

Aspects of Postmodernism in Alice Munro's Selected Short Stories

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Abstract:

The current study looks at Postmodernism in Alice Munro's short stories. It is a technical and thematic investigation. First, a description of women's status, role, and sense of self is given. The process of resisting extreme patriarchy, which sees women oppressed and discriminated against in all communities, is next covered. Postmodernism is then identified in the study. One of the most uncommon examples of gender studies portrayal in literature, according to this study, is Munro. The topic of gender equality is frequently brought up in Munro's writing. She is prepared to speak out against American imperialism and social and religious restrictions in public or in private. Canadians and oppressed women are commonly contrasted in her artwork. As can be seen, women must be free from social and patriarchal constraints. Munro's short stories challenge accepted norms by allowing her to disfigure patriarchy and debase the West.

Introduction

Women have been the subject of countless literary works published in a variety of literary genres all over the world and at all times. Many literary critics have argued that women's roles and status in the world, as well as their self-development of their economic, social, political, literary, and cultural positions, are contested in literary works. Women's oppression, self-complication, and self-recognition are being studied all over the world. The current study looks at how Munro defied accepted writing conventions to give women a voice.

Furthermore, she has used postmodernist approaches to misrepresent both the West and men. Munro is a committed feminist whose work takes into account the difficulties that women

face. In other words, the concept of woman/country appears in almost all of her works. This demonstrates that Canada cannot achieve complete independence without liberating women from patriarchal constraints and societal constraints; she is willing to confront and expose both American imperialism and internal and external social/religious restrictions. Munro's brief works are full of deconstructions of established rules. This allows the novelist to deconstruct patriarchy and the West. Finally, the setting for her short stories is functional.

This study focuses on a number of Munro's short stories, including *Runaway* (2004), *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), and *Friend of My Youth* (1990). These exhibits highlight the barriers to women's autonomy and individuality. They emphasize how women could achieve independence and emancipation by revolting against social norms. Women have been the subject of countless literary works published in a variety of literary genres all over the world and at all times. Many literary critics have argued that women's roles and status in the world, as well as their self-development of their economic, social, political, literary, and cultural positions, are contested in literary works. Women's oppression, self-complication, and self-recognition are being studied all over the world.

Methodology of Research

The study's methodology is primarily thematic and technical. First, an outline of women's roles, status, and self-awareness is created. Then it introduces Munro, Canada's most famous short story writer, whose work has been hailed as revolutionizing short story architecture. The book then goes into detail about the process of defying radical patriarchy, in which women are oppressed and discriminated against in all communities. Through technical analysis of Munro's short stories, the study then pinpoints postmodernism, which disrupts society's dominant patriarchal structure.

Questions of the Study

The present study endeavours to find answers, solutions, or explanations to these questions:

- What does the concept of Postmodernism mean?
- What are the postmodernist techniques employed by Munro ?
- How do Munro's female characters respond to the patriarchal society?
- How do the selected works of Munro illuminate the notion of feminism in modern Canadian societies?

Postmodernism & Violating the Concept of Patriarchy

Postmodernism is the intentional destruction of religious artefacts, particularly those depicting humans. Postmodernism is a term derived from two Greek words: eikon (image) and klasma (breaking), and it refers to "the breaking or destruction of images, the destruction of venerated images and pictures, the attacking or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs deemed to be fallacious or superstitious."

Munro's writing compassionately addresses the societal constraints of being a woman. Her work frequently depicts women fighting for autonomy against the community's established stereotyped roles. Her female characters are cast into a societal underclass of devaluation and poverty. Munro's works examine how women's status is reduced to that of a subordinate, a second-class citizen. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is widely regarded as the primary theoretical text of twentieth-century feminism. According to Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, Munro's short stories are an interdisciplinary study of feminism and patriarchy (1970).

Patriarchy can be defined in several ways. According to Sultana, the term was first used to describe a "man-dominated home" with women, junior men, children, enslaved people, and

domestic workers (2011). It is now used to describe a system that keeps women submissive (Qtd. in Bhasin, 2003).

Furthermore, patriarchy is defined by feminist psychologist Juliet Mitchell as "kinship systems in which men swap women" (1971, p.24). Men, according to Sylvia Walby (1990, p. 20), oppress and exploit women. In *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1989), Gerda Lerner writes, "Men possess authority in all significant institutions of society, while women are denied access to such power" (p. 239). As a result, patriarchy is defined as "the sum of all male dominance we perceive around women" (Lerner, 1989, p. 233).

To de Beauvoir (1997), women are immanent, accidental, inessential, sensual, and "other". Men, on the other hand, are transcendent and rational, capable of changing the world (p. 6). Women have ovaries and uteruses, which confine their subjectivity and define their essence (1949, p. 7). This statement emphasizes the gender gap. As a result, these stories centre on women's relationships with males as husbands or lovers.

The female characters' struggle for identification organizes the Munro stories addressed here. Some of Munro's female characters are aware of power struggles, while others attempt to destabilize them. Women who are dissatisfied with their lives seek relationships with other men. In several stories, men betray female protagonists. These ladies can transcend marriage and escape this oppressive relationship. Munro focuses on how women can change their personalities and become better women. For various reasons, many women are hesitant to leave their relationships. They may rely on their husbands or lovers financially or emotionally. Social constraints, as Millett (1970) demonstrates, make it difficult for women to flee in other circumstances. Women are aware of their responsibilities, according to Munro's "Bardon Bus" (The Moons of Jupiter), "How I Met My Husband" (Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You), and "Material."

The three stories by Munro, "Bardon Bus," "Material," and "How I Met My Husband," depict Canadian women's ability to

disfigure radical patriarchy and escape their situation. Munro elucidates how women are viewed as a means to the satisfaction of the male ego. Stories such as "Hold Me Fast, Don't Let Me Pass" and "Prue" highlight gender inequities in the Canadian community. The stories also show the oppressive environment in which women are forced to live. "Oranges and Apples" by Munro examines men's scepticism toward their wives. Barbara, the heroine, suffers greatly as a result of her husband Murray's suspicious and rude behaviour. The film "Prue" explores men's harsh and sexual treatment of women.

In short, Munro depicts patriarchy as a technique used to dominate and silence women, as well as how women are regarded as lesser beings in a male-dominated society. Munro discusses how women's humanity and dignity have suffered as a result of a lack of female respect, solidarity, community, and definitions of 'woman' (Zidan, 2013, p.18). Munro demonstrates to the reader that the only way out of this bleak and depressing existence is to flee and never return, simply to experience some freedom and independence.

Postmodernist Techniques in Munro's Short Stories

Linda Hutcheon (1988), a well-known postmodern Canadian critic, defines postmodern fiction as "essentially self-reflective writing that is aware that it is written and read as part of society." According to Foucault and Derrida, "postmodernism is a regression from, rather than a supersession of, modernism" (1990). 133 (Godard, 1990). Postmodernism, according to Godard (1990), is a synonym for post-metaphysics, post-humanism, and post-structuralism (Godard, 1990, p. 133).

According to de Beauvoir (1997), feminism is a distinct viewpoint that emerged from the struggle for women's independence. The roles of women in patriarchal culture have been clarified (Beauvoir, 1997). As a result, we believe that "once she has abandoned the conventional notion of femininity," she should be able to experience her true joy in being a woman (Friedan, 1997, p. 295). It is no longer acceptable for a young woman to see herself solely as a mother with spare time; she must now see

herself as a human being first and foremost, capable of taking on the roles of wife and mother if she so desires (Friedan, 1997, p. 295).

Postmodernist female writers, according to Godard (1994), should "create shared spaces and emphasize the social aspect of creation—texts that are not authored and without authority, thus fulfilling the dream of a common language" (p.73). Hutcheon (1988) adds in this context that non-authored texts or texts about one's own life experience continue indefinitely, like ancient stories to which more and more tales could be added. This open-endedness and disorderliness "also underscore the relationship between postmodernism and feminism" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 53).

Identity, belonging, and displacement are central themes in postmodern literature. Because of the "ex-centric position of the short story among fictional genres," using the short story form requires a significant amount of effort (Kudchetkar, 1995, p. 248). As previously stated, Munro's stories express the intersection of postmodernism and feminism by appropriating feminist themes through postmodern writing techniques. In her postmodern style, she writes, "Fight oppression, patriarchy/colonization, and injustice to restore/preserve their identity" (Zidan, 2013, p.16).

Munro's work exemplifies postmodern realism, which is a logical contradiction. As P.K. Prabha (2006) shows, the United Kingdom is now devoid of Lords and Ladies, Princes and Princesses, Dukes and Duchesses, and Manorial Mansions. Instead, ordinary men, women, and children face challenges such as poverty and mental illness. She subverts the story's reality by using postmodern themes and omitting a climax. After reading one of her stories, the reader is left wanting more because the stories end abruptly and the problems remain unsolved (p. 112).

Characterization

Understanding Munro's texts require an understanding of characterization. According to Walter Martin (1987), Munro uses flat and round characters. Her flat characters, such as Uncle Benny

and Flo, are minor characters in the majority of her stories. Flat characters can appear in the scene as well. This character is devoid of details, underdeveloped, and frequently acts like a stereotype. She creates characters that are deep and layered, with various traits and qualities that can grow and change. Munro introduces a new heroine in "Who Do You Think You Are?" who discovers herself after reconciling with her stepmother, father, and other past figures. Rose realizes that there is no objective truth about human connections and identity fifteen years after she returns to old Hanratty. Munro's characters, as Martin (1987) demonstrated, are also dynamic and malleable. Her static characters rarely participate in the plot and are unaffected by the protagonist's events. Munro conveys her characters through both direct and indirect characterization.

Previously, the cartoon deviated from well-known human behaviour patterns (Prabha, 2006, p.57). Munro's writings, on the other hand, expose the ugliness and hypocrisy of society's established conventions. This author uses both conventional and marginalized language to depict comedy. Del lives near the "end of Flats Road," giving her a unique perspective on both Flats Road residents and the city (Munro, 1971, p. 6). When you move from Flats Road to City, everything changes. Del's mother recalls that she didn't feel a new sense of relief and consequence until her feet touched the pavements and she raised her head, grateful for the town's shade after Flats Road (Munro, 1971, p. 6). Prostitution and drinking are most likely not among her favourite pastimes.

She may also dislike unpredictability and pretended ignorance. Frankie Hall, Mitch Pilm, and the Potter Boys irritate her greatly, as do the two idiots, one of whom is Frankie Hall (Munro, 1971, p. 6). Murrell uses humour to portray middle-class hypocrites attempting to escape poverty, oppression, and unhappiness.

They are universal and, as Munro demonstrated, must be overcome in the lives of women. In "Images," "Turkey Season," and "The Spanish Lady," among other works, her characters revel in the most macabre details. "I can't think of anything to do with

this man except turn him into a narrative for Hugh, a curiosity, and a comedy for Hugh," observes the narrator of "The Spanish Lady." "If we laugh, we can survive," she says. Jokes, in some ways, protect us from the monotony of daily life. Homer Milton's Who Do You Think You Are? and other works by Homer are parodied.

Mr Malley in "Office," the grandfather in "Connections," Mr Stanley in "Dulse," and the Kula people in "Albanian Virgin" have all been mocked for their dishonesty and hypocrisy on numerous occasions. Mr Malley is a tyrant who fabricates lies about his daughter to harm her. In "Connections," he claims to have escaped Oxford and makes fun of the naive women who criticise his grandchildren's poor grammar. It is not until later that the protagonist discovers he is a trainee butcher. In "Albanian Virgin," the Kula people believe that women are subordinate to men. Lottar finds herself in a bind after arriving in a new country. Her only choices are to become a Muslim or to remain a virgin.

Gossip is another example of a postmodern literary device. You must be close friends with or well acquainted with someone to spread stories about them. Hutcheon claims that the best letter writers stay at home and gossip about their neighbours (2002). Munro's female stories use gossip to expose reality by undermining and deconstructing social conventions (p. 44). Mrs Fullerton in "Shining Houses" and Mary McQuade in "Images" are both gossipy.

"Mary sat on the back steps of Mrs Fullerton's house, talking-or rather listening-to Mrs Fullerton, who sold her eggs," Mary says at the beginning of "Shining Houses" from Dance of the Happy Shades. Mary learns about her neighbour's lives, in the same manner, she learnt about her aunts and grandmothers by asking questions about stories she had heard. There were "little modifications in meaning, content, and colour, but with a true reality that generally sticks to things that are at the very least part of the past's mythology," she explained. As a result, the author profanes the west and distorts concepts such as sovereignty.

It is alluded to in "Images" from *Dance of the Happy Shades* when the narrator laments that her sick mother has forgotten all of her legends about Princes in the Tower. A queen's head was severed while a small dog hid beneath her dress. The narrator's anxiety is transformed into sympathy and an appreciation for Mary MacQuade and Joe's true strength and value through their stories.

People recount their experiences or theorise about "Girls and Women's Lives" in this book. Del, the main character, introduces us to Uncle Benny. Aunt Elspeth and Aunt Grace are also storytellers. Del explains, "I got the impression they were telling me this wasn't for my entertainment, but theirs." Del's mother is also a gifted storyteller. Unlike Jubilee, she tells stories about Aunt Moira, Uncle Bobby Oliphant, and Potterfield. Del's childhood memories are rife with similar stories. Fern Dogherty and Mr Chamberlain also appear in her stories. According to Coral Howells, Munro's novels enlighten and educate women about their roles and responsibilities in traditional institutions (1987).

Effectiveness of the Setting

Because of colonialism, small-town life is a recurring theme in Canadian literature. Although the majority of the communities in the series are set in Ontario, other observers see it as a national experience. According to Ryan Porter, its significance in nineteenth-century continental spread helps to demonstrate its presence in Canadian and American literature (2010). In his literary analysis of small-town Ontario, W.J. Keith (1989) defines a small town as "any cohesive, distinctive, yet relatively confined human settlement" (p. 148). Likewise, Anthony Hilfer (1969) defines a small town as "a place where people know each other in contrast to the faceless metropolis" (p. 6). He claims that the boundaries of a small town represent an intimate environment in which one can feel a connection with neighbours and the community at large. Williams (1973) associates rural village life with uniqueness and originality.

Rural communities are frequently described as embodiments of direct contact, a setting distinguished by natural virtue, familiarity,

and, most importantly, a stark contrast to metropolitan life. Several cultural and literary studies were carried out in small towns in the 1960s and 1970s. Verna Reid (1972) and Cheryl Joanne Hall (1979) are two Canadian authors. Reid considers a small town to be a symbol of home and thus an ideal environment (p. 2). In "The Tiny Town in Canadian Fiction," Reid (1973) observes that "the small town bears a key to self-understanding, and it is endowed with the aura of innocence that clings to an earlier and supposedly better world" (p. 181). According to Ines Balciunas (1968), "portraits of small-town Ontario range from nostalgic to realistic to critical, with no agreement on its nature and role" (p. 100).

Munro's heroines' identities and sense of awareness are shaped by their surroundings, even if their homes and social traditions limit them. "The Ottawa Valley," from *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), and "The Peace of Utrecht," from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1960), are recognized as notable examples of depicting rural Ontario qualities with a connection to the past. "The Ottawa Valley" is about a trip the narrator took as a pre-teen with her mother and sister. With Aunt Dodie and other relatives from the 'Ottawa Valley,' the narrator connects to a world she is unfamiliar with. The narrator connects to a world she is unfamiliar with. Worse, the narrator discovers that her mother has Parkinson's disease, which she contracted during her stay.

She realizes for the first time that her mother has died and that she will no longer be there to comfort and love her. The narrator recalls earlier incidents to depict Munro's Ontario and her life in her own words. It is said that understanding one's life. One must live haphazardly, recalling and relating to past places, people, events, and tragedies. In "The Ottawa Valley," the young girl was attempting to re-capture and comprehend her mother, and such links always develop from memories, which are often inspired by places or experiences. Munro claims that women can achieve stability by reconciling with themselves and their past, thereby maintaining their identities and gaining independence and emancipation.

According to John Weaver (1988), the stories create "evocative chronicles of rural and small-town Ontario," and Munro is "a remarkable interpreter of Ontario's cultural history, particularly small-town social structure, community values, migration to cities, religion, sexuality, and adolescent fantasies." According to McGill (2002), Munro is self-aware when investigating the person-place relationship.

Munro works as a geographer. She investigates how we write and read the land, as well as the difficulty of achieving Edward Relph's "geographical imagination," defined as "understanding and reinterpreting the linkages between one's experience of particular landscapes and societal and environmental processes" (McGill, 2002)

Canada's early community created social challenges against this backdrop. Wilderness, mountains, and harsh weather all slowed social movement. Munro employs tiny private towns such as Jubilee, Hanratty, and, most recently, Dalglish to combat and demolish the centre. According to James, a private kingdom formed by Canadian feminist sensibility to combat expulsion from the patriarchal national empire (1995, Qtd. in Kudchetkar, p. 103).

According to Ryan Porter, critics have questioned Munro's "photographic reality" of the province's Lake Huron areas (2010). (From Robson, 1984.) According to Weaver (1988), the autobiographical elements in Munro's "a reason to believe her work, and her writing serves as a cultural resource for Ontario Readers enjoy the stories, critics praise the writing style, and anyone interested in Ontario's history must applaud Munro's accomplishments as a historian of deep thoughts and transformations " (p. 400). Munro, on the other hand, rejects the primacy of place in her works, calling the regionalist element incidental.

Munro's attempt to protect her female characters from oppressive patriarchy through inventive nature settings has resulted in the metropolis' deconstruction. Women's frail will and resistance are represented by land destruction. So Del relocates to Jubilee in

search of her roots and family history. According to Michel Foucault, "inferiors should return in time to reread the colonial inheritance from a different perspective" (Zidan, p. 14). In *Friend of My Youth*, Munro also sets the Grieves family in the Ottawa Valley.

Conclusion

Munro's diverse body of work reflects the feminist desire for self-identity, survival, and freedom of imagination and expression. Her female characters must adapt their dreams to conform to societal conventions to achieve independence and maturity in modern and metropolitan settings. These female protagonists are fighting not only for self-actualization, but also for autonomy, social authority, and humanity. These women have chosen to be active rather than passive. Munro uses the term "feminism" broadly because she is more concerned with women's social standing and historical experiences. Women, according to Munro, must learn to perceive, think, and act to fulfil their roles. Munro's works investigate the impact of relationships on her heroines, in addition to social and generational barriers. Her protagonists are all female. As a result, her stories are told from a female point of view. They rely on men to influence and manage their lives, and they may be overly trusting of men who can firmly govern their relationship with men. Munro is acutely aware of societal abuses directed toward women, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape. Females are frequently sexually victimized in Munro's stories, so she includes crimes against women.

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