same core journey of challenge, transformation, and return. By applying *parallel theory*, analysts not only celebrate the universality of human storytelling but also foster a deeper appreciation for the interconnected fabric of global literature. This approach reminds about the article “Theory and Method in Comparative Research: Two Strategies” where Charles Ragin and David Zaret opines, “no matter where or when a story is from, there are shared threads of human experience that weave through every tale” (732).

Josiah Royce in the work, *Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems: Expanded Edition* derives the definition of the term “Provincialism” as, “the tendency of the province to possess its own customs and ideals; the totality of these customs and ideals themselves; and the love and pride which leads the inhabitants of a province to cherish as their own traditions, beliefs and aspirations” (61). The people from the rural villages relish their ‘customs, traditions, ideals and beliefs’ in order to embrace the morality of the provincial life. The provincial life has the touch of woods, fields, nature and animals, where the air feels fresh and the place feels like heaven. Even though, small-town people’s income is less and the opportunities are rare, they lead a simple and healthy life.

Raymond Williams, a Welsh socialist writer in his book titled, *The Country and the City*, comments about his life in a small-town that, “I was born under the Black Mountains, on the Welsh border, where the meadows are bright green against the red earth of the ploughland, and the first trees, beyond the window, are oak and holly” (4). Williams has taken a picture of the view of his birth place from his heart, where he has given importance to each and every part which shows his love for nature. In small-town, the trees, mountains,

lakes, agriculture, woods, and the people plays the major role, which attracts the authors like Munro and Bond. The authors not only give importance to nature in small-town life, but also to the people's attitude and character towards leading a simple life. Williams also quotes about the 'country's natural way of life' which is, "of peace, innocence and simple virtue" (1), where it denotes the life of small-town people.

In the previous chapters i.e., 2 and 3 the *Transactional model's Aesthetic Reading* has been employed to give a thorough examination on the analytical representation of provincial life. The stories deftly convey the subtle aspects of the country setting through character interactions and rich visuals. *The Transactional model* improves the understanding of the aesthetic components woven throughout the narrative by highlighting the reader's constant interaction with the text. By creating a strong bond between the reader and their fictional world, this method enables a deeper examination of the complexities of provincial life. Here, in this chapter, *Parallel Theory* has been applied to the short stories of Munro and Bond to expose the similarities in the narratives of the portrayal of provincial life. Also, their views on small-town life has been compared in this research in order to embrace the value of provincial life.

In studying the rich literary landscapes of Munro and Bond, the application of the *parallel theory* has the promise to uncover a world of shared human essence. Both authors, though rooted in distinct cultural milieus, frequently explore the complexities of relationships, the poignancy of everyday life, and the subtle moments that define human existence amidst nature. By applying the *parallel theory*, one can illuminate the common threads in their storytelling. Munro's simple tales of life in small-town Canada resonate with the same level of emotion and beauty as Bond's evocative narratives set against the backdrop of the Himalayas. This comparative approach can definitely underscore the universality of human experience, proving that stories, regardless of their geographical or cultural origin, can

touch the soul in strikingly similar ways. Through such analysis, the parallel theory champions the idea that literature knows no borders, celebrating the shared narratives that bind humanity across continents.

Narrative Structure

Nature and the environment play pivotal roles in shaping the narrative landscapes of short stories penned by the renowned authors Munro and Bond. Widely recognized for their contributions to the genre, both Munro and Bond craft tales set in rural backdrops, delving into the intricacies of the human condition. Munro, a distinguished Canadian writer, is celebrated for her short stories that intricately explore the complexities of human relationships, predominantly within small-town and rural settings. In the website of *The New York Times*, which is titled “Munro wins Nobel Prize in Literature,” by Julie Bosman has noted that Munro has “revolutionized the architecture of short stories [...] and brought a modesty and subtle wit to her work that admirers often trace to her background growing up in rural Canada”. Her narratives often employ a nonlinear structure, skilfully traversing time to provide a deeper understanding of her characters’ experiences.

Conversely, Bond, a prominent Indian author, is renowned for his versatile body of work, spanning short stories, novels, and poetry, all set against the backdrop of the Himalayan region of India. In Rajesh Beniwal’s article, “Wilderness in Bond’s ‘Dust on the Mountains’,” it is observed that “Bond’s short stories have been written to narrate his views of the natural world and inspire humans to love nature with its wilderness” (117). Bond’s writing is characterized by its gentleness and evocativeness, with a focus on the interplay between the natural world and the human experience. He skilfully weaves vivid descriptions of surroundings and locals to create a sense of place that is simultaneously familiar and exotic.

In terms of writing style, both Munro and Bond exhibit a keen attention to detail, capturing the essence of their respective settings with finesse. Munro's writing, often described as precise and understated, brings to the forefront the emotional lives of her characters through a nuanced exploration of nonlinear narratives. In contrast, Bond's style is characterized by its gentle and evocative nature, employing vibrant descriptions to conjure a sense of place that resonates with both familiarity and exoticism. In essence, both authors showcase a remarkable talent for encapsulating the beauty and intricacies of ordinary life in their literary creations.

The thematic interests serve as a distinctive yet not overstated contrast between the literary works of Munro and Bond. In Munro's stories, complex topics like memory, identity, and gender roles are frequently explored. Daneele Boynton in his article "Themes and Images in Munro's Short Stories" ponders, "Munro's fiction examines the trials and occasional triumphs which the individual experiences in developing from child hood and youth to maturity and offers the reader insight into the complex processes of life through her subtle rendering of human experience." (1) She is particularly curious about how women live their lives and the difficulties they encounter navigating relationships and social expectations. The simple pleasures of life, such as the joys of friendship, the beauty of nature, and the magic of childhood, are frequently the subjects of Bond's works, in contrast.

Bond tales frequently highlight the tenacity and inventiveness of kids who have to face the world on their own terms. Also, in the Book *Bond's World: Thematic Influences of Nature, Children, and Love in his Major works*" Gulnaz Fatma reflects, "Bond has won the hearts of millions of readers with his countless charming short stories and introspective novels. From biographical tales about acting as a grandfather to children, to tales of unrequited love, the cross-cultural dimensions of Indian society, and the power and beauty of nature, Bond's more than forty novels and short story collections have made him an

internationally acclaimed author.” (1) The way in which Munro and Bond use character development is another similarity. Their stories frequently centre on the inner lives of these characters as they navigate difficult situations, and they create believable and relatable characters.

In a broader perspective, despite the divergence in cultural backgrounds and settings, Munro and Bond share notable commonalities in their writing styles and thematic explorations. Notably, their narrative styles align in several ways. Both Munro and Bond share a commitment to portraying life with honesty, avoiding exaggeration or dramatic embellishments. They focus on everyday people, their struggles, and experiences that resonate with readers. In the book titled *New Realism in Munro's Fiction*, Li-Ping Geng emphasises that “Munro’s brand of realism is underpinned by her philosophical perception, her level-headed morality, her dialectical mind, and her versatile narrative style” (1).

Similarly, Sovan Dhibar, in the article “Realism and Utopia in the Romantic Picture of the Himalayan Foothills in Select Works of Bond,” discusses how Bond creates a truthful and majestic portrayal of the Himalayan Foothills, including places like Dehradun, Mussoorie, and Shimla. This depiction allows readers to easily connect with the emotions of grief and joy, the simplicity of life, the challenges faced, and embark on an adventure through the mysterious world of the hills, woods, and various types of animals. Dhibar notes, “Bond develops such a truthful majestic picture of the Himalayan Foothills such as Dehradun, Mussoorie, Shimla and its surroundings that one could easily identify himself or herself with the grief and joy, simple lifestyle and hardship and can go through an adventure through the mysterious world of the hills, woods, and its various types of animals” (774).

When discussing regionalism, Aroonima Sinha and Gangesh Kumar, in their article “Munro: Fusion of Regionalism and Realism,” observe that “Munro’s fictions grow on the fertile soil of regionalism. Her fiction derives vitality both from the regional landscape, with

most stories set in Huron County, and from her sense of the narrator as the intelligence through which the world is articulated” (135). Munro and Bond illuminate the unique cultures, traditions, and customs of specific regions in their writings. They provide readers with vivid descriptions of the environment, the locals, and the social structure, facilitating a visual and relatable connection to the story. Additionally, Astha Saklani, in her article “Lower Himalayas: Regional Representation in the Works of Bond,” notes that “Bond’s works have been hailed by several critics as depicting the life of the hills he calls home. Some have even called him a ‘regional writer.’ In several of his fictional writings, he realistically represents the rural life of Garhwal and addresses various social issues pertaining to the hills” (23).

Moreover, in her article titled “Analysis of Munro’s Stories,” Nazrulla Mambrol delves into Munro’s distinctive writing style, noting that “Munro has the ability to create characters of eccentric individualism and achieve completeness and verisimilitude in evoking the past. She is an intuitive writer, less likely to be concerned with problems of form than with clarity and veracity”. Munro and Bond exhibit mastery in crafting captivating characters. They intricately design multifaceted characters with a blend of flaws, assets, and weaknesses. Both authors venture deep into the psyches of their characters, exploring their motivations, aspirations, and internal conflicts. Additionally, in the article “A Study on Bond’s Art of Characterization,” Geetu Saini and Yashpal focus on Bond’s adeptness in characterizing people within his stories. They highlight that “Bond’s world is the world of the poor and the middle-class people. Bond’s greatness can be seen in the originality and naturalness of these characters. His stories are not mere books printed on paper but worlds full of real, living, and breathing people” (44).

Green Homestead

The embrace of a small-town lifestyle is often regarded as the realization of aspirations for serenity, communal togetherness, and a sense of belongingness. The coveted attribute of a garden transcends its aesthetic enhancement of residents' lives and property, assuming a symbolic role in literature associated with notions of security and tranquillity. The provision of a private outdoor space for recreational and horticultural pursuits renders a dwelling with a garden a preferred residential choice, as in the article titled, "Reverence for Life, Back to Nature: An Ecocritical Study on Selected Short Stories of Munro", Wang Miaomiao and Liu Chengqi remarks about the importance of garden as, "the bush surrounding the family's farm is considered as a wild and mysterious world. Wilderness is the environment that is not yet controlled and affected by human activities" (196). Proprietors, in turn, derive advantages from access to freshly cultivated produce, fostering an intimate connection with nature and contributing positively to overall well-being. Furthermore, the ecological dimensions of gardens, functioning as sanctuaries for diverse forms of life, consolidate community bonds by serving as shared spaces for communal horticultural endeavours, as Anjan N and Santhosh Kumar, in their article titled, "Ecological Concern in Bond's Short Stories", opines, "Bond and his father want to preserve both flora and fauna in Dehra ... creating shelter for birds, butterflies and animals, is the largesse that Bond gives out to the world" (289).

In Munro's short story "Labor Day Dinner," Valerie's house, constructed with red bricks and white-bricked windows in the style of small-town dwellings, features a noteworthy garden surrounded by diverse trees. The front yard, adorned with two grand elm trees and vibrant dahlias, is meticulously maintained, preserving the green grass beneath the elms throughout the summer. Inspired by Valerie's home, George purchases a house with a spacious garden, cultivating raspberries and various fruit trees. In small towns, having a

garden at home fosters a sense of community, inspiring neighbourhoods and instilling pride in residents. As Ryan Melsom notes in the article “Roberta’s Raspberry Bombe and Critical Indifference in Munro’s ‘Labour Day Dinner,’” that, “Valerie’s house, with its ‘splendid elm trees and decorative outline of lighter-colored bricks’ (*MOJ* 290) around the windows, is depicted as a welcoming and inviting space for both readers and characters”.

Similarly, Bond’s short story “The Cherry Tree,” explores Rakesh’s aspiration to grow a cherry tree, inspired by his grandfather’s garden. Although the grandfather initially planted vegetables and medicinal plants, Rakesh wishes to cultivate a cherry tree, which comes to fruition as the tree grows and begins yielding cherries. The grandfather later introduces mango and papaya trees, enhancing the garden’s surroundings. Rakesh, influenced by his grandfather, becomes an eco-conscious individual, as observed by Sandip Kumar Mishra in the article “Bond’s ‘The Cherry Tree’: An Eco-critical Study,” stating that “A child like Rakesh possesses ecological understanding, a quality essential for better earth care” (116). The theme of houses with gardens plays a significant role in both short stories, providing not only mental refreshment but also inspiration for others to cultivate diverse plants and trees.

In Munro’s short story “Lichen,” the narrative unfolds Stella’s passion for gardening and her meticulous care for the small garden surrounding her farmhouse near Lake Huron. Despite its modest size, Stella cultivates various vegetables for personal use and nurtures wild blackberries for fruits. She prunes excess bushes around the vegetable plants and fruits, fostering their health. Tending to a garden proves to be a rewarding and enjoyable pastime, enhancing the house’s aesthetic while promoting the healthy growth of plants. Similarly, Bond’s short story “The Tunnel” also explores the theme of houses with gardens. In this narrative, a small hut, attended to by a watchman, is enveloped by a petite garden. The watchman cultivates marigolds in the front and vegetables at the back, showcasing a

commitment to maintaining a garden despite the limitations of living in a small hut. This portrayal reflects the mindset prevalent among small-town residents.

Munro's impactful short story, "Passion," significantly contributes to the theme of houses with gardens. The Travers' residence is embraced by a vast garden adorned with "maple and cedar and balm of Gilead trees" (*POL* 161). Grace, the protagonist, is captivated by Mrs. Travers' lakeside house and its expansive garden. Mrs. Traver's garden not only boasts an array of trees and plants but also features a spacious verandah, providing a tranquil spot for evening relaxation. Grace, reminiscing about her summers spent with the Travers family, recalls the enchanting beauty of the house and garden, leaving her with a sense of wonder. Similarly, in Bond's short story "The Photograph," the narrator discovers a childhood picture of his grandmother standing in the centre of a garden. The photograph captures a garden adorned with diverse flowers like marigolds and Bougainvillea creepers, emphasising that pictures taken in small towns often feature gardens and lakes. In both short stories, houses with gardens play distinct roles—while the former highlights beauty and relaxation, the latter evokes beauty intertwined with cherished memories.

Munro's short story, "Fiction," intricately weaves into the theme of houses with gardens as Joyce grapples with nostalgia for the small-town ambiance after relocating from Vancouver. Despite leaving her small-town origins, she discovers a semblance of the countryside's charm in Vancouver. Presently residing in Matt's house, Joyce is embraced by a vast garden, utilized for cultivating vegetables and fruits. The backyard, adorned with a swing, serves both recreational and relaxing purposes. Munro, through this narrative, delves into the significance of small-town living, emphasising the theme of houses with gardens. Gardens, in this context, not only provide outdoor spaces for entertainment but also serve as a source of sustenance.

Similarly, in Bond's short story "Coming Home to Dehra," the narrator revisits his grandmother's residence following his father's demise. Along the journey, he observes numerous bungalows with gardens adorned with fruit trees—mangoes, litchis, guava, jackfruit, and papaya. His grandmother's garden, replete with trees and plants, becomes a nostalgic haven where he once climbed trees during his childhood. Gardens, as depicted in both stories, hold a profound significance in people's lives, offering spaces filled with beautiful memories to be cherished. Through the theme of houses with gardens, both narratives evoke a wistful yearning for the simplicity and charm of small-town life.

Munro's short story, "In Sight of the Lake," delves into Nancy's deep appreciation for nature and her enchantment with gardens. While in Highman village to meet a doctor, Nancy stumbles upon a garden and becomes engrossed in admiring the blooming flowers. It is later revealed to be a private garden, owned and maintained by a man. Despite the unexpected encounter, Nancy engages in a conversation with the owner, highlighting how gardens can serve as catalysts for friendly exchanges with strangers.

Similarly, Bond's "The Prospect of Flowers" explores the blossoming friendship between Miss Mackenzie and a young boy named Anil, nurtured by their shared passion for gardens. Both individuals have a keen interest in studying various types of flowers. Miss Mackenzie's garden boasts a rich variety, including dahlias, gladioli, rare orchids, and chrysanthemums. Anil's curiosity about flowers leads him to connect with Miss Mackenzie, ultimately resulting in her thoughtful gift of the book *Flora Himaliensis*. In both narratives, gardens play a pivotal role in fostering unexpected and meaningful friendships.

Temporal feature

Memories play a major role in the short stories of Munro and Bond. Memories are not just passive repositories of information but are dynamic and constantly evolving, shaped by emotions, perceptions, and attitudes. Jędrzej Burszta in the article "Images of Past and

Present: Memory and Identity in Munro's Short Story Cycles" incorporates, "She constructs her characters' identities by interweaving images of past and present in multi-layered narratives of individual memory" (23). Memory is a pertinent theme related to small-town lives, as everyone always cherishes memories of their childhood spent there by living or visiting. A person's understanding of the past, present, and future is largely determined by their memories. They serve as a repository for each person's experiences, feelings, and environments, enabling people to relive important occasions, people, and locations.

Sights, sounds, smells, or even a little touch can trigger memories and transport a person to another period of time. While some memories are happy and inspiring, others could be unpleasant and challenging to understand. Likewise, in the book *Bond's World: Thematic Influences of Nature, Children, and Love in his Major works*, Gulnaz Fatma highlights, "Bond writes stories in which there is always one memory or the other of his childhood, the time he spent with his father, of friends, of hills and trees and various places" (9). However, they all have the same function of guiding people through life and giving them a feeling of the past.

In the short story "The Progress of Love," Euphemia reflects on the past memories of her mother, Marietta, drawing inspiration from Marietta's remarkable willpower and determination in her childhood. Memories hold immense significance, serving as cherished treasures throughout an individual's life. Kazuo Ishiguro, in his novel *Never Let Me Go*, emphasises the value of memories, stating, "Memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don't go along with that. The memories I value most, I don't ever see them fading" (191). Similarly, in the short story "The Photograph," the narrator prompts his grandmother to revisit her childhood memories, revealing a brave and bold version of her younger self. Both Marietta and the grandmother exemplify a vibrant childhood, lived to the fullest due to their resilient and positive attitudes.

The short story “The Turkey Season,” also contributes to the theme of memories, as the narrator fondly recalls the happiness experienced with a group of strangers at the turkey barn. Working as a turkey gutter, a common small-town job, exposes the narrator to various experiences and diverse individuals. Despite navigating challenges such as gossiping and misconceptions about homosexuality, the spirit of Christmas Eve allows the narrator to set aside these concerns and enjoy the company of Lily and Marjorie. Similarly, the theme of reminiscences holds a significant role in Bond’s short stories. In “The Coral Tree,” the narrator contemplates a move to England to explore city life but, before departing, revisits his grandfather’s house, evoking memories of his childhood. Interactions with a small girl bring forth cherished childhood memories, creating a sense of security and nostalgia. Recollecting moments like climbing jackfruit and coral trees, the narrator rediscovers the joy of childhood exploration. Despite facing different challenges, both narrators find strength and independence through the enduring memories of their formative years.

Munro’s short story, “Passion,” revolves around the memories of the narrator, Grace. Walking through her village after thirty years, Grace observes unchanged aspects like the absence of a post office and convenience stores. Recollections of the Travers family’s house, perfectly situated by the lake with a spacious veranda, bring back memories of a seemingly idyllic past. Despite bitter experiences with past relationships that prompted her to leave the village, Grace’s enduring love for the small town draws her back, highlighting the powerful impact of memories. Memories, beyond serving as lessons from mistakes, offer solace and joy during challenging times. Similarly, Bond’s short story, “When You Can’t Climb Trees Anymore,” focuses on the narrator’s childhood memories. Revisiting his grandmother’s house, the narrator recalls climbing a jackfruit tree and hiding treasures. Interactions with a little girl evoke a sense of youthfulness, and the sight of the jackfruit tree triggers memories of hidden treasures. Both stories, “Passion” and “When You Can’t Climb Trees Anymore,”

underscore the narrators' desire to cherish and relish their memories, providing emotional nourishment.

Small-profile jobs

Small-towns boast a unique lifestyle underscored by the prominence of low-profile jobs, essential for local functioning. These jobs, requiring minimal education, provide crucial goods and services, contributing significantly to the town's prosperity. Often associated with lower incomes, they form the backbone of small-town economies, supporting families through small businesses. The inherent flexibility of many such jobs, allowing workers to choose their hours, enhances their appeal. This adaptability, including part-time options, proves advantageous for diverse commitments, such as students. Acknowledging the pivotal role of small-profile jobs is imperative, emphasising their indispensable contribution to the daily lives of small-town residents.

Munro's short story "Turkey Season" delves into the theme of small-profile jobs as the narrator, a fourteen-year-old girl, engages in turkey gutting during her Christmas holidays to support her family. Working alongside others like Lily, Marjorie, and supervisor Herb Abbott, she learns the intricacies of turkey gutting. Despite being a school-going girl, she dedicates her after-school hours to this job. Similarly, Bond's "The Night Train at Deoli" explores small-profile jobs through a basket-selling girl at a railway station. Although her homemade baskets remain unsold, she persists in bringing them to the station for sale. Both narratives emphasise the significance of small-profile jobs in sustaining families, whether it be turkey gutting or a small basket-selling business.

The short story "Wood" by Munro also confers the theme of small profile jobs where the protagonist named Roy works on wood cutting. He is a craftsman and renovator of furniture, where he uses varieties of woods which is taken from different kinds of trees. Wood cutting and making furniture out of them is one of the small profile jobs in small-town.

Roy uses both machine and axe for wood cutting which makes his work easy and he works alone without any helper because he loves his job. Correspondingly, the short story “Last Truck Ride” by Bond, through the characters of Pritam Singh and Nathu Ram discusses about the importance small profile jobs in small-town life. Pritam Singh is a truck driver and he never allows anyone to drive his truck, whereas Nathu Ram is the cleaner of the truck. Driving truck is one of the small profile jobs in small-towns, where it is used to carry heavy loads like limestone quarries. Even though, Pritam Singh’s son works in the city and earns good amount for the family, Pritam Singh wants to stay in small-town to earn on his own for his living. In both the short stories, both the characters Roy and Pritam Singh are self-reliant and do not expect help from others.

In Munro’s short story “Fiction,” the theme of small-profile jobs is explored through characters Jon and Joyce. Jon engages in carpentry and woodworking to craft furniture, opting to appoint an assistant named Edie, part of a government program that offers compensation for mentorship. Concurrently, Joyce, having earned a degree in music, works as a music teacher at the Rough River School, highlighting the diverse ways people in small towns secure their livelihoods through small-profile jobs. Similarly, Bond’s “The Summer Season,” delves into this theme through the character Visni, who works as a cleaner at the Roxy, the only theatre in the entire Garhwal village. Operating seasonally from April to October, Visni’s earnings support his family after taking on the responsibility following his father’s demise. Despite receiving modest pay, Visni finds contentment in supporting his family through his hard work, echoing the sentiment that individuals derive satisfaction from the meaningful contribution of their small-profile jobs.

Farming and Agriculture

Agriculture and farming exert a profound influence on the fabric of small-town life, serving as vital components that provide sustenance and contribute to the local economy.

Small-town residents heavily rely on the land, engaging in agricultural activities for both sustenance and economic purposes. In her work on *The Countryside and the City in Munro's stories 'Fiction' and 'Wenlock Edge'*, Nadia Naddi emphasises Munro's penchant for placing narratives in rural settings, where farming, gardening, and agricultural endeavours intertwine with life experiences. According to Naddi, "Munro has always placed her stories amidst rural settings where there is farming, gardening, and agricultural activities happen alongside life experience" (27).

Similarly, in the context of Bond's works, Rajesh Beniwal observes the author's penchant for situating stories in rural settings where the ebb and flow of human existence revolves invariably around farming and agriculture. According to Beniwal, in his article, "Wilderness in Bond's 'Dust on the Mountains,'" remarks, "Bond is also in the habit of placing his stories amidst rural environs in which invariably all activities of human existence revolve round farming and agriculture" (117).

Munro's short story "Dear Life" delves into the theme of farming and agriculture, portraying the narrator's father as a cultivator with a vast field for crops and space dedicated to animals. The twelve acres of grassland, adorned with elm trees, not only serves as shelter for the animals but also provides essential sustenance. The narrator, recognizing the significance of farming, actively assists her father by tending to the field and caring for the livestock, demonstrating the integral role of agriculture in the small-town way of life. This narrative underlines the cultural importance of farming in small-town communities.

Similarly, in Bond's "Blue Umbrella," the character Binya exhibits a profound love for farming and her cows in a setting surrounded by fields and gardens. Naming her cows Neelu and Gori, Binya's deep affection is evident. Her fields yield a variety of vegetables, such as potatoes, onions, ginger, beans, mustard, and maize. While the produce may not be surplus for market sale, it adequately sustains her family. Through Binya's character, Bond

emphasises the importance of cultivating crops and vegetables not solely for commercial purposes but for the sustenance of one's own family. Both narratives highlight the protagonists' genuine interest in farming and agriculture, motivating them to harness their natural resources for livelihood.

In Munro's short story, "Labor Day Dinner," the significance of farming is explored through the character George, who draws inspiration from Valerie's garden-filled place. Motivated by this, George acquires a house and land in a small town, dedicating himself to agriculture by cultivating a diverse range of vegetables and fruits. Roberta, assisting George, actively tends to the plants and trees, showcasing their joint commitment to farming. George's engagement extends to forestry, reflecting his genuine passion for agricultural pursuits. This narrative emphasises the role of agriculture and farming in environmental conservation.

Similarly, Bond's "Summer Season," underscores the importance of working on one's land and in a small town, exemplified by the character Visni. Despite his contentment with working in a theatre, Visni feels a deep-seated discomfort, prompting his decision to return to his village and oversee his land. This narrative highlights the authentic connection small-town individuals have with agriculture. While the stories differ, they converge in portraying the vital role of agriculture, serving as a common thread that unites these narratives.

Culture and Community Influence

The sense of community and culture in a small town forms a tightly woven fabric of interpersonal connections, where everyone knows each other, fostering a unique way of life. In such close-knit environments, death is an inevitable occurrence that profoundly impacts the communal dynamics. As Achmad Munjid articulates in the article "Death and Woman: Comparing the Meaning of the Deaths of the Female Main Characters in the Works of Toni Morrison and Alice Munro," Munro uses death to reveal truths from the past, transforming

ignorance into knowledge and purifying historical narratives from falsehoods. Munjid notes, “Death is used as a technical instrument to reveal the truth, to transform ignorance into knowledge, dishonesty into accountability, to purify the past from falsehood and lies” (8). Similarly, in the article “Isolation and Orphan-Hood in Ruskin Bond’s ‘The Funeral’ and Kelwinsio’s ‘Let’s Go Home’”, Dhimant P. Soni underscores Bond’s exploration of the dark and terrifying aspects of death in a simple yet poignant manner. Soni states, “Bond has explained the dark and terror of death in a simple way,” highlighting how literature portrays death as a communal affair, symbolizing the end of an era and prompting collective mourning within small-town communities.

Munro’s short story “Circle of Prayer,” delves into the theme of funerals as Robin attends the funeral of her friend Tracy Lee. The small-town tradition of mourning is vividly portrayed as friends express their grief by singing songs and placing personal items in the coffin. Robin, too, participates in this tradition, throwing a necklace into the coffin as a heartfelt gesture. This unimpeded observance of traditional mourning rituals reflects the community’s unique way of expressing affection for the departed. Similarly, in Bond’s “The Funeral,” the small-town setting emphasises the close-knit nature of the community as they gather to mourn the death of the head of the household. Despite the deceased not being highly outgoing, the entire community, including the gardener and cook, extends their condolences. The story underscores the humanity within the small-town ethos as people empathize with the deceased person’s son. Padre Lal, the deceased’s neighbour, exhibits concern for the children’s mental well-being, highlighting the supportive and human nature of the entire small-town community. Both stories depict diverse expressions of grief, with the former utilizing songs and personal items and the latter emphasising verbal expressions and communal support.

Munro's short story "Miles City Montana," delves into the theme of death and funerals with the demise of Steve Gauley. Despite the narrator's dislike for Steve due to his mischievous behaviour and teasing, her father, displaying the compassionate nature of small-town residents, organizes Steve's funeral in their home. This decision is driven by the perception that Steve's own residence lacks sufficient space for the ceremony. Despite Steve's father's lack of respect in the community and his apparent indifference to his son's death, the small-town community demonstrates its humanitarian qualities by attending the funeral and expressing collective mourning.

Similarly, in Bond's short story "Coming Home to Dehra," the narrative centres on the death of the narrator's father. The profound bond shared by the father and son is shattered by the father's demise, resulting from persistent health issues. The unexpected loss leaves the narrator speechless, yearning for the comforting presence of his father. Despite the support and consolation offered by those around him, the narrator feels an irreplaceable void, emphasising the profound impact of the father's death. In both stories, diverse aspects of funerals and deaths are explored, underscoring the crucial role of community support for the grieving families.

Representation of Nature

The representation of nature and environment in small-town life has been a prominent theme in literature. Small-towns are often depicted as idyllic, pastoral and closely connected to the natural world. Small-towns often offer a unique representation of nature and the environment, one that is different from urban areas. These towns are usually situated in close proximity to natural landscapes such as forests, lakes, and rivers, which play a vital role in shaping the character and identity of the community. One of the most notable features of small-town nature representation is the emphasis on preserving the natural environment. Another key aspect of small-town nature representation is the way in which it is integrated

into daily life. Nadia Naddi in her work *The Countryside and the City in Munro's stories 'Fiction' and 'Wenlock Edge'*, remarks, "In contrast to urban areas, where nature is often seen as a luxury or escape from city life, small-towns incorporate nature into everyday routines" (27), which is reflected in the works of Munro. Small-towns often have a strong sense of community, and residents take pride in maintaining the beauty and cleanliness of their surroundings. This is evident in the careful upkeep of parks and green spaces, as well as the protection of wildlife habitats. Astha Saklani in her article titled, "Lower Himalayas: Regional Representation in The Works of Bond." Opines the statement of Bond that, "Bond himself states that he writes "about mountains and people who live in the hills of Himalaya. Most of [his] books are set in a small town like Dehradun or Mussoorie or a small village" (26).

Munro's short story "In Sight of the Lake" deliberates the theme of representation of nature, where the protagonist Nancy is an enthusiast of nature. The exquisiteness of nature incites her aesthetic sense because of her beautiful kinship with nature. She visits Highman village, a small-town where she has to see a doctor, meanwhile she also checks the village, whether she can lead her life there because of her love towards nature and small-town. Small-towns is the place where nature is unified into daily life. Nancy admires every part of the Highman village, where she is amazed by the houses in the small-town which is surrounded by gardens. She visits one of the gardens and comes to know that it is a private garden, which makes her dream about having a house with a garden in a small-town. The way Nancy is admired to nature is that, sometimes she forgets about her own self. She visits a lake near the Highman village, where she feels the cool breeze around the place. Nancy is totally into nature, and she wants to spend rest of her life in the small-town.

Similarly, Bond's short story "As Time Goes by" discusses about the narrator's love for lakes, rivers and waterfalls. The narrator is dragged to the sound of rain and he steps into

the forest to feel the breeze of the rain and trees. When he hears the sound of the waterfalls, he follows the sound and finds a waterfall which has formed a pool. Without any second thought, the narrator jumps into the pool and he enjoys the waterfall, where Bond discusses about aesthetic sense and love for nature of the small-town people. The narrator not only enjoys by himself, but also brings his friends Somi and Dal to the pool. They spent their whole day in the forest by swimming, playing and riding buffaloes. In both the short stories, the theme 'representation of nature' has been clearly depicted through the characters of Nancy and the narrator, where they have abundant love for nature.

Munro's short story "Lichen," explores the theme of nature representation within an old age home, reflecting the small-town residents' deep connection with the natural world. Named 'Balm of Gilead Home' after the Balm of Gilead trees, the facility's green-painted corridors symbolize nature's vibrant hues. Stella's residence, nestled amidst plants, trees, mountains, and beaches, exemplifies the community's affinity for a life intertwined with nature. The narrative showcases the small-town ethos of cherishing the environment.

Similarly, Bond's "Growing Up with Trees," delves into nature representation, portraying the narrator's upbringing alongside his tree-growing grandfather. The narrator's fondness for climbing trees and relishing their fruits aligns with his grandfather's diverse plantings, including peepul, neem, mango, jackfruit, and papaya. The banyan tree, despite its formidable exterior, serves as a habitat for various creatures. Both narratives intricately weave the theme of nature representation into their settings, portraying a shared love for the natural world among the characters.

Role of Animals in Small-towns

Animals are essential to small-town living because they help humans on both a functional and emotional level. Animals provide companionship and sustenance for people living in small-towns, which is crucial to their everyday existence. Animals, from working

farm animals to cherished pets, are an essential component of rural communities and add distinct charm and character to small-town life. Animals' role in agriculture is one of the most important contributions they make to small-town life. They are crucial to the success of agricultural activities, which is the main business for many rural areas. Cows, chickens, turkeys, pigs, and lambs provide flesh and dairy products vital to the regional economy, while horses and donkeys are frequently used for ploughing and other agricultural tasks.

In the article "Goats, Heifers, Wolves and Other Animals in Munro's *Runaway*," Gianfranca Balestra states, "All sorts of animals populate Munro's short stories ... Some of them are just mentioned in passing as part of domestic life, rural landscape, or the wilderness; others become characters with important functions in the text and acquire symbolic or mythical status" (123). Many small-town communities would find it difficult to maintain their agricultural processes and the livelihoods of the people without the help of animals. Animals not only contribute functionally but also benefit their human caretakers emotionally. Pets, regarded as family members in small communities, provide solace, company, and a sense of purpose, making their owners happy and loved. Moreover, in Uttiya Sarkar's article "Animal Kingdom in the Fictional Works of Bond," it is remarked that "The world of animals is abundant in the fictions of Bond. They are characterized by their behaviour which represents human-like behaviour in close relation to the author himself and other characters created by him" (8).

Munro's short story "Turkey Season," explores the significant role of animals in the lives of people, particularly in the context of small communities where turkeys serve as a crucial source of food. The narrator, employed as a turkey gutter during the Christmas season, learns the art of turkey gutting under the supervision of Herb Abbott. The repetitive sight of turkeys hanging everywhere in the barn evokes a sense of pity for these creatures,

slaughtered for sustenance. Despite the narrator's job necessity, a genuine sadness for the turkeys reflects her compassionate nature towards animals.

In contrast, Bond's short story "Tiger in the House," delves into the heart-warming relationship between a grandfather and a tiger named Timothy. Discovered during a hunting expedition, Timothy becomes a cherished companion alongside a monkey and a dog. Despite the wild nature of tigers, the grandfather forms a profound bond with Timothy, leading to conflicting emotions when deciding to transfer him to a zoo. The subsequent visit to the zoo reveals Timothy's demise due to pneumonia. The poignant connection between the tiger at the zoo and the grandfather, even though the tiger is not Timothy, that underscores the reciprocal love that animals can have for humans.

Munro's short story "Miles City, Montana," delves into the theme of the role of animals in small-town life, notably illustrated when the characters come across a deceased deer struck by a truck. Cynthia's emotional response to the lifeless deer is palpable, expressing her sorrow and an unwillingness to witness harm befalling creatures. Despite the deer's unfortunate demise, its presence serves as a catalyst, revealing Cynthia's compassion and love for animals. Similarly, Bond's "The Tunnel," explores the significance of animals in small-towns, portraying a unique bond between a watchman and a leopard. Living near a railway tunnel in the forest, the watchman, unafraid, encounters the leopard inside the tunnel. Rather than fearing the wild creature, he communicates with the leopard to prevent harm. The watchman's perspective considers the leopard as a regular visitor rather than a threat, exemplifying the deep connection small-town residents can have with both domestic and wild animals.

Munro's short story "Dear Life," underscores the significance of animals in the daily lives of small-town inhabitants, particularly exemplified by the narrator's father who raises cows and horses for farming on their twelve-acre grassland. The narrator actively tends to the

animals, providing them with water and maintaining their shelters, highlighting the indispensable role of animals in agricultural practices that simplifies the farmers' tasks. Similarly, in Bond's "Blue Umbrella," the narrative emphasises the importance of animals in small-town existence, focusing on protagonist Binya and her deep connection with her two cows, Neelu and Gori. In these close-knit communities, animals are not merely livestock but are considered integral members of the family, reflecting the genuine affection small-town residents harbour for their animal companions. Binya's attentive care for her cows and their reciprocal affection portrays the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals, illustrating the profound impact these creatures have on the fabric of small-town life in both narratives.

Aging and the Elderly

A recurrent subject in literature is the depiction of elderly people living in small towns. These personalities frequently serve as a window into the past and reveal how small-town life has changed over time. These individuals serve as a reflection of the value of community, family, and the perseverance of the human spirit, whether they are depicted as wise and resilient or as battling to find purpose in their later years. Although old age is a normal period of life, it frequently comes with a number of different bodily, mental, and emotional changes. Marta Gort Paniello, in the article "Identity in Old Age: The Meaning of Ageing in Munro's 'In Sight of the Lake'" states, "Munro's narrative depicts old age as a troubling stage for identity, and older characters from her later short stories need to confront notions of fixed physical limitations and restricted living conditions" (173).

The aged frequently play a crucial role in mingling, offering advice, and maintaining cultural customs in small-towns with close-knit communities. However, as families become more nuclear and life moves quicker, many elders find themselves alone and secluded, which is where old age facilities come in. Institutions known as old age homes house, feed, and care

for aged people who are unable to live self-reliantly. Old age homes can truly offer care and support to the aged, despite the fact that many people identify them with maltreatment and abandonment. Likewise, in the article titled “Treatment of the Elderly in Bond’s Short Stories” Vijayalakshmi Bhat and Sangeetha Noval portrays the how Bond has represented the elderly people in his stories, “loneliness in old age and the mental fragility of the aged. He is deeply conscious of the myriad problems that are at the core of the alienation felt by the people of an advanced age and his stories give the readers an empathetic rendering of the twilight years of their lives” (1552).

The short story “Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd,” by Munro provides a poignant portrayal of life in an old age home through the characters of Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd. Having known each other since the tender age of three, their enduring friendship spans numerous years, and they find themselves residing together in the confines of the old age home. Despite having experienced early marriages and raising their own children, circumstances have led them to this shared space in their twilight years. Despite the attentive care provided by the old age home and the thoughtful gifts sent by their children, a sense of loneliness and melancholy pervades their existence as they yearn for the warmth of their families. Enduring the challenges of various ailments, Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd make a concerted effort to maintain a positive and cheerful outlook for each other.

In stark contrast, Bond’s short story “The Photograph,” explores the lives of elderly individuals who live alone in their homes. Here, the elderly grandmother is accompanied by her devoted grandson. Despite the grandson’s presence, the grandmother embraces a life of independence, engaging in activities such as knitting and finding solace under the shade of a mango tree. She imparts her wisdom and skills to her grandson, seamlessly blending discipline with love. While the two short stories present differing perspectives on elderly individuals residing in old age homes versus living independently, a common thread emerges.

Both sets of characters possess unique methods of finding joy and love in their later years. Whether through the companionship of a lifelong friend or the independence of solitary living accompanied by familial visits, these stories highlight the resilience and adaptability of the elderly as they navigate the challenges of aging.

Munro's "Lichen," examines the theme of old age homes and the elderly, particularly through Stella's father, a resident of the 'Balm of Gilead Home.' Accompanied by her husband David, Stella visits her father to celebrate his birthday, revealing the distinct atmosphere of the facility marked by the pervasive scent of sanitizers. Despite residing in the nursing home due to health constraints, Stella's father finds solace in conversations with David about cars, offering a glimpse into the complexities of familial relationships within the context of elder care. Munro skilfully captures the challenges faced by aging individuals and the dynamics of maintaining connections in care facilities.

Bond's "The Cherry Tree," explores the profound influence of love and guidance from elderly figures, exemplified by the grandfather's unwavering support for his grandson Rakesh. The story unfolds as Rakesh, inspired by his grandfather, endeavours to plant a cherry seed, facing setbacks that test his determination. Bond artfully portrays the resilience of youth guided by the wisdom of elders, ultimately resulting in the flourishing of a cherry tree, symbolizing the unexpected joys that can emerge from perseverance and intergenerational bonds. Both narratives underscore the vital roles played by elderly individuals in providing wisdom, guidance, and emotional support, emphasising the enduring impact of intergenerational relationships.

Contrasting City Lives and Small-Town Experiences

Munro's short but dense narratives demonstrate the virtues of country life. These descriptions however, are not one-sided and portray different merits in the two different environments. In the work *The Countryside and the City in Munro's 'Fiction' and 'Wenlock's*

Edge' Nadia Naddi proclaims that, "It is argued that Munro's rhetorical technique, which provides a multifaceted view of the countryside, identifying its advantages and disadvantages, strengthens the overall advantageous image of the countryside. The contrast between the images of country and city life shows that there is a bridge between the two lifestyles that can be difficult to cross" (1). Bond also favours rural life to place his short stories. He often sides towards the country life and find city life to be mechanic and monotonous. Bond uncovered the genuine idea of reality with the assistance of dreams. These accounts are composed out of his social perceptions. Also, in the article "Rural Culture and Customs: An Exploration of Bond's Literary Opus" Jagdish K. Bawane states that, "The settings of Bond's tales and dreams are slope-top, a mountain, a stream bank, a valley or a villa. The characters of his dreams are either superstitious villagers or crude people. These accounts have solid message important to our time" (655).

In Munro's "The Progress of Love," the thematic dichotomy between small-town and city life is artfully depicted through the contrasting perspectives of sisters Marietta and Beryl. Marietta, rooted in the simplicity of small-town living, expresses discomfort with her father's second marriage, embodying values centred around simple life and love. On the other hand, Beryl, residing in the cosmopolitan setting of California, embraces the sophistication of city life, demonstrating a pragmatic approach even in familial matters. The geographical backdrop further emphasises their lifestyle differences, with Marietta in Netterfield county and Beryl in California. Mundane choices, such as dining habits, reveal the clash of ideologies – Beryl's inclination towards dining out for familial bonding, typical of city life, is met with Marietta's preference for homemade meals, encapsulating the broader conflict between the values of simplicity and status emblematic of small-town and city mentalities, respectively.

In the short story "Haven", the theme of small-town vs city life, about typical small-town qualities, is discoursed through the characters of Jasper and Dawn. Here, Dawn plays

the role of a typical small-town woman, where she has given her life in the hands of her husband, Jasper. Her husband, Jasper is a person who decides everything like a small-town patriarch. He never allows his wife to be friends with the neighbours, and he wants his wife to take care of all the household chores and needs the house to be very clean. Jasper is completely a different person outside the house, as he is the famous doctor at his place and he is also a sociable person. Respecting the words of her husband, Dawn does all the works and she even eats only after her husband leaves the house. Dawn never defies her husband and this gives Jasper advantage and control over her. B. Anitha in her article “Between the Dream and the Reality: Middle Aged Woman Cravings and Contentment in ‘Labor Day Dinner’” opines, “Men continue to take advantage of women in all societies irrespective of culture and historical differences. Munro captures this reality in her short stories” (62).

The short story “The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink” explores the theme of differences between small-town life and city life, particularly focusing on job opportunities and discipline. Sam and Edgar practice acrobatics, inspired by performances they have seen in circuses and on roadsides. Consequently, they leave their homes and start living in a boarding house where the landlady, Miss Kernaghan, imposes strict rules. Adherence to these rules is mandatory for the residents. Miss Kernaghan prohibits alcohol consumption, smoking, disrespectful language, bad attitudes, and even eating in the rooms. This highlights the disciplined nature of small-town life, with Miss Kernaghan embodying the role of a disciplinarian. Despite the limited job opportunities in small towns compared to cities, Sam and Edgar perform acrobatics on the streets of Gallagher town to make a living. Although the pay is modest, they find satisfaction in their earnings. Similarly, in Daneele Boynton’s *Book Themes and Images in Munro’s Short Stories* has been stated that, “Economic exploitation continues in all societies that have even an iota of institutions influenced by patriarchal

oppression. Munro is aware of this fact and she continuously presents such exploitations in her works as part of her mission to depict small-town life” (33).

In “Miles City, Montana,” the thematic exploration of small-town versus city life is nuanced, with an emphasis on the interface between technology and an enduring affinity for rural living. The narrator’s poignant longing for her small-town roots becomes evident upon relocating to Vancouver city, prompting the organization of a family trip back to her hometown as a rare vacation opportunity due to her husband’s infrequent holidays in the demanding urban work culture. The narrative subtly delineates the dichotomy between urban and small-town lifestyles, underscoring the prevailing work-centric ethos in cities that often marginalizes familial and leisure pursuits. The story also symbolically contrasts navigation methods, as the daughter employs a traditional paper map, symbolizing the evolving shift from conventional approaches to modern tools such as Google Maps. The discomfort experienced during the urban journey intensifies the narrator’s yearning for the cool, natural serenity characteristic of her small-town origins, replete with verdant trees, blossoming flowers, and refreshing mountain lakes.

The short story “Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd,” artfully examines the dichotomy between small-town life and city life, delving into the themes of marriage and gift-giving. The enduring friendship of the two elderly characters, rooted in early marriages and numerous children, embodies the traditional aspects of small-town life, where such familial structures prevail. However, the poignant portrayal of these characters residing in an old age home reflects a departure from conventional small-town values. The gifts exchanged further accentuate the divergence, with Mrs. Cross receiving sentimental items like ornaments, images, and pillows, emblematic of the small-town penchant for treasuring meaningful possessions. In contrast, Mrs. Kidd’s affinity for books aligns with the intellectual pursuits’

characteristic of city life, illustrating the nuanced distinctions between these two societal archetypes.

In Munro's "Passion," the dichotomy between small-town and city life is skilfully depicted through the protagonist, Grace. Munro uses Grace's experiences, particularly her dissatisfaction with a movie character, to draw poignant comparisons between the affluent city woman and the financially constrained small-town girl. Despite the urban character, Elizabeth Taylor's desires for more resonate with Grace's own yearnings for a prosperous life. Grace, working as a waitress due to financial constraints, harbours envy for the perceived societal expectations of attractive and selfless women, contrasting with her aspirations for a wealthier and more fulfilling life in the city. The story reflects the economic disparities between small-towns and cities, where the former tends to undervalue women's dreams and aspirations, emphasising the societal expectations for marriage and motherhood.

Small-town versus urban living has been a topic of discussion in Bond's short stories, where the short story "Summer Season" illustrates Visni's opinion about the women in small-town and the city. He contrasts the attitudes and physical characteristics of the metropolitan woman and the small-town girl. Visni works in theatre as a cleaner, and there he observes the women who comes to the theatre, and is shocked to see their colourfully painted faces because in his small-town the girls are lovely with straightforward appearances and they are healthy. Despite being in good health, the rural girls do not scent like women from the plains. The females from the prairies are elegantly attired, beautifully painted, and scented. However, Visni considers small-town women to be attractive in their own unique ways. Most of the women gives him a bored look, but fortunately, middle-aged women are friendlier to him because of their maternal character, and they typically leave him with some gratuities when he does a good job. Bond is fond of portraying small-town life and its simplicity as well as its attuned with nature.

The short story “Growing Up with Trees,” delves into the dichotomy between small-town and city life as the narrator is nurtured by his grandfather amidst a plethora of trees. Unlike the congested city homes dominated by theatres and stores, the grandfather’s residence boasts a lush expanse of diverse tree species, symbolizing the warmth and natural ecosystem prevalent in small towns, often enveloped by forests. Similarly, in “Coming Home to Dehra,” Bond skilfully contrasts the characteristics of small-town life against the backdrop of city life, emphasising the unique features of tight-knit communities. Bond intricately details the distinctive items used in small towns, such as the Khus reed curtain, a testament to their resourcefulness in adapting to local conditions, particularly during summers when fans were not yet commonplace. The narrative underscores how the people of small towns embraced alternatives like illumination lanterns and Khus, showcasing their ability to thrive while cherishing the distinct advantages of a close-knit community.

In “The Night Train at Deoli,” Bond sheds light on the distinctive features of small-town life, particularly focusing on the ambiance of the local railway station. The station, equipped with both electric bulbs and oil lamps, stands as a symbol of small-town practices where the preference for oil lamps, renowned for their inherent brightness, prevails. The solitude of the station, characterized by the narrator’s observations of an absence of boarding or disembarking passengers, creates a poignant, isolated atmosphere. Bond intricately narrates the history of this small-town railway station, delineating its components such as a reception area, the station master’s room, and a solitary platform adorned with a produce stand, a tea shop, and stray canines. In stark contrast to their small-town counterparts, city railway stations pulsate with crowds, primarily due to the extensive use of railways by urban dwellers commuting to work. The omnipresence of trains and the vivid portrayal of Indian railway life hold a prominent position in Bond’s narratives.

The short story “As Time Goes by,” vividly explores the dichotomy between small-town life and city life, with the narrator expressing a deep fondness for the tranquillity and natural beauty of the small-town environment. Enamoured by the rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and mountains that characterize small-town living, the narrator highlights the adventurous disposition shared by the majority of residents, an innate trait that defines their connection to the idyllic surroundings. As the narrative unfolds, the trio, including the narrator and companions Somi and Dal, venture into the jungle, discovering a secluded pool where they engage in activities such as swimming, fishing, and even attempting to enlarge the pool with an explosion. Their enjoyment extends to wrestling, mounting a buffalo, and other sports, activities that thrive in the unhurried and unpolluted small-town setting, providing a stark contrast to the limitations posed by the urban environment’s pollution and crowding.

Resolution and Endings

Resolution and closure in a literary text, especially within the concise framework of a short story, carry profound significance. Munro adeptly employs the slice-of-life technique, offering readers a window into characters’ lives, encouraging contemplation and interpretation. Munro’s nuanced resolutions invite readers to actively engage, reflecting on the intricacies of the characters’ existence and formulating their own insights. Similarly, Bond, much like Munro, consistently draws inspiration from the simplicity of realistic occurrences. Bond’s narratives often culminate in moments of quiet hope or subtle revelations, showcasing his mastery in infusing optimism into ordinary circumstances. In their unique ways, both Munro and Bond demonstrate the power of short stories to evoke introspection and emotional resonance.

Munro’s short story, “Lichen” is about Stella, who has lost hope in her personal life with David who is interested in other women. Moreover, Stella does not lose her hope and purpose of her living, where her father and the garden which she maintains gives her the

resolution to live. She finds peace and happiness in taking care of her father and the garden. Also, in the short story “Circle of Prayer”, Robin puts the necklace into the coffin of her deceased friend, which shocks her mother Trudy. The Necklace belongs to Robin’s Grandmother, which Trudy really values. Therefore, she follows the superstitious beliefs to get back the invaluable. In both the short stories, the protagonists have purpose and meaning in life.

In Bond’s short story, “Coming Home to Dehra,” the narrator is heartbroken on his father’s demise and feels the loss of his home along with his father. Though, initially he feels hopeless and homeless without his father, he finds comfort after visiting his grandmother in Dehra. Similarly, in “A Tiger in the House,” the grandfather is forced to part with his beloved tiger Timothy regardless the bond they share. Later, when he visits the zoo to meet his Timothy he finds another tiger in Timothy’s place. Though, he is saddened by Timothy’s death, he is able to look forward.

Alice Munro and Ruskin Bond, both renowned for their short stories, explore the theme of environmental sustainability in distinct yet profound ways. In Munro’s stories, environmental themes are intertwined with the psychological landscape of her characters. For instance, “Turkey Season” critiques the alienation humans experience from nature through the industrialised processes of a turkey farm, emphasising the ethical implications of animal exploitation. Similarly, “Labor Day Dinner” presents a rural setting where the slow encroachment of human activities reflects the fragility of natural landscapes. Munro’s use of stark imagery and symbolism, such as lichen in “Lichen” and rivers in “Miles City, Montana,” highlights nature’s resilience and the need for a balanced ecological relationship. Bond, conversely, portrays the beauty of rural life and emphasises coexistence with nature. In “The Last Truck Ride,” he critiques environmental destruction through the story of Nathu Ram, a quarry worker who chooses to return to farming, suggesting that sustainable

agriculture is a more ethical way of living. Stories like “The Tunnel” and “A Tiger in the House” depict respectful human-wildlife interactions, reinforcing the importance of wildlife conservation and natural habitat preservation. In “Growing Up with Trees,” Bond celebrates the nurturing force of trees, portraying their interconnectedness with human life and advocating for ecological balance.