

DELINEATION OF WOMEN PSYCHOLOGY AND COMMON PLACES IN THE SHORT STORIES OF ALICE MUNRO

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ABSTRACT

Alice Munro is down to earth and firmly connected to roots as well as to the many routes that she had travelled. She describes to the inner compulsion of the artist that makes her to write what she had decided to write upon, irrespective of form or generic categorization – to take visions as they come and be personally grateful for those that survive. She set some of her short stories in the damp British Columbian metropolis, and the urban geography is so exact that you can practically map the city off her works. The most important characteristic in these stories is that she is the genuinely popular Nobel Laureate who pictures the little sorrows, little joys, little victories and little defeats of the common people.

Keywords: - *Nobel Laureate, British Columbian Metropolis, Victoria, Governor General's Award, Herculean Romances.*

In order to appreciate Alice Munro's works, we need to go through the geography of Canada. Surely, Munro's stories are concerned to specific geographical places, for she is delighted by local history and geography and her short stories offer social setting of small-town life for example- rural Ontario, though like women's gossip they also describe unspeakable events of the society, those Open Secrets which she focuses on telling and which are completely off the map. Reading Munro's stories is to bring to light the pleasure of seeing two worlds at once: an ordinary day to day life and the dark map of another fictitious or hidden world.

Munro delineates the locality where she grew up in the 1930s and 1940s and where she still lives. That map of locality can be seen by locating a group of small town in southwestern Ontario (Wingham, Clinton, and Goderich on Lake Huron). Her work is confined to a long tradition of Canadian small-town fiction where anywhere else is outsider and alien, be it as near as Toronto or as far away as Sydney, Australia.

Alice Munro left her home town when she went to for higher studies at university in London, a few hours' ride away; then she married and went to live in Canada for twenty years where her three children were born and where she and her husband ran a bookshop in Victoria. Remembering that time she asserts, "All through the 50s I was living in a dormitory suburb, having babies, and writing wasn't part of the accepted thing for a girl or a woman to do at that time either, but it never occurred to me that I should stop".¹

Specially, Munro focuses on the fact that she had gone out for writing short stories all through that period. Twenty-one stories were published before her first collection of stories 'Dance of the Happy Shades' appeared in 1968, and it won the prestigious Governor General's Award. Her first two books were published while she was in British Columbia, then in the early 70s her marriage broke up thereafter she returned to Ontario, where she employed herself in creative writing and still lives. With her increasing international popularity, she began to travel to England and Scotland, then to Australia in 1979 and 1980, and she celebrated her fiftieth birthday in China with a group of Canadian writers. These sweet memories are reflected in an occasional widening of reference in her short stories from The Moons of Jupiter onwards.

Munro's stories are frequently introduced as gossip and they circulate as gossip; they are complex interwoven parts, full of glimpses of parallel lives and quiet knowledge of women bodies. They narrate casualties of the female lie, of love stories and failed romantic fantasies. Adolescent female characters have

passion for more glamorous narratives than their common lives contain. Munro chooses the traditional subjects of women's fiction, keeping their imaginative appeal and power in mind. Her short stories considerably alter female plots so that they become stories of traps and escape with women seeing themselves as spies or aliens, and where secrecy and silence are strategies of camouflaged resistance to conventional social decorum. These short stories have a positive function as women's counter-discourse, suggesting alternative maps for women's destinies beyond traditional patterns of masculine authority and gender stereotyping, drawing new ways to delineate women's differences - not only from men but also from one another across gaps of generation, class and education.

As a woman writer Munro is always serious about the issues related to girls and women. She asserts that female subjectivity is intimately bound up with sexuality and desire, and the contradictoriness of women's desires is one of her main topics. "She is not a feminist theorist though the work of Luce Irigaray and Rosi Braidotti in particular offer some fascinating perspectives through which we can interpret her fiction".² Instead, Alice Munro provides the paradoxical experiential evidence with which theorists are searching to come to terms as she explains sexual difference from within - in women's fantasies and in the dynamic relations between women and men as well as between women themselves. Since the early 1980s there has been a lot of critical attention paid to popular romances and to women's romantic fantasies, "Munro's fiction like Margaret Atwood's seems to be crucial in delineating this central area of female subjectivity".³ As she says of her adolescent heroine Del Jordan, "Del was sabotaged by love - all women are"⁴ and her short stories represent unlimited celebrations and revisions of female romantic fantasies with all their urgent sexual hunger, their perplexing contradictions and disappointments, and their disdain of age and experience. Alice Munro does not delineate Harlequin romances or soft porn though she comprehends their appeal, as the female narrator of 'Bardon Bus' notes with some self-irony. The images, the tongue of pornography and romance are alike; monotonous and mechanically sedative, quickly leading to despair.

The American and Canadian publishers represent her oeuvre chronologically but with a rearrangement of the order of short stories within each collection. As the review in *Books in Canada* suggests, "we have to read this as a new presentation in itself, as a narrative on its own, and as a defence of her art",⁵

Certainly Munro's style of narration has changed over thirty years, as she allows more and more possible meanings to propagate in each story while refusing definitive interpretations or plot resolutions. In the beginning collections and whole book story sequences up to *The Beggar Maid*, Munro writes within the tradition of documentary realism, delineating surface details of common people and then disrupting those realistic conventions by shifts into fantasy, suggesting alternative worlds that coexist within the same fictional space. Endings are important features in many of these short stories, where something extra is added - some insight or additional detail of information - which unsettles the carefully constructed narrative a principle of augmentation, following Derrida's concept of the "unsettling supplement as a feature not only of the play of language but of narrative itself."⁶

There is a major shift in Munro's art of narration which is reflected in *The Moons of Jupiter* and *The Progress of Love*. In these collections instead of placing the supplement at the end, augmentation pervades the whole story through time shifts and shifts in narrative perspective, unsettling the story at every stage of its telling.

Munro has been called a regional writer because many of her stories delineate rural Ontario during the Depression era, where Munro grew up, and evoke a bygone time of hardship and deprivation. Munro's heroes often hold on to their sense of wonder and mystery about the world around them, as does the narrator of *Walker Brothers Cowboy*. The family of the narrator—a young girl—has lost their fox farm, and her father has been compelled to take a job peddling patent medicines, food flavourings, and poisons to the farmers who live in Ontario's countryside, but the girl still looks deeply at the common world and finds enchantment in it. Like many of Munro's stories, *Walker Brothers Cowboy* also analyses such global themes as isolation, identity, and maturation.

In *The View from Castle Rock*, Alice Munro writes, closer to a nonfictional first person than usual, about travelling the domain with her husband, a geographer, and with special maps sold to accompany a book called *The Physiography of Southern Ontario*. The title sounds almost parodically dry — especially to those Americans who persist in viewing our wild and mysterious northern neighbour as an empire of blandness but in Munro's hands those maps come to resemble poems, runes or magic spells.

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