



INSIGHTFUL NARRATIVES FROM THE NOVELS OF ALICE MUNRO

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ABSTRACT

Alice Munro is a prominent Canadian writer who brings an effective art of narrative in her Novels and short stories. Munro has "revolutionized the architecture of short stories and brought a modesty and subtle wit to her work that admirers often traced to her background growing up in rural Canada". Munro is one of the most well-known and highly praised representatives of Canadian short fiction writing, both on the Canadian and on the international scale.

In her novels, what techniques Munro uses to create the impression of her stories not being stories, but truth", or the reality" as such. however, they have omitted some aspects of Munro's work which would, in fact, support the argument that despite her realism, her short stories are in fact very well-structured, and fit into the general pattern of traditional criteria towards short stories: they excessively use foreshadowing technique, the opening sentence initiates the predesigned effect and every word has its place in the story line, they are indeed chosen very carefully. Her stories investigate human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Narrative is the focal movement of the characters of Munro's fiction. Her fundamental subject is humiliation and grief, sexual perversity, terminal illness and fatal accidents but her memoirs are the best.

In the present paper, I illustrate how the techniques described and depicted in Munro's novels, all the protagonists of Alice Munro's stories are modern, educated and independent women, between the ages of thirty to thirty five. At the end they emerge more confident, control and significantly helpful. Her plot is relatively basic and simply told in a simple language. She likes using small town setting where even the minor events and minor characters hold higher significance. Her writings mainly focus on the lives of women and their problems in particular. The effect of realism is very strong in her stories. Her use of one word title focuses the narrative perspective of each story on an image that makes the reader to understand the story.

Key words: Revolutionized, Foreshadowing technique, Human complexities, Independent women

Introduction:

Alice Munro is one of the most well-known and highly praised representatives of Canadian short fiction writing, both on the Canadian and on the international scale. As an American writer Mona Simpson notes, (Munro's) genius, has the simplicity of the best naturalism, in that it seems not translated from life, but, rather, like life itself." In other words, she is praised for being a realist writer. In the novels, what techniques Munro uses to create the impression of her stories not being stories, but truth", or the reality" as such. Also, they comment on how the narrator in Munro's stories reflects from time to time on the narrative technique or the plotline and the development of the story. However, they have omitted some aspects of Munro's work which would, in fact, support the argument that despite her realism, her short stories are in fact very well-structured, and fit into the general pattern of traditional criteria



towards short stories: they excessively use foreshadowing technique, the opening sentence initiates the predesigned effect and every word has its place in the story line, they are indeed chosen very carefully in order to contribute to the effect that the author wants to create, and thus creating a dense text.

Alice Munro is a prominent Canadian writer who brings an effective art of narrative in her Novels and short stories. Her stories investigate human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Narrative is the focal movement of the characters of Munro's fiction. Her fundamental subject is humiliation and grief, sexual perversity, terminal illness and fatal accidents but her memoirs are the best. She is often called as a territorial writer since her fiction focus on the way of life of rustic Ontario Canada, which she renamed as Jubilee or Han ratty in her stories.

Alice Munro started publishing in different magazines from the 1950s. Some of her works are, Dances of Happy Shades (1968), Lives of Girls and Women (1971), Something I've been meaning to tell you (1974), Who do you think you are? (1978), The Moon of Jupiter (1982), Open Secrets (1994), The love of Good Women (1988), Run away (2004), The View of Castle Rock (2006), Too Much of Happiness (2009), and Dear Life (2012). Though she grew up in a very traditional community, she thinks practically. She is known for her tuned short stories which are characterized by clarity and realism.

The outwardly narrow focus of Alice Munro's fiction includes an intricate representation of the dynamics of power. Munro's subject is the interplay of men, women, and sometimes children within the network of domestic relations. Her characters are rarely developed within professional, political, or social settings external to their domestic circles. Yet Munro is a deeply political writer, repeatedly tracing the contests, victories, and defeats between contenders in a domestic system founded on power imbalance. The vast majority of her principal characters are women, many of whom are seeking relief from, or at least understanding of, their object position within the microcosmic political system of family and friends. Of these characters, only a lucky few succeed, reaching a vision that dismantles oppressive binary oppositions like subject and object, victimizer and victim.

When crisis comes to Munro's characters, it is often experienced as a collision between past and present, between two sets of experiences that cannot be resolved and that collude as sharp reminders of the pain of powerlessness. A representative example of such a collision occurs in the 1980 story "Dulse," Lydia's account of a flirtatious weekend with three telephone workers sits uneasily within her painful memories of a recent love affair. The later experience insists upon calling up the earlier, which in turn looks to the later for an accommodation and resolution that it cannot deliver. In order to extricate herself from this tangle of experience, Lydia, like many of Munro's characters, is impelled to narrate, historicize these clashing experiences. She resorts to narrative to relieve her pain--a pain resulting from the passive, pleasing, submissive role she habitually plays with men. But Lydia's attempt is unsuccessful, and the cause of her failure can be found as much within her narrative method as within an analysis of her relationships with men.



In the stories, Munro is offering a voice to characters accustomed all their lives to having been silenced, objectified, and generally relegated to the verge of discourse. At the beginning of their stories, these women inhabit not just the position of object, but of reject. Impelled to manage their pain through narrative, they become story tellers, narrators. But they do not gain the traditional privileges of subject hood, control, or power through this new role. None of these women practices inversion--they do not replicate or even mimic the controlling strategies of those who have controlled them. The least conscious of Munro's characters, like Lydia in "Dulse," and Julie in "Hard-Luck Stories," use the voice given them to perpetuate their own victimization. But characters like the narrator in "Stories," Janet in "Moons," and Del in the earlier volume *Lives of Girls and Women* at least approach a new configuration of narrative that combines voices, drops the device of a single unifying perspective, moves almost imperceptibly among points of view, and remains as faithful to experience as the representational register of language will allow. Interestingly, these characters make this move largely in the company of women and rarely with the participation of men; frequently, the narrating women are sisters or mother and daughter (see, for two examples of many, "Friend of My Youth," 1990 and "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You," 1974.)

The characters in Munro's fiction need truth, and Munro's understanding of narrative offers them at least the possibility of a provisional one. Her narrative, with its emphasis on communal participation, allows her to disinfect the notions of 'decidability,' 'understanding,' 'truth.' Her version of truth, often found in narrative, provides an alternative to, on the one hand, the chaos of undecidable, indeterminable meaning exposed in some postmodernist fiction, and on the other, rigid, hegemonic, traditional constructions of meaning and truth. Through her figuration of the narrative act as participatory, polylogicand metaphoric, she frees the notions of truth and understanding from their association with control and dominance. Truths like that reached by Janet and her father at the end of "The Moons of Jupiter" are jointly discovered, consensually composed. There is no imposition of one voice or will upon another, no controlling, directing narrative subject objectifying the characters of his/her story. Such truths are fluid, dynamic, always dispensable in the light of a better, jointly constructed version. But they are also usable and useful; while polyvocal, they are not hopelessly polysemic; the circumstances of their composition guard as much against total undecidability as they do against monologic dominance.

Much of my argument about Munro's understanding of narrative can be read in her early novel *Lives of Girls and Women*. In the chapter entitled "Baptism," Del Jordan, the novel's narrator, has her first serious sexual relationship. The affair ends when Del realizes that her lover, Garnet, has taken too seriously the powers she had given him "in play" (197). Her decision to end the relationship rather than struggle against Garnet's desire to reform her marks a profound change in her understanding of her future. She will excuse herself from arrangements that require either her domination or her dominance. In the following story, actually an "Epilogue" to the novel, Del marks another significant (and related) change in her life. She realizes that she cannot finish the novel she had been writing--a highly fictionalized, stylized version of the tragedies of a local family She abandons the novel, it seems, for the same reason she has abandoned Garnet, because she will not participate in a hierarchical



relationship, she will not impose herself upon her material, nor be imposed upon. The novel she was writing was entirely false, she realizes, dedicated not to truth, to a transcription of the actual events, but to her self-indulgent mastery and reformulation of the material. Chastened by this recognition of her arrogance, she chats with the brother of this local family, who, by his presence and conversation, both reminds her of the truth of his story *and* allows her to experience narrative as dialogic.

Alice Munro's most popular novel 'Dear Life' is the Winner of the Nobel Prize in literature (2013) that work was published in 2012 and it is a collection of fourteen stories. The last four stories specifically The Eye, Night, Voices and Dear Life are taken for analysis. Munro is a skilled writer whose quality lies in her capacity to display the surface of regular day to day existence with both concern and unyielding exactness. The key features of narrative techniques are plot, setting, character and style which were used by the writer in her stories. Munro's attitude seems to be changed with the publication of Dear Life. It is supposed to be the last book in her career and the author also revisits her wounds in the 'finale' or autobiographical sections.

In the preceding note she writes "The final four works in this book are not quite stories. They form a separate unit, one that is autobiographical in feeling, though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact. I believe that they are the first and the last -and closest- things I have to say about my life"

Concept of Narrative Technique:

Storytelling is a fundamental part of human nature. Man is the only individual who tells story. It started with oral conventions as myths, legends, tales, accounts, and so forth. The term 'Narratology' was used by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969. As Barry states "Narratology is the study of how narratives make meaning, and what the basic mechanisms and procedures, which are common to all acts of storytelling" (Barry). It not only interprets the individual story but also attempts to study the nature of story by itself.

The Narrative is an art of storytelling. It aids to express our thoughts, feelings, experiences, and observations. The story teller tells a story in an artistic manner. Story might be used as an equivalent word for narrative, to allude to the arrangement of occasions depicted in a story. Homer's 'Iliad and Odyssey', Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' and Spencer's 'Faerie Queene' are famous examples for extensive use of narratives.

Conclusion:

In the present paper, I illustrated how the techniques described and depicted in Munro's novels, all the protagonists of Alice Munro's stories are modern, educated and independent women, between the ages of thirty to thirty five. At the end they emerge more confident, control and significantly helpful. Her plot is relatively basic and simply told in a simple language. She likes using small town setting where even the minor events and minor characters hold higher significance. In most of her stories the protagonists are all women. The



minor character in the novel suffers in silence and accepts the fact without any response. Her writings mainly focus on the lives of women and their problems in particular. The effect of realism is very strong in her stories. Her use of one word title focuses the narrative perspective of each story on an image that makes the reader to understand the story.

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