

Representation of Women in Alice Munro's Works

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Abstract - *The young girl who is usually the first-person narrator in Alice Munro's short tales, notably in the collection Dance of the Happy Shades, forms a gender identity throughout childhood, according to this research. The purpose of this article is to look at the potential for this narrator to form her own ideals based on women's unique talents and personalities, as well as to create a women's society. The structure of this piece follows the girl's experiences as she moves between her mother's home and her father's workplace. I concentrate on the features of the narrating girl, who does not fully comprehend her parents' actions and attitude, but tells all that occurs to her and shows the hidden truth beyond the visible world. I also see the disconnect between her unpleasant moment with her mother and her unintended reveal of how her gendered identity has pervaded her daily existence. I argue that the daughter's discordant connection with her mother gives birth to the prospect that she may explore how to become an adult in the future.*

Keywords - Women, Love, Gender, Representation

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INTRODUCTION

It has been almost 50 years since Alice Munro's first collection of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, was published in 1968. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 and has been hailed as a contemporary Anton Chekhov. What sets her short tales apart from those written by other authors is the narrator's unique role and the common subject that permeates them.

One of Munro's most distinguishing features is the use of first-person perspective in all of her works of fiction (Thacker, 2005, p. 19). There are twelve first-person narrators in *Dance of the Happy Shades* who tell tales and experiences that the reader may identify with. Even though they are based on a person's real-world concerns and concerns, their tales "condense a richness of implication and depth into a minute span" (Duncan, 2011, p. 3). On the surface, the reader can easily follow the story's storyline, but the complexity of the story's structure and the depth of its subject matter are quickly revealed to the reader (Duncan, 2001, p. 2). There must be a reader who can differentiate between important concerns affecting women's lives and gaps in communication between people of varying ages, educational backgrounds, social groups and familial backgrounds, thus the reader must be able to do this sorting. The narrators don't appear to be trying to convey anything in particular, but they do show how

pervasive the character's issues are in his or her day-to-day existence.

Munro's tales describe the emotional growth of girls and women in episodic memories. The author Catherine Sheldrick claims that Munro's tales are presented in "everyday situations so that they look remarkable, endowed with a sort of enchantment" (Sheldrick 283). As a woman and an artist, Munro takes on society head-on. "The struggle for freedom of imagination and expression via the medium of art," says Munro, "is an essential part of the feminist journey" (Rasporich 32). Munro's upbringing seems to have had a significant impact on her development, both outside and internally. As in the "privilege" tale, "Who Do You Think You Are?" she attends a difficult elementary school. Munro states the following in an interview with Alan Twigg:

Because we didn't reside in the town or the county, we didn't fit in with the rest of the population. All the bootleggers, prostitutes, and hangers-on resided in this small slum. That was the group of folks I'm familiar with. It was a place for the outcasts of society. That was how I felt about myself, too. (Twigg 218).

Despite having grown up in a fairly traditional village, Munro finds herself on the outside looking in in a patriarchal culture. She's a doer who

approaches problems from a practical standpoint. That's what Munro claims:

I'd always known I had a unique perspective on life that, if revealed, would get me into a lot of problems and make me a laughingstock. (Gibson246)

Southwestern Ontario is the setting for most of Munro's work, and the protagonist is an expert on the area. From a feminist perspective, her work must be analysed. Well-crafted tales by Alice Munro may be found throughout her works. They are the labour of the journeyman. They convey Munro's feminism via their actions. Writing about women in patriarchal societies is the focus of her work. This book is full of "the past with concealed from others but told to in... and tales do appear formulaic" stories. (Busch 356).

Women's autonomy and uniqueness are undermined in Munro's tales. In her tales, she focuses on "liberation - sexual liberation, the economic emancipation of the working class, women's freedom from the cultural tyranny of males. " In its simplest form, it was all about the person and how they received what they desired and needed. When asked, "Why can't I obtain what I want out of life?" is the era's defining question. (Fawcett70). Class and generational differences may have a significant influence on women, she explains. In Munro's stories, women are prominent:

Her younger characters demarcate the extremes of social distance, the women as a picture of independence from the sphere of domesticity, and repel them as proof of the apparently unreachable psychological and emotional gap between men and women (Jansen 311).

Munro's literature is also notable for its focus on the lives of female characters in patriarchal countries. Having grown up a woman, Munro's female characters embody her own views on gendered expectations for women's roles in society. Additionally, she exposes women's inner longing to be free from society and their fight to dispel stereotypes about women. On the other hand, Munro's male characters often represent the archetypal father figure of patriarchal masculinity and represent the hidden realm in which a father conceals his thoughts and wants, respectively. With their ambiguous ideals and meanings, Munro characters' efforts to keep their masculinity are exposed in the tales of his protagonists.

Because of this, in several of Munro's writings, "the contrast of the two worlds: tidy vs. unkempt" appears (Pfaus, 1984, p. 16). Patriarchal society seems orderly on the surface, with male characters in positions of authority constantly in charge. The narrator sees a bizarre world under the surface of

civilization, which is full of chaos and violence, a stark contrast to her father's orderly world.

The narrator of Munro's stories, who is somewhere between childhood and puberty, is able to engage in both the father's and mother's worlds with equal ease. One of the main characters in Munro's books is a youngster who is innocent and requires a secure place to grow up. Rather, the narrator's image of innocence is not that of a kid idealised by adults who want "to safeguard the features of innocence and to educate them" (Kincaid, 1992, p. 11) in order to preserve them. Rather, her kid narrator reveals that she is unable to depict persons and situations that are "at the absolute boundaries of representation, particularly in language" (Heble, 1994, p. 4) It's [five]. In spite of her lack of understanding, she is able to accurately explain everything that occurs to her. While Munro's characters are all gendered, his protagonist is a narrator who is neither male nor female.

The last important feature of Munro's work is its focus on how girls come to identify as female. "The father and mother [are] dedicated to their offspring's moral and/or spiritual well-being", says Munro, which is the basis for our conception of gender (Thiel, 2008, p. 5). Even though she is still a kid, the narrator selects how to react to conventional male and female roles in order to become a part of society. When she responds to them, she seems to have achieved "a more widely understood sense of order and generality that defines adult society" (Jenks, 1996, p. 3). Since childhood is not only a "place protected from adult corruption and responsibility" (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 5), the protagonist sees it as such. A significant and severe political environment in which she is forced to learn about gender identities is her youth.

In this first collection of tales, Munro focuses on the lives of young women and girls. Throughout Munro's work, the narrator is a person:

a young girl who pays close attention to the world around her, not forming judgements but noticing all of its oddities. The tiny textures, location descriptions, clothing standards, behavior norms, speech quirks, assumptions, and attitudes that were unique to a small Ontario town in the 1940s legitimize this universe. The greatest of Munro's fiction has a factual feel to it. (Stouck 260).

Each of the pieces in *Dance of the Happy Shades* is written from the perspective of a woman who is concerned about her environment and her connections with men. Each of Munro's characters in this collection of tales is based on a real girl or

woman that Munro has met along the way. Ronald Blythe has this to say about Munro's characters:

All of the tales revolve on finding personal independence within a socially acceptable restraint. Despite the fact that one often finds oneself longingly caught up in some of the events so vividly recreated, there is no intended nostalgia; and there is no distortion in the depiction of the characters (Blythe588).

A patriarchal society assigns women a variety of duties, which Munro explores in her book, *The Dance of the Happy Shades*. They all seem to have a similar theme: women's quest for human freedom and equality. 'Dance of the Happy Shades'

Munro's work is characterized by a persistent emphasis on the isolation of a town's outcasts on the basis of social and personal differences. In Munro's tales, characters begin to rethink their fundamental ideas. Recollections of teenage and adult female characters are chronicled in Munro's works, which are structured as episodic narratives. There are several tales in this collection that deal with issues of intergenerational or intersex communication in the context of childhood, adolescence, or adulthood (Gadpaille 58).

In *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Munro examines society's expectations of females in both historical and contemporary contexts. It is through the lives of her characters that Munro brings to life the collective experience of women.

Gender identity formation and reproduction in a patriarchal culture are important concerns of this work, which focuses on the first-person narrator's experience of growing up female in a patriarchal society. The first-person narrator's depiction of dads and mothers, particularly as a child who lacks life experience yet aspires to become an ideal adult, piques my interest in how the girl deals with her gender identity. Munro places the families in isolated rural locations where conventional gender roles are seen as the norm: the father works outside the house to support the family while the woman does domestic responsibilities at home. This helps to explain why she chose a narrator between the father and mother. It is a simple fact that the father is more confident and sure of himself than the mother, who is more likely to demonstrate negative circumstances like anxiousness, exhaustion, and hysteria. In order to take the reader into the secret realm beyond these two roles, Munro uses the reader's pre-existing knowledge of gender roles to her advantage.

I also look at how Munro's narrator establishes her own concept by examining women's distinctive features and personalities as she grows up. To put it another way, I want to look at the many meanings that Munro's short tales provide to women's words, qualities, and locations that are often overlooked or

seen unfavorably. The primary text investigated in this article is the *Dance of the Happy Shades* anthology, with Munro's only novel, *Lives of Girls and Women*, serving as a supplementary source.

Section II "The Mother's Uneasiness" and Section III "The Father's Ambivalence" examine the distinct qualities of the mother's and father's spaces, respectively. They show how a woman has to deal with a male-dominated culture while also showing how a man deals with her own personal challenges to cope with her new circumstances. "The Daughter's Selection" focuses on the daughter's transformation into a new subject after experiencing "the quest pattern departure/return" and the characteristics she chooses as her identity (Redekop, 1992, p. X). Finally, I'll talk about how important it is for her to be conscious of her new life and how important it is for her to be part of a group.

It's possible for Munro's narrator to test what she formerly took for granted by going beyond the surface of reality in certain tales. For example, she is able to form her own ideals that are at odds with the interests of her society and traditional gender roles. In order to be strong, she has had to grow up in the shadows of her mother's hysterical world and her father's bifacial world, and she is no longer naive or immature in her need for physical and emotional support because she is no longer naive. The girl understands her mother's concern in society and her father's mask by travelling from her mother's world to her father's outdoors. Because of this, the narrator's perspective differs from that of the little girl who was oblivious to the "dialectic between present and past, between experience and comprehension" that existed before. As stated in (Duncan, p.19),

Ruth, for example, rejects a scholarship and chooses to remain at home in *Lives of Girls and Women*. When Ruth's mother does not understand Ruth's predicament, she views her as a coward because she feels that one must go to college in order to be accepted by society. It is Ruth's decision to go her own path despite the narrator's belief that she knows best. From a girl's point of view, Ruth doesn't conform to the norms and values of her peers. Instead, she portrays her as a role model of self-reliance who strives to be free of gendered expectations and challenges the widespread belief that a college education is a must for success.

Similarly, the writer-housewife narrator of "The Office" leases an office to write and relax. As she says, "it was actually the sound of the term 'office' that I loved, its tone of dignity and tranquilly." Her desire for an office appears impractical and ludicrous to others. The sense of significance and purpose" (Munro, 2001). People in "The Office" are less worried about others since the narrator doesn't care about them. "A passionate and unrestrained quiver of loneliness" is what she describes her

loneliness as, according to her (Munro, 2001, p. 61) also requires her work, so that she becomes "the home" itself. (Munro, 2001, p. 60). Due to the prevalent gendered standards of the time, she needs a separate location from her home. Aside from that, she gives her writing a deeper meaning and purpose that is hidden from the eyes of the public: she creates a safe haven for herself, expresses her own views on the world, and enjoys a level of independence that most other moms could only dream of achieving. This "shelter" enables people to "ask and address challenging questions and unpleasant situations, as well as to engage in critical self-analysis" (Kramarae, 1996, p. 319). When it comes to her, dignity means critiquing her circumstances and knowing exactly what she needs, rather than just blaming others or blaming herself.

Unlike the narrator in "The Office," Mrs. Fullerton, an elderly lady who refuses to give up on her shabby home in "The Shining Houses," is proud of her home's imperfections. Due to her unique rights as a human being, Mary believes that even if her home is not regarded good enough in industrialized society, it should be protected. Mary realizes that a home is more than just a physical object to Mrs. Fullerton; it's a place that has a special place in the hearts of those who have lived there. She believes that Mrs. Fullerton is not an obstinate, antiquated elderly woman who is unable to adapt to current culture; rather, she is an interrogator who challenges how readily individuals lay claim to their own unique rights. As Mary knows Mrs. Fullerton's condition and objectives, she acts as an advocate for the other woman's above those of the community.

"I can't sign that," she said. Her face flushed up,

at once, her voice was trembling. Steve touched her shoulder.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"I don't think we have the right. We haven't the right."

"Mary, don't you care how things look? You live here too." (Munro, 2001, p. 28)

When she speaks up for Mrs. Fullerton's rights, her face "floods up." A lady's scarlet face shows how tough it is to convey a concept that differs from the expectations of others, particularly as a woman. In contrast, Mary is not content to focus just on her own company or family, but is also eager to take on the role of neighbor and community member, looking out for the needs of others around her. This focus on Mrs. Fullerton's plight causes Mary to reconsider her preconceived notions about her neighbors and her views on industrial society, which were previously congruent with a patriarchal outlook, by turning an otherwise insignificant and helpless senior into a central figure.

Munro's work offers the prospect of creating a "supporting environment made by women" via some of the connections between the women (Foss, Sonja, & Cindy, 1999, p. 49). One of Mary's main themes in "The Shining Houses" is the temptation to overlook individual rights in favor of the greater good. The female protagonists in this story each have a distinct voice through which they express their ideas and feelings and make decisions about their lives. Then again, they become guardians, safeguarding others against indiscriminate assaults on individual rights, and look secure enough in their own lives and freedom to enjoy them. There are also "interactions that are marked by trust" in these partnerships among women. Confident that others would not exploit their weaknesses, participants openly disclose their lack of self-awareness (Foss et al., 1999, p. 49). Mary and Mrs. Fullerton's relationship depicts how one woman strives to maintain the other's low social status and live together in society. Mary has come to appreciate how fulfilling it is to be able to express herself verbally and how beneficial it is to have people hear her ideas and feelings. Mary is Mrs. Fullerton's confidant; therefore she doesn't give a second thought to her flaws. As a result, the connection between them is great.

Female friendships show how vulnerable individuals may form a community of mutual support and trust via their development through time. Because the gendered identity system devalues a woman's talent and authority, I believe that building mutual trust among women is an important first step in preventing a girl from becoming a deformed woman ruled by male-dominated ideals. Such a lady should fight to pay close attention to another woman who is befuddled, dejected, and unable to help herself. These women are able to aid one another because, while living in various regions, they are aware of each other's mutual struggles as undervalued members of patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION

Researching Munro's first-person narrators allowed me to better grasp how a girl becomes an object of debate and discussion about gender problems. According to Howells (1998), "partially figured in myths and imagination," these narrators are frequently young girls who find it simple to go into various gendered settings, where the narrating girl's thinking and conduct are affected. As a result, she tends to maintain a cool demeanor with her mother and presents her work and personality in a dispassionate light. But she also admires her father and feels that if she emulates his ways as much as possible, she will one day be as successful as he is. By learning more about this world, she comes to realize that gender roles are still strictly enforced even in the lives of children, and she is forced to confront her

own insignificance as a weak, useless child who "is treated in terms of [her] potential (or actual) womanliness and sexuality, in terms of child-bearing as well as sexploitation" and should be obedient to the rule. The erroneous characterization of woman as a hysterical person is also shown to be the reason why she sees herself as a bad person in society.

For females who are subjected to injustices owing to illogical ignorance and harsh treatment, Munro imagines an escape. That ideal woman figure doesn't cut ties with other women or blindly enter the father's world, according to her perspective. As a result, she participates in social interactions with other women, confronts the harsh realities of life, and ultimately reflects on her own experiences. As Munro emphasizes this new understanding of relating to others and self-reflection, she establishes a feminine "counter-discourse, providing alternative blueprints for women's destiny outside established patterns of male leadership" (Howells, 1998, p. 4). Looking back on her past in conjunction with other women in her life and communicating with them helps her better comprehend the thoughts of other women. A woman's independence might be negatively impacted if she is dependent on her husband's care and protection, which is why it is important for women to be able to care for themselves. Despite the fact that she concentrates on female relationships, Munro does not profess to be able to fix all of the challenges women face. When it comes to how to live life, she believes that women should take the initiative to enhance the lives of others around them, rather than just stepping out of someone else's space. One of the finest methods to achieve this is to talk to people who are willing to discuss their feelings and experiences. Healing on all levels will be facilitated as a result of this action. When it comes to defining desirable attributes, women should also consider their ability to act. As a result of this process, women may use their voices to fight against gender bias and oppression. As a result, "the unending negotiation of a crossroads" is carried out by women. (Fraiman, 1993, p. 131).

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