



The Exploration of Human Trauma in Alice Munro's Short Stories: A Study

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Abstract: Alice Munro is a Canadian short story writer who has received numerous literary awards, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 for her work as "master of the contemporary short story" and the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 for her whole body of work. The work of Munro has been considered as having altered the structure of short tales, particularly in its tendency to go ahead and backward in time. Her stories examine the intricacies of the human condition in plain writing. By writing about regular people in everyday situations, Alice Munro presents a depiction of life in its entire trauma. She examines the distinction of relationships, the depth of emotions, and the impact of the past on the present in her gorgeously complex works. She is able to summon a person's personality or a whole geographical place with only a few details. Munro is an expert at writing short stories that are as completely developed as novels.

Keywords: receiver, reformed, tendency, exploration, trauma, portrayal, profundity, incite

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I. Introduction:

Alice Munro, a Canadian author, is regarded as one of the finest short story writers of the present day. Her critically praised pieces describe small-town life, typically in Ontario, where she grew up, and focus primarily on human interactions, deeper realities, and uncertainties. In her stories, which are primarily written from a purely feminine perspective, life's events are reinterpreted in the inner landscape of intellect and emotion of the narrator/protagonist, which is a reflection of the author's own perceptions. The frequent themes in her stories are difficulties within relationships; between domesticity and independence, creativity and compulsion, commitment and the freedom to follow one's own desires, as well as discrepancy between social classes and the complex problems a creative woman must face. In 2009, Munro was awarded the Man Booker International Prize, and in 2013, she was given the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her story collections comprise *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), *The Beggar Maid* (1979), *The Moons in Jupiter* (1982), *The Progress of Love* (1986), *Friend of My Youth* (1990), *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998), *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001), *Runaway* (2004), *Carried Away* (2006), and *Too Much Happiness* (2009). 1996's *Selected Stories* is a compilation of stories from her previous eight books.

Selected Munro's Short Stories:

In the preface to her collection *Selected Stories*, Munro explains that she typically combines a real-life event or situation and then develops a story around it. All of her works explore the trauma of the human mind and interpersonal connections, including those between husband and wife, father and daughter, mother and child, and, of course, man and woman. Where realism is depicted through fiction that is insightful and tinged with irony; where human relationships operate on different levels, dictated by social norms on one end and striving to break away from them on the other. In the majority of her stories, the past, present, and future alternate.

Miles City, Montana is a superb illustration of Munro's skill. The narrative begins with Steve Gauley's drowning death and funeral. As a child, the storyteller had witnessed this. When she describes the inexplicable bitterness and disdain she felt for her parents, as well as the deceit she detected in the solemn tone of the hymn they sung with their heads down, the human interaction angle is established. She feels that all youngsters have

the same feelings toward adults. Later in the narrative, she explains that this feeling may have been a result of the knowledge that ultimately, adults cannot protect children. Since they make the child, it follows that they embrace its death on some level, whereas the child has little choice but to trust the parents, as her daughters Cynthia and Meg did following Meg's near-drowning. On one level, the narrator, her husband Andrew, and their two kids reflect a normal middle-class family travelling to Ontario to show off their new car. However, on another level, the dissatisfaction and discrepancy in the marriage are accurately portrayed. She is justified in describing herself as "an observer, not a keeper...constantly losing what I desired to keep." (A Study of Three Authors) Therefore, the one step into the future in which the author admits she hasn't seen Andrew in many years signals the end of an unsatisfactory relationship, while being shocking. Just as the novel oscillates between the past, present, and future, so does the narrator's perspective of spouse Andrew oscillate between "wonderful friend and most vital companion" and that his "male authority came between me and any joy or lightness I might find in life" (A Study of Three Authors)

Again, familial relationships are examined in *The Moons of Jupiter*, but this time the narration is more chronological. Munro does address the father's past and describes his entire life in a one, concise sentence: "The runaway child, the survivor, an old man stuck here by his leaking heart." (NYT, May 22, 1978) Janet eloquently describes the irony of a father-daughter connection when she adds, "had my father's amusing, indulgent critique been directed at me, it would induce in me a familiar gloominess of spirit." (NYT, May 22 1978). She characterises her married life as "cartoon couple, more middle-aged in our twenties than in our middle age." (NYT, May 22, 1978). The acceptance of a child's death by a parent is a common issue in her stories and was particularly prevalent in *Miles City, Montana*. When she learns that Nichola is suspected of having leukaemia, her hug imperceptibly changes as a self-defiance mechanism so subtle that "the recipient of such care would not guess it any more than she would suspect the death sentence itself." (NYT, May 22, 1978) After her visit to the planetarium, she fully accepts her estranged connection with Nichola, as well as her father's decision to "go under the knife." (39)

The other stories in the anthology *Selected Stories* are diamonds in their own right, each displaying Munro's unique perspective on human frailties, complexities, and connections. Through the fourteen-year-old protagonist's voice and eyes, dignity and compassion are communicated in *The Turkey Season*. The death or murder of the couple next door in Fitts raises questions about marriage. The husband cannot comprehend his wife's indifference to the horrible event next door. After decades of marriage, he feels as though he has been living with a stranger, as is often in real life. Sexuality is present in a number of Munro's stories, albeit in a subtly veiled manner. In *Wild Swans*, recounted from Rose's perspective, Munro invites the reader to join the girl's awareness and experience vicariously the uncertainty of her fantasy, imagination, and reality. Rose's subjection to the minister's probing hand raises the question of her reasons; the author labels it as "curiosity. More consistent and resolute than any yearning;" an insatiable need for experience. The plot of *The Albanian Virgin*, in typical Munro fashion, alternates between the voices of the narrator who befriends Charlotte, the author of the story about Lottar, and Lottar, the Canadian girl who is taken captive by barbaric tribals to the small town of Matsia e madhe in the Northern Albanian Mountains. The two worlds at opposite extremes of the spectrum are brilliantly juxtaposed, as are the male-female relationships in the two surroundings, which are also interconnected.

Different Short Stories:

Moving away from *Selected Stories*, I will discuss a couple of Munro's more recent works in which she depicts many elements of human nature in her characteristically compelling and complicated manner. She conveys the natures of her characters or the atmosphere of the location and period with only a few brushstrokes. Her narrative *The Red Dress* – 1946 opens with a mother-daughter struggle, a recurring motif in many of her works. She eloquently explains the interaction between the two thirteen-year-old pals, including their adolescent curiosity about guys and sex, as well as the insecurity and low self-esteem that most youngsters their age experience. The young narrator attends the High School Christmas Dance despite feeling absolutely inadequate, wearing a crimson velvet dress sewn by her mother against her will. She hides in the restroom after being abandoned on the floor halfway through a dance. There, she meets Mary, who states she is not interested in guys and would rather spend her time doing something else, such as harvesting tobacco or working in a cafeteria to make money. Impressed by her self-assurance and encouraged by her difference, the narrator agrees to leave the dance; however, on her way out, a boy asks her to dance, and she abandons her new friend Mary for the dance floor. This dance and Raymond Bolting's interest restore her self-assurance, and she is grateful to have rejoined the regular world.

In *Voices*, on a more autobiographical note, Munro describes her brief contact with a prostitute at the age of eleven. She recounts the 1940s little town, the clothing worn, the social norms observed, and the conflicts between mother and daughter once again. The protagonist, a young girl at the time, attends a dance with her mother, both dressed in their Sunday best. Here, a lady captures her attention. She sticks out from the throng;

she is a study in contrasts; "both old and polished, both heavy and graceful, brash as brass yet incredibly dignified." The mother, frightened by the appearance of the prostitute, instructs her daughter to retrieve her coat so that they can immediately depart. The girl observes a woman named Peggy sitting on the steps surrounded by several Air Force men who are supporting her.

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