

Narrative Exuberance and Powerless Female Depicted in Alice Munro's "Runaway"

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Abstract--- *This paper mainly focuses onto explore the way in which Alice Munro employs certain key images to dramatize the central theme of her fiction. Munro, who creates fantastic fiction, has fabricated collection of short stories which are prominently concerned with the maturation process and the recognition of moral and social pressures which can put an impact on an individual. My introduction praises Munro for her narrative exuberance and sense of accuracy which discriminates men and women. Munro's fictive marriages are world without end bargains and she studies not only their Nostalgias, but there's surprising endurances to an extraordinary level. The raw material of Munro's work comes from her own life. She never abandons Southern Ontario as a setting, many considers it the inspiration for her best work. Her admiration and fascination for her birth place contributes to the construction of her identity. Research explored the ambivalent views of sexual freedom in terms of the progress of feminism and focused on the women's identity from the short stories written by Alice Munro.*

Keywords--- *Dramatize, accuracy, nostalgias, ambivalent, feminism etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Alice Munro is wide thought to be one among the world's greatest living female writers of short fiction in English. She is admired for her writing techniques of Chekhovian realism, her keen insight and attentiveness to day to day life. When it comes to short stories the only name which strikes into our mind, is of Alice Munro. She is a very good writer indeed, perhaps even a great writer, who is not a great fantasist or a visionary and hardly a symbolist as her stories mostly begin in 'real life'. Two types of phenomena happened in Canadian literature from the late 1960s to the beginning of 1970s. Firstly short story started blossoming, and secondly that female writers gain huge heed. Alice Munro (1931-) is one of the most extraordinary writers in this movement. She is far better at describing women's desperation and confusion, which reflected in her works as women's sensitive and challenging spiritual life, with specific concerns of their love, family and inner world. In fact Munro implied that socially for effective change realism is the only tool to bring philosophies. She has a narrative exuberance and her exact sense of what discriminates women and men. "Survival over victory" is stressed as the choice of Munro's fiction. Munro explores the women's life of her contemporaries bound up by its traditional and set up. She expresses the lives of women through her art about her every stage and their inner quest from patriarchal domination. Hence the relationship between self and Society is a very prominent aspect in her writings.

Just as Welty drew inspiration from the settings in Mississippi, Alice Munro drew inspiration from the rural Ontario landscape. Munro like many Canadian authors finds value "in writing about places where your roots are", "I am certainly a regional writer" Munro confesses,

"In that whatever I do, I see only to make things work.....If I use this..... plot of land that is mine"

Her Ontario stories turn back to the country of her childhood. In the 1960's there was an upsurge of feminism in the West which coincided with Canadian nationalism. Her characters explore the tensions between the old rural cultural values and the sense of past and respect for family history. A Canadian author World Health Organization her stories are suffused with the earth science and customary lifetime of her native town western Ontario and of her second home close to the seashore. Not amazingly, these square measure all qualities that square measure mirrored within the stories that comprise Munro's latest assortment of short stories, Runaway.

Munro in her short stories deconstructs the exploitative and interiorizing structures of power and Dominion. That is why the theme of Survival becomes quite important one in her short stories, where protagonists have to pass through various ordeals in order to survive. Her stories are the depiction of quest of self assertion of her women protagonists, who face threats from the patriarchal social setup. She equates the powerless status of women to that of Canada. Most of her stories have a prominent place in modern fictional world not only in Canada, but all over the world by virtue of the way she depicts the problem of freedom in relation to women and the space of women as the secondary one in a patriarchal society. There is a depiction of how women are perceived as absurd and unimportant with comparison to rational men.

Divorce and separation, act as a developmental milestone in relationships and the individual's self awareness. She explores the complexities and intricacies in women's relations through many generations. Her strength as a feminist writer lies in the range of female characters from childhood to old age. Two solitary figures, that of the spinster and the widow are her significant characters. She transgresses the limitation of the predominant and her abilities of keen observation and detailed description are viewed as an extraordinary skill. This accuracy encourages readers to identify with Munro's characters, places and events. As distinctive feature of women's writing is the nonlinear structure of the narrative. Her stories are the depiction of leisurely digressive unfolding of the narrative.

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Women's writing often subverts tradition literary categories. Munro investigates the women's life of her own generation bound up by its traditional and set up. She expresses the lives of women through her art about her every phase and their inner quest under patriarchal domination. Munro has used parody and intertextuality as typical postmodern paradoxical form which use and abuse the texts and the conventions of male tradition. During 60s the novels written by women tended to explore women's issues within the Nationalist framework. Life was generally harder for women in Canada than those of men. Elizabeth Waterston says "Cultural ideals based on a Garrison situation inhibited the pioneer woman in Canada, climate and terrain locked her into a restricted her. Today the Canadian women have been caught in a contemporary sense of strain and change. The continuing depiction of women yearning for liberation from the restraints of her environment has become a significant theme. The movements of nationalism and feminism signalled revolutionary changes in Canadian society. Beverly Raspovich is of the view that all the three phases are discernish in the fiction of Munro (1990) Femininity is of major significance to Munro who questions and revolts against it imprisoning effects. (Raspovich)

Canadian women writing of the last half century has seen another important theme that is a sense of powerlessness that is in juxtaposition with other powerful women in western countries. Lorna Irvine and Coral Ann Howells have pointed to share theme of powerlessness, victimization and alienation as well as to a certain ambivalence or ambiguity that makes Canadians and women open, tolerant accepting, yet also at times angry and resentful. "The Female Voice" believes Irvine, "Politically and culturally personifies Canada" (Irvine) in 1986. Traditionally Munro is accepted as a realist writer of South Western Ontario and feminist writer who explored intricacies of female consciousness. Munro defies categorization. Critics like Coral Ann Howells find two dominant contradictory Discourses in her stories that of reality and fantasy.

She with her brilliant craftsmanship has thrilled readers and critics because of her unique story writing technique which received much critical attention. She has the perception of women as an artist, because for Munro "The feminist Quest" seek for freedom of imagination and expression through the medium of Art. In the introduction Raspovich contemplates the matter of autobiography in fiction stating that, Munro is voicing her thoughts on art and on being a woman artist through her characters. W R Martin too in "Paradox and Parallel" 1987 realise the importance of the imaginative artist figure in her stories, but at the same time he falls to explore the fact these creative young people are almost always female. E.D. Blodgett in his survey of Munro's fiction entitled Alice Munro devotes a chapter in examining "Lives of Girls and Women". Although Blodgett considers Del to be a developing writer, he omits any consideration for the gender issue, preferring to view her simply as an artist, rather than as a maturing female who is budding writer too.

Runaway is one of her collections of short fiction, published in 2004, which contributed Alice Munro won the Giller Prize. It is an exemplary work of Alice Munro. There

are a number of perspectives of narratology studies, while this paper mainly concerns three aspects, they are narrative voice, narrative perspective and narrative time. Alice Munro's narrative strategies have been analyzed in diverse ways by critics. This paper presents Alice Munro's literary creations, general concept of Runaway, domestic and international studies on Munro especially on Runaway, research methods, main structure and importance of this study. They acclaim that the mode of short story is more suited to Munro's style of narration. Katherine Mayberry's "Narrative Strategies of liberation in Alice Munro" says that her fiction includes her intricate representation of the dynamics of powerist. Munro has used the strategy of non-linear narrative time, such as flashback, retroversion; changeable narrative rhythm enhances the narrative artistry, enriches the literary connotation and enhances the depth of the theme as well. Munro chooses various narrative techniques to narrate short stories. The narrative point is multiple and keeps on altering. On narrative rhythm, she creates the transformation of time and space, past and reality that contributes to the jump of plots. She has a superb narrative ability hence; she can narrate such attractive and motivational stories in limited space. It is absolutely clear that she prefers to subtle events in reallife and she explores how women find an appropriate stand in their family and their marriage under the complex and varied living condition.

Munro could be bracketed with fictional auto biographers who transmute personal experiences along with observed facts into fictional reality. George Woodcock in "The plot of life" says that Alice Munro.

"has always written best when her stories or the episodes in her novels were close to her own experience in a world she knew"

Writers like Munro opt to apply autobiographical narrative this is how she make connection between writer and reader. The subjective element found objectified here in Literature. The resentment is seen in the guise of the narratives of her female protagonists, self Discovery and renunciation of male ordained familial values. One could easily notice Munro mapping out in her parallel narrativization of the space for self emancipation derived from the feminist ideology of women's resistance and recovery of her -self. She constructs in some of her stories the social and sexual mores of the emergent feminist world. Robert Thacker who is a famous critic of Alice Munro argues that the key to understand his short fiction is the fact of her,

"having grown up, and of having lived in, and of having left and of having remembered and of having returned to and above all having made texts out of Huron County, Ontario".

Hence the stories have tended to follow the personal and geographical facts of a life, many of which were provided by her daughter after a few years ago by Sheila Munro in an interesting memoir "Lives of mothers and daughters growing up with Alice Munro"



She is one prodigious drive and gifts of intelligence and sensitivity, curiosity and imagination what she writes is worth paying heed to. She confirms her narratives that they reveal things which often confirm the readers own secret experience or suddenly bring life to something that was until then buried just under the surface of consciousness. She fights inner desires in face meaninglessness of real in day to day life. Munro's 11th collection of short stories is called *Runaway* published in 2004. *Runaway* as the name indicates literally a story related to run away. Carla a young wife runs away from her husband and in subplot which is the dramatic point of the story a goat called flora runs away from her. According to Brad Hooper this is most successful psychological stories of Munro. It is narrated in 3rd person point of view setting in a rural area of Canada; story signifies the conflicts of young couple Carla and Clark on one hand and the conflict to kill the white goat by Clark which was Carla's favourite pet. Some critics said "Runaway" as stylistically "innovative".

Michiko Kakutani wrote, "..... *the feel like self conscious, overlooked tales, relying on awkwardly withheld secrets and O'Henryesque twist,* " It is not upsetting she has the quality to characterize both place and people within the confines of the short fiction. Her female protagonist's who are usually an aged one goes into a flashback with the sense of loss, loneliness and a host of other emotions. She sought to seize just what it feels like to be alive in the moments, she perceives. Munro throughout has applied life, she has lived to wonder over and to research that life, to be shaped with impactful stories which as they conclude recreate feelings and understandings being itself. Her stories are therefore real as anything is, both in affect and effect.

In the realms of literature Canada's voice has been established only because of Munro, as she is the remote provided of intensely pleasurable private experiences. When she writes her tone can be bracingly dry. She spoke of the stultifying aspects of local culture which along with the respect of individuality and independence, helped to nurture her love of freedom. The most readily identifiable Western Canadian quality about Alice Munro is her dedication to social reform and the Social awareness that is a part of the foundation of all her world. In this collection of short stories we can find the exploration of the theme of Survival and the theme of self assertion at different levels in the title story 'Runaway', 'Silence', 'passion', 'soon', etc, where the protagonist articulate sensitivity, self reflective, dispossessed and suffer from a sense of inadequacy in their present that placed them in a quandary regarding their identity. She is fascinated towards the failures in love and work and is obsessed with time. In *Runaway* her focus was to the Travails of middle age and of the elderly women alone as, she claims her stories are not autobiographical rather "emotional reality for her characters is drawn from her on life." Interestingly the story introduces the challenge and the theme that shows a strong connection to the struggle of a girl or a woman finding herself and for extracting sense out of her life.

The first story analyzed is 'Runaway' from which its title being drawn. In this story the main character is Carla who is a young woman find herself in a relationship with a very eccentric rather frightening lover named as Clark. She

portrayed her as a captive to Clark and who feels no existence without Clark. In the story Carla is depicted as a very young girl who is caught into the trap of Clark, who never finds a separate existence of her. She lives in that shallow sense of self who does not have trying fires of experience in her life. Although this story moves around the three characters Carla, Clark and Sylvia Jamieson but the main protagonist is Carla. In this story Clark who is although not a hero but a male protagonist, who abuses Carla and physically violent towards her inspires her to runaway while Sylvia her neighbour helps her in her attempt to get away from her husband Clark. It is also made very clear by Munro that without Sylvia's instigation Carla doesn't have had the courage to leave Clark, whom she loved very much. In this story Munro develops the plot where Sylvia whose husband was died, looks to rely on Carla for help and gradually builds an obsessive concern for her abused neighbour. So there is a runaway situation in Sylvia's life also, where she want to run away from her pathetic condition and seeks support from Carla and then also she runaway from the dejection and settle down to an apartment in town.

Then Munro develops a mysterious runaway of Flora, Carla's pet goat, which very mysteriously disappears and returns in a very supernatural way when the situation is not favourable to Sylvia, where she was physically threatened by Clark, Carla's anguish is the result of the absence of her pet Flora which has a strong connection to Carla, she may be treated as a counterweight to her emotional disbalance of uncertainty and distress with Carla. Munro very beautifully presented Carla dreaming of Flora when compared both had earlier a happy carefree state with Clark. Through a diligent analysis of the characterization of the female protagonists in *Runaway*, this paper aims at a comprehensive and deep interpretation the significant theme of escape.

Runaway: The Unconscious aspect of dreams

As this is a story of a couple Clark and Carla and their connection to Sylvia Jamieson. This story recounts in both of their life in an anachronism way and swinging between memories and coming expectations. In this story clear dissatisfaction and disappointments by Clark's violent behaviour towards Carla can be seen, which in result she want to achieve a new identity and horizons for herself where Clark is no-where. The narrator recounts:

"She had dreamt of flora last night and night before. In the first dream Flora had walked right up to the bed with a red apple in her mouth, but in the second dream last night she had runaway when she saw Carla coming. Her leg seemed to hurt, but she ran away. She led Carla to a barbed wire barricade of the king that might belong to some battlefield and then she – Flora- slipped through it, hurt leg and all, just shattered through like a white eel and disappeared."(AliceMunro 1979)

Munro's art of expression through dreams

As the Clark an abrasive personality who is not kind towards Carla, where she has gone through a litany of challenges because of this ruthless fellow. Carla was very disturbed because of her white goat Flora. Flora has a symbolic importance in this story as Munro introduces us two dream sequences that can be clearly associated with Carla's story with Flora. Munro represents that Carla had dreamt of Flora previous night and the night before. In both the dreams Munro Symbolically represents two meanings. In the first dream she saw Flora with a red apple in her mouth walked right up to the bed, while in the second dream with her wounded leg she had run away from Carla. In some or other way Carla can be like Flora to Sylvia, as comfort, life and energy personified. Sometime Munro deviate us with the plot to blackmail Sylvia over false accusations of sexual abuse by Sylvia's husband during her visits at Sylvia's home. Finally and symbolically Clark's dangerous Runaway temper, clearly stated early in the story, which threatens to become truly dangerous, when he visits Sylvia's place to have a confrontation about instigating Carla's Runway.

Women Agony in Alice Munro's Fiction

There is a apparent similarity between the goat's behaviour in ways that clearly is a reflection of Carla's relationship with Clark. She writes:

"At first she had been Clarks' pet entirely, following him everywhere, dancing for his attention. She was as quick and graceful and provocative as a kitten, and her resemblance to a guileless girl in love had made them both laugh".(John Moss, 1977)

Clark's repeated annotations that "Flora might have just gone off to find herself a belly obviously has a similarity with Carla's running away to marry her love Clark from her parents. Munro deviates us a little with a plot to bribe money from Sylvia to save reputation of her died husband against allegation of accusations of sexual abuse by Sylvia's Husband, the poet, so that the money can be extracted from her. But this deviation put some light on Clark's psychology. Thus Munro writes with the global themes like women as a lesser self, who is a captive and over powered by beast like men who considered women to be more like animals. This story also reflects upon the world where knowledge has place, where an Eve in Eden garden was tempted by apple fruit but not very strong to eat the fruit from the knowledge tree. Munro has beautifully portrayed a world of female devoid of women's freedom or full participation.

Narration of Characters in Alice Munro's Runaway

Carla and Juliet both pursue love and take a new leap into new life looking for romance and sex. Carla tries to find love from Clark while Juliet finds a man whom she met only once on a train journey and in return she subsequently received a letter from him. Although both struggled in a different way but complication was due to relationship with Eric or Clark. Both need to see death, because Juliet's partner dies at sea only and her mother dies as well, while in Carla's case, She suspects the Flora's death by Clark and surrogate self has been killed.

Different Portrayal of Women Agony: Juliet and Carla

Juliet and Carla are altogether different characters from each others. Although they both share a youthful uncertainty and self effacing manner as Juliet is not at all pitiful, not a weepy dependent creature while Carla was completely dependent on Clark for her happiness. From the very first out of three stories, she knows very deep about herself and her actions in pursuit of love with Eric. She is a very confident lady who knows what she is doing after every impulse, as Munro represented her as an educated skilled lady.

The stories with Juliet are no doubt about love, while in the case of 'Soon' and 'Silence', it is concerned about filial love of parent and child. In 'Soon' we can see many perspectives which remained unexamined previously. Munro does not feel little hesitant in depicting a loose relationship between Sara and Juliet as mother and daughter. Munro ends the story thus:

"When Sara had said, soon I'll see Juliet, Juliet had found no reply. Could it not have been managed? Why should it have been so difficult? Just to say Yes. To Sara it would have meant so much to her surely, so little. But she had turned away she had carried the tray to the kitchen and there she washed and dried the cups and also the glass that held the grape soda. She had put everything away. (Ray papi 2004)

Out of Filial Love we found anguish and regret which Juliet now finds because of her cowardice or whatsoever emotion that kept her away from responding to her mother.

Similarities between mother and daughter in 'Silence'

The study shows that now being a mother herself, she can realise the pain of a mother to put up her child. Now this pain is clearly reflected in her story 'Silence' in which she is abandoned by her daughter 'Penelope' in the same manner as she left her parents. Although the conditions are not same as we can clearly see that the pain of her daughter's loss was eating her up and the depression which comes after left her isolated wearily.

II. CONCLUSION

It's clearly observed that the stories of Alice Munro in Runaway are Women centric, their thoughts, feelings and their own situations. She very precisely and with that delicacy reflects the unsteady thought process. With a broader perspective if we view the stories, these are self analytical in its psychological approach. She talked about all generations be it young girl or a teenager or a old lady having a flash back of her own life. Very emotionally she has written about love between a male and a female or between parent and child. Munro carefully exposes her characters to the most painful thoughts and revelations by displaying their personal and professional likes with subtlety.



Her stories are the direct connection with human conditions, the complexity of life, caprices of human heart, momentary conditions that can change the whole perspective of life and the readers point of view. Margaret Gail Osachoff analyses the presence of autobiography confession and memoir and observes the ethical and mimetic paradoxes created by writing about other people. "Exploring the lives of others by writing about them involves the writer in unavoidable lies", and yet paradoxically those lives have a 'pure reality' or truth about them. Munro's women characters never reveal their melodies and suffering. They are into habit of enduring the difficulties in their mind, unless it becomes intolerable and escape but anyhow returns to home. Women's relationship with the outer world and with the inner world is quite complicated.

Brad Hooper writes in "The fiction of Alice Munro" "*from the beginning Munro's stories were primarily character studies, the chief way of describing them*". Another prominent aspect of her writing style is the depiction of past, interwoven thread of past and present is the great stylistic achievement for Munro to show how the past impacts the present lives of characters not being able to wipe out their memories and mistakes. Some of the female in Munro are silent while others quickly feel that they have been trapped. Few stories reveal the female recognition of power struggle while some of them adopted and others try to overthrow it. Some women with dissatisfaction with their present married life fill up the distance with extra marital affairs. The repeated theme in Munro stories right from the beginning is the challenge of achieving happy male female relationships within or outside marriage. Most of Munro's married female protagonist realise that marriage is not as romantic as they had anticipated, rather it is full of duties, responsibilities and accomplishing various other expectations of the people in male dominant society.

She although ignores her male characters but bring very few interesting characters as well with least importance to them. This can be the limitation of her stories. They are seen only with female perspectives. Although it is her artistic choice of matter that women only interest her the most, who consistently surprise, anguish and delight her reader with their challenges their hopes, desperation their farsightedness and their awareness. So each and every story of Munro in Runaway deals with this hard fact that one cannot run away from past events, past thoughts and actions. It also reflects that there can be no escapism from the steps of fate which determines one's destiny. As earlier also shows that narrated in it three parts is all about old confusions and obligations which is developed in her own life and which haunt her still. It also shows the cause and effects of the female protagonists' escape and highlights the positive and negative social significance of the action of escape. Thus we are reminded yet again with this thought like others; this author directly speaks about her own experiences in stories.

Her sense of a concluded human life neglects retrospection. Ordinary unhappiness, which in others writers is not fascinating to us, is a brilliant achievement for most of her women and many of her men. Her stories have a connection to the triumphant slyness of Shakespearean comedy. Munro blurs the line between the objective and the

subjective and between the small and the large, in order to discover that, if anything will suffice for a more abundant life.

Dreams in literature play a vital role to describe a flashback or some foreshadowing of the event, here in this story also has the same purpose.

These are signal ascent into the psychological realms. So this may be a little heavy handed by Munro, but fast and hidden as they were in numerous details regarding Carla, She might be forgiven.

The symbolic study shows firstly the Goat's name: Flora which represents life, bountifulness, flowers and gardens- in brief the good life. Then goat's second time coming back and then again disappearance, here it's been analyzed that goat in itself suggests sacrifice and old testament themes and then the apple also suggests the religious themes.

In Silence We can find anguish and regret which Juliet now finds because of her cowardice or whatsoever emotion that kept her away from responding to her mother. 'Silence is an exceptional story, a powerful story, but it's not easily explained.

Then also this is a story of vivid and imaginative extravagance.

It is very much an internal story of Juliet's inner state of mind, told in a quiet style with great restraint. The story reveals that this story brings its readers to that empathetic level that they start feeling; we are Juliet, experiencing her anger. The reader appreciates the care with which Juliet is given an opportunity as an older woman to go on flashback on key aspects of her life.

Although Runaway may be categorized as a takeoff point for a broader investigation of the stories in this collection, Where Carla is a kind of women sufferer in society at large. But there is Juliet who is the main protagonist in the consecutive stories 'Chance', 'Silence', and 'Soon'. Munro firstly presented her as a young graduate student turned to a teacher in Chance, a young mother who is visiting her parents after a long time with her daughter in 'Soon' and an old lady in Silence who wanted to break this Silence from both their lives, wanted to contact her. An analysis of Munro's thematic pattern shows that her main focus is on Freedom. Hence Alice Munro short stories are centred on a series of striking individuals. Each of the women in the stories is battered by events, but also moves of her own free will towards self recognition, self acceptance and awareness of a limited freedom.

They Endure and progress eventually shaking of debilitating guilt's and fears and learning to accept themselves as well as others with tolerance and love. Hence Runaway is a special book that suits to probe into Munro's views about existence

Alice Munro is gifted us with the kind of characters which come indomitably through pages with bravery, with reassurance and with laughter, our friends and our sisters. As Dennis Duffy has recently written,

“Munro emerges as a producer of multivalent narrative, in which the factual and imaginative exist within an equivalency.....that is she emphasizes that as a writer she produces narrative period; questions of factuality and historical reliability are not central in the stories presented to the readers. Any question raised by generic differences between narratives is sidelights, avenues to be explored once a reader has absorbed the initial impact of the story at hand”.

Helan Hoy said ,

“Munro's own sensitivity to individual words and images, her spare lucid style, and command of detail have given her fiction a precision which is one of her most distinctive accomplishments.”

She has attained prestigious reputation for the rich contents, unique writing style and profound connotation in her short fiction. The objective of my study was to divulge a sense of connection and a deep desire of connections to its perceptions. The characters although written autobiographically, are the most powerful and meaningful, that requires no external explication. This study brings out the qualities of Munro and her evocateness as a writer. Based on intensive study and exhaustive textual analysis, this paper illustrates the feminist utopia constructed by Alice Munro through these eight short stories in Runaway. Women have to come into the real world and perform their roles as daughters, wives and mothers, while women should also have their own independent will and desires to live. They do not belong to others and they have right and freedom to make choose. When they encounter love and marriage, women are able to make decisions for them, share responsibilities and accept the results. When it comes to sex, if women think it is worthwhile, they should be bold enough to break the conventional ways. Through different female characters and their different ways to handle the dilemma, Munro deconstructs the duplexity of patriarchy and constructs a feminist Utopia in which women could enjoy freedom and happiness. According to Munro, for achieving that goal, women should fight for themselves instead of blaming it on men and the society for what they are enduring for long.

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