

## Speaking Silence: A study of the Female Image in Alice Munro's *Runaway*

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### ABSTRACT

The Canadian writer Alice Munro, master of the contemporary short story and also the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature, received the attention of a host of researchers, readers and literary critics both in Canada and many other countries worldwide. Throughout her literary career, she has published many famous short story collections. In so many of these collections, Munro introduces the idea of females' enforced silence in different plots and by various narrative techniques. By writing about a silenced half of the society, Munro resists silence. In her stories of silence, Munro allows silence to start telling stories, stories of resilience, freedom, oppressive males and of change. This paper examines how and why Munro's characters of *Runaway* have been silenced, where Munro does expose this horrible silence to the reading public.

### Keywords

Munro  
Silence  
Feminism  
Carla  
Oppression  
Identity  
Discrimination

“You were injured, you were molested and humiliated and I was injured and humiliated because you are my wife. It's a question of respect.” (*Runaway*, p.8)

Alice Munro has always been one of the most inspiring and challenging Canadian short story writers. Munro's fiction has successfully captured worldwide attention to the cause of female rights and independence. Her fictional experience, presented in her short stories, is colored by the Canadian milieu; yet addressing the female readers and their rights all over the world. Delving into the lives of common people, Munro's collections of short stories are usually known for being women-centric with a detailed and in-depth analysis of their life conditions under unfair social conventions.

In this research paper, the researcher adopts the interdisciplinary approach. The interdisciplinary approach enables the researcher to draw from feminist, ecofeminist and the semiotic theories. Through the feminist theory, the female characters of *Runaway* can be singled out and set off from the rest of the characters. Whereas the semiotic approach helps to envisage the set of signs which the reader organizes to form one

meaningful network. It is the interrelation of these two approaches that helps the researcher to reach the final conclusion.

Feminism to Karen Offen is “a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted to men”.(123). The key notion in this definition is to reach a state of equal rights to those earned and gained to men. In literature, feminist critics try to do justice to female points of view, interests and values.

A prominent figure in feminist criticism is Virginia Woolf in her classic work *Room of One's Own* (1929). She criticized the victimization and the marginalization of women's place in the literary world. Her works generally attacks the patriarchal domination over women's identity and role. She further adopted and depended up on the stream of consciousness narrative technique in order to reflect the psychology of her female characters.

Feminism also witnessed a great development with the works and the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir. In her landmark work *The Second Sex*, she questioned the existence of women in the shadow of the dominant patriarchal constructs. She bluntly wonders “if women still exist or if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be (Beauvoir: “Introduction”, 13)

This idea clearly reflects the situation of women in male dominated society and the limited insignificant roles imposed upon them by male prejudice. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* continues to be a milestone in the modern feminist movement that revolutionized the common perceptions of the social relationship between the two sexes.

Other known feminist critics and theorists have also outlined the key ideas of the movement to provide a further accurate definition of the term feminism. Moreover, they have also tried to pinpoint a more respectable position of women in family and society. Generally, the philosophy of feminism is to probe into the causes of women's sufferings and to try to provide suggestions and ways for reform. Feminism aims also to assert the position of women in society, in order to reach an equal treatment with their male counterparts far away from being discriminated on grounds of their gender. This is mainly achieved by creating an environment of awareness against the different forms of oppression.

An analysis of feminism shows that feminist critics and writers are aware of the descending position of women in every walk of life, especially in literary criticism. Women are simply discriminated because of their sex and they are never criticized objectively whenever their writings are evaluated. Discussing this aspect of male oppression, Mary

Ellman, in *Thinking about Women*, has pointed out that women's writings are viewed from the angle of their own gender.

Books by women were treated as though  
they themselves were women, and criticism  
embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual  
measuring of busts and hips (Ellman, 29).

In a similar context, many specialists have noted that social history reveals the idea that women are neglected, and even deliberately obliterated from literary criticism. In her essay, *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, Elaine Showalter clearly proves that women have been deleted from literary tradition that is in addition to considering their works insignificant and improper to fit to the tradition of literary criticism. She clearly wonders "was there a tradition of women's writing, or an autonomous female aesthetics? And if one could talk about women's writing, was 'men's writing' also marked by gender?" (179).

Elaine herself has attempted to answer these questions by noting that female literary works do exist, and it is the task of the critic to meticulously search for these works and to objectively analyze it. In this essay, Elaine Showalter also coined the famous term 'gynocriticism' (190) for the study and the analysis of women's writings. To her, feminist criticism encompasses two major types: the first is 'feminist critique' which focuses on woman as a reader. The second is 'gyocritic' which focuses on woman as a writer, the author of the literary work.

Showalter's ideas opened up new dimensions of feminist literary criticism. The late seventies witnessed the contributions of other theorist for a respectable view of women's literary creativity. Eminent among them is Ellen Moers, whose *Literary Women* (1976) is the outcome of a long study of women and literature. The work is considered by many critics and readers to be the outline of the literary history of women.

History also witnessed many other influential female critics, for example Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. In *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979), these writers believed that female critics are better than male critics in bringing up topics related to women. Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar's research reveals that artistic creativity is mistakenly considered a male privilege and thus female writers will never be able to reflect and highlight their own selves. They indicate that

Since both patriarchy and its texts  
subordinate and imprison women,  
before women can even attempt that  
pen which is so rigorously kept from

them they must escape just those male texts (13).

As a result of restricting creativity only to men, there was no other way for women but to be represented from males' point of view. Women were usually dignified and respected in texts written by men, while in practical life they always come in second place after men. This idea is clearly expressed in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* when she says, "Imaginatively she is the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant". (44-45)

Feminism nowadays opened up varieties of thoughts and a search for new dimensions of creativity. The creed of the feminist literary criticism is that, sexual discrimination has always existed in literature and that the female creativity has been deliberately excluded from the different forms of literary creativity. Consequently, the aim of feminism is to re-examine and to analyze the female literary creation with new unbiased visions. To quote Jameela Begum in this context:

Feminist writers and critics have embraced an agenda that centers on the mapping of unexplored realms of female experience, which hitherto remained outside the documented scenario of human experience. Placing herself at the center and redrawing the circle of existence around her, shifting the angles of vision at the periphery, the writer focuses on the unmapped wilderness of the female psyche (261).

Consequently, recognizing the creative side of women, which has been long and deliberately ignored, began to exist. Women's literary works have been read with a new unbiased vision and new literary canons to analyze female literature. "Women's critics now began to voice a loud what it means to 'think' and 'read as a woman'" (Begum, 263). It is no secret that women have always wanted a space to express their own ideas in their own literary work to reflect their voices, visions, and ideologies, and to share all of that with their readers. This has become possible through their own literature.

Feminist criticism also played another major role by its relation with psychoanalysis. The embodiment of this role existed in the condemnation of Freud, as he was the prime source of the main attitudes of patriarchy. Freud has pointed out that the lack of external genitals is the reason of woman's feminine character which leads to a sense of inferiority to women and a great feeling of mastery to males.

This theory caused a great controversy and was the main topic for endless debates. Freud's theory itself has been modified by Jacques Lacan who built up his theory on linguistic, semiotic, and structural approach. To Lacan, "phallus as the signifier... signifies patriarchal character". As the child goes from the *imaginary* world to the *symbolic*, language becomes one of the acceptance of the social environment and cultural systems. It becomes a symbol of the patriarchal scheme and thus signifies the sexual power of men. In such a patriarchal society, the voice of women is oppressed causing the production of male oriented texts. Since the end of the twentieth century, feminism developed to be more and more "eclectic" in nature... drawing upon critical approaches —Marxism, structuralism, linguistics and so on ..." (Barry 122).

Feminist Literary criticism, a product of the feminist movement, has started a trend that focuses on the role of women and their position in literature. Thus one can safely note that feminism has always questioned the obsolete phallogocentric beliefs and tried hard to change the ideologies of the patriarchal society. It attacked the biased vision of male when writing about women or when analyzing and criticizing the literary works written by women. Feminism, at its core, is a struggle for equality, not a movement that seeks a shift of power. Feminism seeks an "equality in difference" that can only stem from considering issues of women, and their relationship to a number of 'isms' - imperialism, classism, Marxism, racism, sexism, ...etc. It is not my intention here in this paper to provide a historical outline or a detailed critique of the movement, but rather simply to overview the background upon which Munro has relied.

Nowadays, the term feminism connotes a wide variety of approaches. It has no single meaning, but rather a various interpretations. Under the umbrella term 'feminism' it includes, *Radical feminism*, *Socialist feminism*, *Liberal feminism*, *Marxist feminism*, *Lesbian feminism*, *Ecofeminism*, etc. Feminism has become a reflection of women's inner freedom and independence and seeks to reach a balanced relation between sexes. Feminist literary works and approach seek to reach a better understanding of women's problems.

Ecofeminism expands feminism from being interested only in human relationships between the two sexes to cover human relationships with the non-human realm. Ecofeminism to Linda Vance is,

A critique of existing relations between society and nature, and particularly a critique of patriarchal relations. One aspect of this critique, perhaps the central aspect, is that women and nature have been

similarly degraded, both conceptually and gradually  
(Linda Vance Interview).

The term ecofeminism or *écologie-féminisme* comes from the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne who wrote many famous articles as *Le féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), and *Écologie et Féminisme: Révolution ou Mutation?* (1978). In her articles, she clearly states that, “the destruction of the planet is connected to the oppression of women”; she further emphasizes that “the liberation of one cannot be affected apart from the liberation of the other.” (Tong 251). Karen J. Warren also highlighted d'Eaubonne's theory that both females and nature suffer from males' oppression. Moreover, she notes that “feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective” and vice versa (Tong 251).

Ecofeminism, as a branch of feminist theory, is interested in discriminatory practices that are common in Western patriarchal society. Specifically, ecofeminism focuses on animalism and speciesism to the same level of importance that feminism gives to sexism and racism. Similar to feminism, ecofeminism challenges the constructions of patriarchal society and its discriminating ideologies. Within this context, ecofeminism negates the myth of the superiority of men over women, nature, and all the living things. Ecofeminism also refuses the polarity of men and women, culture and nature, white and black, civilization and wilderness, mind and body in a way that women and nature are always the other. Thus, the importance of ecofeminism lies –among other things– in its search for social and environmental justice. Greta Goard and Patrick Murphy highlight this idea by saying:

Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the ‘maldevelopment’ and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism...The foundation and ground of ecofeminism's existence, then, consists of both resistance and vision, critiques and heuristics (7).

A thorough understanding of Munro's art requires a general view of the social conditions, especially of women in Canada. The voice of women in Canada has always been a loud cry of objection against the oppressive social structures and male domination. Marginalized, oppressed, and victimized by the patriarchal beliefs and practices, the conditions of Canadian women were no different than other women across the world. The quest of an independent identity and a free

responsible voice was a main indispensable target for Canadian women. This long sought target was concretized in 1929 in the form of an organized movement for their political rights. This was an important step in the way for Canadian women's freedom and independence.

Canadian women also questioned and objected to their marginalization in literature. From 1960 onwards, Canadian feminist movement sought to create a free independent space for women in order to be able to express their own selves in their writings, so that other women can be aware of their rights. The movement also sought to establish a literary canon for Canadian women by retrieving their neglected works from literary history and placing them before the reading public. The movement also chooses the topics of the literary works that clearly differentiates them from men, for example the experience of women as mothers and how far that experience differs from how male writers represent them. The aim of this movement was to provide women writers with new unlimited horizons where women can be creative in expressing their ideas and untold problems without fears of patriarchal overshadowing. Salat relates this idea of social change in the following words:

More and more women, therefore, took to writing as a profession or a vocation and their writings portrayed the aspirations and ambitions of the 'new woman' and her yearnings for independence and liberation from the limiting constraints of the convention-ridden society (62).

The quest for an independent identity and a humanistic approach to express women's inner voice has become a dominant theme in almost all of the literary works of that period. One can further say that, this movement has become a catalyst to create a better awareness of the need for an independent self. This explains the reason why Canadian women reflected in their works, life patterns of women and realities of their existence. Thus, literature has become a way for understanding women's problems as well as a path for raising their consciousness. This idea has been explained by Lorna Irvine when describing Canadian women's narrative:

Women's narratives, often covertly, more commonly, stress gender issues ... situate and celebrate a maternal domain that presents an alternative structuring to that of patriarchal systems... Women writers find that subversive language powerfully connects their cultural and psychological situations along with their positions as Canadians and as women (10).

In order to be able to unify women's psychological situations with their culture in a new literary matrix where women are no longer victims, Canadian women writing were marked by blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, and between actual history and the rewriting of history. Many of these writers preferred to focus on the local flavor in their fiction and to neglect the city. Askroetsch observes: "Canadian writing treats the city as an invisible presence" (67).

The early seventies presented an era of new awareness in Canadian feminism. Writings reflected refusal of social injustice towards women and sought to create a better consciousness towards victimizing women. Well-known examples of this period are Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and many others.

Alice Munro is a supporter of the women's cause, and she expresses clear feministic views in her writings. In her short stories, Munro shows how Canadian women struggle to survive and to prove their identities. Alice Munro also discussed the issues of victimization, gender-discrimination and patriarchal dominance. She believes in the necessity of creating a woman's space in the oppressive patriarchal social construction.

The Canadian short story author Alice Munro, winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in literature, was recognized by literary critics when she published her first short story collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* for which she received Canada's most prestigious literary prize. In 2009, Munro was awarded the Man Booker International Prize for her achievements in fiction that is next to a long list of awards and prizes for example Giller Prize, the National Book Critics' Circle Award from the United States, Medal of Honor for Literature from the U.S. National Arts Club, and many other rewards.

Alice Laidlaw was born on 10 July 1931, and grew up during the Depression in rural Southwestern Ontario. The social traditions of this rural society are the prime source upon which she drew the features of many of her major characters. She reflected the oppressive patriarchal traditions of her society in the matrix of short stories. In many interviews, Munro has repeatedly emphasized how her society assigns certain roles for women that reflect sexual discrimination. She replied on one of the questions by saying, "on a farm, there is a sexual polarity ... which feels good". The man is assigned to the outside labor; while the woman is responsible for the complicated domestic management of the home and the farm. However, Munro adds, "you are a bit out of luck if you don't have the talents for the sexual role that you have been born into" ("Name", 69).



Being a writer in a discriminating society was never welcomed hence that does not fit to the assigned fixed roles of women. Munro has told an interviewer that, although writing was “the only thing” that she “ever wanted to do”, she felt “embarrassment” about “doing something” that she could neither “explain” nor “justify” to her hardworking parents at home (“What is”, 17-18).

Such negative attitude towards writing has actually turned to be a source of positive power that motivated Munro to master the art of short story to narrate stories of several female characters that suffer from the patriarchal supremacy in her society. In the journey of her life, Munro wrote fiction about women, nevertheless, her stories appealed both to women and men. Godard states that, “In all her writing, Munro has been concerned with the production of meaning” (45). The same idea can be applied on her life. Munro is a storyteller who writes mainly about women, yet she never neglected men. In an interview, Munro tells Horwood “In fiction I not only do not think of feminist politics, but of the class struggle, or anything else; I think of what’s going on in my story and that is all” (134). Munro offers her readers the belief that knowledge is power, and that power lies in truthful depiction of life in her stories. In her fiction, Munro “offers us true reality: the ordinary made marvelous in its distinctness and the abundance of its life (Carscallen, 535). With her distinctive narrative techniques, Alice Munro has been popularly known as ‘Canadian Chekhov’. Her style, expressions, ideas and plots distinguished Munro from other Canadian short story writers.

From her first short story, collection to the recent one, the main topic of her works can be the loss and regaining of identity. Her fiction discusses the exclusion of people from the society because of social inferiority or because of a certain human experience such as marriage, love, divorce or aging. Through this broad topic of losing identity and trying to regain it, Munro chooses to side along with the voiceless people who are incapable of expressing their case clearly. She is the champion of speaking on behalf of those who are unfairly silenced. Her stories narrate the lives of ordinary people who seek better life than their already existing victimizing one. In so doing, Munro maybe more than any other writer, gave a new scope to the Canadian short story.

Through the matrix of short story, Munro succeeded in expressing her own concept of feminism. Munro is different from her contemporaries in the interpretation and the application of feminism. As a matter of fact, Alice Munro has neither identified herself as a feminist writer nor took a polemical stand in favor of the feminist movement. However, Munro’s fiction is the voice of everywoman speaking out about their problems in patriarchal discourses. Oppressed and victimized by society, women have

been unable to articulate their problems and the injustice they face. Munro's fiction takes up these issues and highlights these situations to increase the awareness against them. In *Controlling the uncontrollable*, Carrington writes:

Munro is not a feminist because she is too complex and independent a writer to accept feminist oversimplification (182).

Munro is best described as a women's writer who writes about women's issues in patriarchal discourses and who has a large number of women's audience. Through her fiction, Munro has dismantled the operations and practices of patriarchal societies, gender constraints and male domination and superiority. Her fiction has always stressed the need for social reform that stops these practices against women. Her stories are protesting cries that draw attention to the horrible untold stories of women's suffering. Some of these stories do identify with the principles of feminism, yet this identification does not make Munro a feminist writer.

This explains the reason why the heroine of Munro's short stories are aware enough to break through these social constraints and they also know that the more they depart from these norms, the greater the suffering and the price they experience and pay. This price ranges from loneliness and isolation to alienation from society, abuse and even mental suffering. In their quest for self-identity, these brave heroines are willing to pay the price since they discover that they cannot lead a meaningful existence in the shadow of the patriarchal constraints. Mavis Asaad in her thesis *Female Sexuality in the Fiction of Alice Munro* notes that,

To be feminine is to have a body and exist in domestic space. To be feminine is to be a body in a beautiful dress. Munro challenges these demanding, masculinist assumptions by showing that a house can be a prison and a dress a straightjacket. She also

reveals

the visceral, embodied pleasures of these roles, beyond societal demands in their very real connection to

women's

very real bodies (p.115).

It is a surprising fact that Munro has remained loyal to the form of the short story throughout almost her literary career. The reason for her preference for short fiction is her tendency to narrative density which lacks in novels. The limited space of the short story reflects the limitation of women's space in patriarchal societies. This embodies the voice of the silent women's protest against the male domination. Munro, herself, has

said that her narrative art is best developed in short fiction. In an interview with Alan Twig, Munro says:

I've never known why I've chosen the short story form. I guess in a short story you impose discipline rather soon... It is as if I must take great care over everything. Instead of splashing the colors out and trusting they will all come together, I have to know the design (16).

In reference to Munro's literary style, expressions such as 'Munroesque' and 'Munrovian' have been coined (used by Nischik 2007:209 and LÖsching 2014:52, respectively). This literary style is mainly known for using certain narrative techniques that break out with the traditional pattern, with its chronological sequences and predictable ends. To be more accurate, Munro has not conceptualized her short stories within a concrete narrative pattern framework, but has framed her stories to reflect the life challenges. She has adjusted the form to the content and followed the demands to the situation.

In each story, there are multiple narratives, with one story overlapping the other. Furthermore, the development of the story is not a linear one, but rather a juxtaposition of time sequences. This complex structure of her stories provokes the reader's mind and soul.

Munro's stories are typically a life journey that includes sudden shifts of time. Such shifts and sliding "up and down the time axis" is an important characteristic of Munro's narrative technique. It is fascinating how she moves from one point to another in a story. If a reader arranges the events of the story in a linear chronological way, there will be gaps in time that may reach up to decades. Instead, Munro arranges the events of her story around the emotional mode of her heroine. The stories usually start with a moment when the character has the opportunity to change her life. Then Munro moves backward to the past to capture the moments where her female characters are victims of the patriarchal practices. Only then she moves forward to the present moment of the daily life activities of her character and the story keeps on that pattern.

This manipulation of narrative time provides Munro with the breadth of perspective needed in the form of short story. Moreover, this technique of nonlinear presentation of events helps Munro to give the reader a clear better picture of the suffering and the oppression her characters go through in the different stages of their lives. By adopting this narrative technique, Munro succeeds in speaking out the silent suffering of her heroines in different places and with different people. The only common idea among these various events, places, times and people is how female suffer silently in a patriarchal society.

Another distinctive feature of Munro's fiction is ellipsis or narrative gaps. The narrative gaps in Munro's stories prove to be problematic specially for non-Canadian readers. This is because these narrative gaps may refer to Canadian cultural, historical and geographical knowledge that a non-Canadian reader may not entertain. Munro's stories are set in Canada, in its rural parts and many of the common events and cultural specifics are not common to the other readers while Munro avoids mentioning them to average Canadian readers so as not to feel bored. Moreover, ellipses or narrative gaps help Munro to accelerate the narrative speed which suits the matrix of the short story. That is in addition to reflecting the fragmented state of her female characters. Simply a female victim of physical and emotional violence will be only able to break the imposed silence with fragmented full of gaps sentences and ideas.

Another feature of Munro's narration is the use of nether voice. Nether voice is usually used to reflect unstable and uncertain subversive voice that gives another version of reality to the readers. Throughout her literary works, Munro makes her readers familiar with what she calls 'nether voice', to see beyond the daily life events. By moving her readers away from the rational familiar and ordinary discourse, she opens a new horizon of textuality full of signs for them. In this new world, anything can happen and everything can get out of hand. Munro calls this world the true world, which is in contrast to the factual world that only consists of familiar ordinary regular things. The goat in *Runaway* is a clear example of Munro's nether voice.

A reader of Munro's fiction can easily notice that she does master the use of first and third person narration. Munro easily switches between the first-person narration (first-person or I-narration) and a third-person narrator (impersonal narration) to deliver her message. Third-person narrators are usually absent because they replace the implied author and get his absolute knowledge. The view point through which events and characters are analyzed is called focalization and the holder of this view point is called the focalizer, whereas the character or scene presented is the focalized. While in first-person narratives, the narrator and the focalizer both refer to the same person. Focalization can be either external or internal.

That is being the case; Munro's success in speaking out the silent voices of women is associated with her use of both first and third person narrators. First-person narrator helps the reader to establish a close relationship with the heroine and the other characters and events of the story which in turn provides insights into the silences of more characters presented in the novel, whereas the use of the third-person narrator allows

Munro to comment more extensively and to analyze more critically on the interpersonal relationships among the characters. In *Runaway*, the use of first-person narrator reflects the restless soul of Carla, her inner conflicts and her torn soul between her past dreams and her prison-like present. Nevertheless, the use of the third-person narrator shows the nature of the relation between Carla, Sylvia and Mr. Clark.

Throughout these narrative techniques, among others, Alice Munro manages to keep readers in a dynamic relation with her stories. Although readers are aware that Munro's fictional world will soon disappear, yet it provokes their minds to think of various messages and different ideas that sustain long away after the story is being read. Dickler Awano, an owner of a literary agency that has started since 1974, expresses his admiration for the way Munro's work was and still conscious of social structures that girls and women are expected to abide by in "appreciations of Alice Munro". He notes that,

There is also something about her writing that is so accessible. She doesn't use drums and trumpets or purple prose. Quietly and surely she involves you in a story, and then there comes a paragraph or even a sentence that really knocks you sideways, and you see something in a very different light. The stories grow in your mind, and when you have finished one, you feel you know something more, or comprehend something familiar in a new way. I marvel at all she can bring to life (96).

This is exactly what happens with readers of *Runaway*. When readers get familiar with the characters and expect the coming events, Munro refuses but to change their expectations and ideas. In *Runaway*, Munro skillfully mixes the familiar with the unfamiliar within a realistic framework which is gradually settled by shifting perspectives across wide spectrum of time, and by scenes of unprecedented strangeness which can sometimes defy reason and logic. Who else but Munro can connect between the character of Carla the protagonist and Flora, the little runaway goat. Flora returns home the same night Carla, the runaway wife, decides to come back home. And only then with a skillful mastery of her narrative techniques, Munro turns both Carla and Flora into scapegoats.

In 2004, Munro published her eleventh collection of short stories entitled *Runaway*. The eight stories in *Runaway* all bear single-word titles, but they are far away from being described as simple stories. Each one of these stories tells a story about a woman at least. These women are different in everything except searching for their identity in a patriarchal

society. Love or any other superficial layer covers another deep feeling of sorrow and agony. Although they lead ordinary lives, these women are full of misery, injustice and mistakes. Missed opportunities and lies are two common themes that Munro covers in her eight stories.

Munro starts her story *Runaway* with, “Carla heard the car coming before it topped the little rise in the road” (1) then moves to the past to narrate a story of Carla who has a very difficult marriage and decides to leave her husband and to speak out her refusal of the imposed silence by running away. Carla is motivated to do so by Silvia, her rational older neighbor. Only then when Carla tries to run off, she realizes that she is not strong enough to do it. Although she has all the reasons in the world to do that, she simply cannot do it and thus she decides to go back home and to adapt to the silence.

That is totally the opposite sense given by the title of the story. The title actually does not tell only the story of the young wife running away from her depressing humiliating husband, but it also tells the story of Flora the goat running away from her too. Throughout this frame, Munro spreads the tone of frustration in narrating the story of two sympathetic females. From the very first sentence, the primary character is given a name: Carla. The setting is rural. From inside her barn, as the story begins, Carla eagerly hears a car going by and quickly without hesitation assumes that it is Sylvia's, her neighbor. Mrs. Jamieson, her neighbor, has newly come home from a European vacation. Carla has always wondered if these people are really farmers, or they are outsiders who have recently come to experience what a rural life might be. At the same time, Carla hides a great feeling of admiration to her neighbor since she is independent woman who leads a successful life after the death of her husband.

The second paragraph answers Carla's questions. It is not her neighbor; it is rather her husband Clark. This element of mystery is soon joined by a tone of oppressiveness that will prevail till the very last line of the story. This tone was first set by the sentence “This was the summer of rain and more rain” (*Runaway*, 1). Carla does not live on a solid economic basis. The rain does not even fall smoothly on the house but rather “loud on the roof of the mobile home” (*Runaway*, 1). Moreover, this constant rain negatively affects their business of providing riding lessons.

The second level of oppressiveness from which Carla suffers is hot-tempered Clark who deliberately embarrasses her in front of others. This idea is clear in these two lines “Clark had fights not just with the people he owned money to. His friendliness, compelling at first, could suddenly turn sour” (22). Another example reflects the nature of the dialogue

between Clark and Carla is presented at the very beginning of the story, “You flare up”, said Carla “That’s what men do” said Clark (3).

Carla suffers at every moment and with every word she says. She had enough but she does not know if she can succeed living away from Clark. She victimizes herself by believing that she can’t lead a successful life without Clark. On the other hand, it is Clark who should be under that stress. Without Carla, he will definitely fail. Clark, when feeling seriously threatened by Carla’s attempt to run away, bitterly admits that, “when I read your note, it was just like I went hollow inside. It’s true. If you ever went away, I’d feel like I didn’t have anything left in me” (29).

Nevertheless, this would never mean that he will give up victimizing his wife or oppressing her feelings. Clark says this sentence when he knows for sure that there is nothing left in Carla that can change the belief that she is not an independent human being with equal rights and responsibilities just like him. Throughout the story, Clark knocks down Carla’s identity bit by bit until nothing left at her. He starts by embarrassing her in public as explained earlier, and then goes through threatening her by saying “I am not going to let you off the hook, Carla” (5); then ignoring her opinions as if they are not even worth considering. “Clark went on as if she had not spoken” (7). After that obliterating her identity completely by admitting, “You were injured, you were molested and humiliated and I was injured and humiliated because you are my wife. It’s a question of respect” (8). And finally, Clark clearly admits in front of strangers that Carla is less than a human being by mocking even the idea. “She is a human being” said Sylvia... “Besides being your wife”. “My goodness, is that so? My wife is a human being? Really? Thank you for the information? (25). Within this context, Carla has nothing to do but to identify with her goat pet, Flora. Flora has run away as well for two nights through which Carla has been dreaming of her own escape as well.

A brief flashback now and then is used by Munro to enable her readers to compare the life of Carla before and after marriage. Even though she used to live happily with her family, she decided to fight the world to be next to Clark and to start a family. While Munro builds up the picture of Clark’s difficult nature as well as Carla’s unhappiness, Flora transfers her affection for Clark to Carla. Even though Clark is the one who brought Flora home and had been the center of Flora’s affection at the beginning, Flora comes to find peace and comfortability with Carla. It is as if Flora itself invites Carla to join her in its escape from their stressful life.

It is as if Munro questions what has been explained earlier in this research concerning the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf and

Karen Offen. Munro even questions the ideas of eco-feminists concerning the human relation with the non-human realms. Munro asks a simple question, namely, to what extent can a female fight the organized destruction of her identity? The answer is really disappointing to many readers. Simply she cannot last in such a context. Once patriarchal beliefs are gravely in a woman's soul, nothing can change that. This idea is embodied when Carla had a golden opportunity to gain her identity and to lead her own life away from stressful, oppressive Clark. However, she simply refuses that opportunity to gain and to build up her own identity.

When asked to go to clean up the house of her neighbor, Carla at once tells Sylvia about her troubles with her husband and the miserable life from which she suffers. At that very moment, Carla misses Flora as if she will never see it ever again. "at least Flora's leaving was not on account of anything she-Carla- had done wrong". (7). At this point, Sylvia's point of view reigns that Carla should right away sway Clark out of his meanness. So, it is decided that Carla cannot even go back home for even a minute, and Sylvia gives her a better outfit to wear in her bus trip to her freedom. Sylvia calls a female friend to provide a house and a job for Carla to start a new life where she is not forced to tolerate with Clark's attitude any more.

On the bus and away from her oppressive Clark, Carla's naïveté becomes so obvious. Clark actually has done a great job obliterating her self-identity. Carla discovers that she is accustomed to silence than speaking her own voice. She stops the bus and goes back to Clark admitting her own weakness.

The story ends with a very depressing note when Carla has found the bones of little Flora buried in the grass. It is simply the price for any woman who might think of running away or who might think of being free. This final scene of *Runaway* identifies with the conclusion Elizabeth Tracy reaches at in her PhD entitled, *Discourse in Social Movements: An Analysis of Eco-feminism*. She says "The feminine quest for self-identity ends in circularity when women once again embrace the socially imposed role of wife and mother" (125). What Carla does not comprehend is that it is not by denying her feminine powers but it is by uniting them with males that her identity can crystalize. Once a female accepts being victimized by patriarchy, she will never gain respect nor has an independent reality. Neither Sylvia's solution of running away is acceptable. If a woman never stands up for her rights, the ideas of feminism will be meaningless. Running away from patriarchy is as bad as succumbing to males' oppression. In both cases women have not developed healthy relationships based on equality and self-respect. Developing a conscious independent identity is the only way out of the



circle of silence imposed upon women in their lives. If Alice Munro has spoken the silence of Carla and her fellows in *Runaway*, it is their responsibility to develop their own identities regardless of the price they might pay. Women should start speaking out their own silence, defending their rights and searching for their own goals to stay away from being over shadowed by men.

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