



# Childhood Experience, Identity, and Sensibility: A Feminist Reading of Alice Munro's *Dance of Happy Shades*

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## Abstract

The main objective of the present paper is to explore childhood experiences, identity, and sensibility with special reference to Munro's *Dance of Happy Shades* (1968). Her stories are known for being intensive and concise character studies, personal and psychological portrayals of women and men, often centered on the explosive struggle between individualism and collectivism. Munro devotes the form of her stories to their substance, citing similar storytelling structures and motifs in various works, such as the subject of reunion and the conflict that arises from opposing lives. She creates her characters' identification by combining pictures from the past and present in multi-layered tales of personal recollection. The paper also examines several short tales, with an emphasis on the three-story cycle.

The paper also examines the short story writing of Munro and her common style which illuminates human intricacy effortlessly. She keeps a remarkable position among other contemporary writers of fiction. She gave prime attention to her native place; Southwestern Ontario in her short stories. The paper will also shed light on the local people, their desires, and their lifestyles. She started writing at adolescent age and published her first story as a student. Her writing hold on regional and perplexing female characters which are the features of her writings. Southern Ontario Gothic is a literary genre and most of her writings are related to it. It will use the qualitative research methodology based on the observation, evaluation, and analysis of Munro's select work.

**Keywords: Identity, childhood experience, Sensibility, Injustice, Women, Environment**

## Paper

Throughout 1968 and 2014, Canadian author Alice Munro wrote seventeen books and was received the third Man Booker International Prize in 2009 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. She is widely regarded as one of the world's best short story writers. This international acclaim for her work necessitates a glance back at her first narrative, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, which was released in 1968 and had fifteen works written between 1953 and 1967. International experts on her writing evaluate the initial steps of a successful author and provide new critical insights on a debut collection that presages some of the concepts and trends of subsequent stories, some forty-five years after the release of this first book. Contributors use a range of methods (including fiction, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and hereditary conflict) to elucidate the tales in *Dance of the Happy Shades*' major stylistic elements, storytelling tactics, creative styles, styles of composition, and basic qualities.

Munro's command of the first-person narration is one of her most distinguishing qualities. An analysis of Munro's early unclaimed works, as well as those included in *Dance of the Happy Shades*, reveals that her style evolved from her first stories onward; it is also best observed via an assessment of literary devices. Munro had established a distinctive, retroactive storytelling technique by the time her debut collection was published, and she has utilized it throughout her subsequent work. Thacker observes: "In her stories, it is how present and past mingle, the vehicle by which the narrator's humanity is communicated, and, finally, how each narrator, and several other individual characters besides, are followed their articulate moments. Simply put, it is the catalytic factor in Munro's substantial art". (37)

Although readers of extended stories, along with books, may be acclimated to retaining certain aspects in their minds while other strands of the story are established, viewers of short fiction are less acclimated to this technique. As Hollingshead points out, the contrast between a brief tale and a book is not just in the number of words used, but in the amount of information conveyed across a long distance. In a successful short story, the meaning is more firmly and unfathomably incorporated in the formal elements of the text, rather than being abstract able and transportable as it must be in a book. Centrifugal acceleration of focus acts in a short book scene and there should only be one. A chapter in a book, on the other hand, spends a lot of its time gazing not just back and ahead in the book, but also laterally, well outside the narrative, at the

physical universe, at the set of shared beliefs that constitute everyday life. That force is rotational, expanding outward rather than attempting to rotate around a stationary core.

Stories like “Dance of the Happy Shades”, “The Day of the Butterfly”, etc., belong to this phase. The seven stories of this period are set in a Gothic milieu where the heroine is presented as a helpless being. Towards the end of the story, the helpless being gets transformed into a Cinderella figure on whom all attention is showered. Munro achieves the transformation from traditional story-telling to the metafictional mode through her special use of language as well. The use of metaphors and 229 similes becomes restricted in later stories. She brings violent changes in the accepted notions regarding sentence structure and semantics to suit her story structure. She also blurs the boundary between different genres of writing by mixing poetry, prose, newspaper reports, papers from magazines, and dialogues into the single frame of the short story. She deconstructs all traditional notions of meaning, time, space, human body, psyche, physical world, the patriarchal institutions like family, school, church, etc., through her unique use of language. Munro’s stories are in the form of an imagist, where the plots are no chronological and moods of atmosphere dictate the story structure.

She has accomplished this picturesque presentation of life in all its variety, through photographic imagery. This drawing of scenes and characters, by the use of photographs and paintings, highlights her sense of beauty. In addition, photographs help to present the paradoxical, comic, and unnatural in life. Although Munro’s works are not strictly autobiographical, they do echo her experiences of life. The environment in which she had grown up, the milieu, customs, and traditions that the women of the times were accustomed to, all find a place in her fiction. This gives her work an emotional reality. Through the eyes of her fictitious narrators, Munro re-examines the past to shape the present. Nevertheless, what characterizes her autobiographical narratives is that they are not simply a narration of the past, but a reflection of the inner self.

Munro’s narratives are strong and focused character studies, personal psychiatric portrayals of women coming to grips with their convoluted life histories, deeply rooted in the dynamic struggle between individuality and civilization, and its significant influence on one’s life. Many of Munro’s stories, particularly those that are part of larger story periods that follow a solitary character’s efforts to make sense of the world, feature the relieving power of distancing oneself from either family or, to a greater extent, babyhood group, both psychologically and geographically marks a defining moment. The infinite narrators

of these narratives recall their tumultuous upbringings to shed light on their personalities and to comprehend the causes of eventual tragedies, worries, and disappointments. Childhood continues a defining era of life for Munro, the time when one's character is created since all that occurs to the young characters, everything the kid witnesses, notes, or disregards, forms the fundamental sensation of self-concept. As Murphy (2009, p. 49) points out in her essay on memory and identity in Munro's fiction, the Canadian writer's characters "struggle to forge their identities in a crucible of connections: of one place to the next, of the past to the present, and of one sexual being to another," to a huge amount low the autobiographical environment of Munro's writing. Munro's treatment of the protagonists' efforts- the process of discovering and comprehending their identities connects pictures of the ancient and modern in a multi-layered narrative of individual memory, a topic that will be addressed more in the pages ahead.

Del Jordan from *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Rose from Whom Do You Think You Are?* are both prospective storytellers, which is a recurring theme in Munro's short tales. The tension that develops from comparing the youthful, naive spectator from the past (the narrated) with the adult narrator, who is reflecting on her childhood from a range of time, is exemplified by their retellings. She is both detached from and involved in the tale. As Munro expertly illustrates in "Lives of Girls and Women," the nature of the short story enables managers to transcend the typical linearity of the book. The protagonist, a little girl, alternates between being an active participant in the events she recalls, someone with the agency, and a passive yet extraordinarily attentive observer. She performs in the past but tells the story in the present. What is it that she sees? The majority of Munro's fictions are situated in an adult world, whether that world is made composed of members of her immediate family or modest or agricultural populations in southern Ontario.

Munro has constructed her story to show the complexity of life, rather than conceptualizing her work inside a particular narrative pattern framework. She has fitted the shape to the substance by following the needs of the scenario. Munro has a very unique writing style which greatly changes the way that each reader interprets her text. She uses her fictional stories as an attempt to truly make an impact on the life or experience of the reader. Many fiction writers cannot focus on anything except the storyline. Munro, however, takes the reader further than the storyline pulling their attention away from the words on the 231 pages, and toward the connections between the characters and the connections to the realistic parallels to their own life experiences.



The researcher praises Alice Munro for narrative exuberance and her accurate sense of what divides women and men. Based on the research subjects chosen by the researcher, the interest in Canadian literature and culture has eclipsed the reader's curiosity as regards British and American Authors. The researcher by analyzing the select short story collections has entered into a dialogue with the author by way of tracing feminist tendencies, the portrayal of women, and has brought out a traumatic legacy to the forefront. The researcher has also explored the theme of realism as a psychological notion very much depicted in Munro's fictional world and at the same time investigated the widespread theme of regionalism which is related to Munro's physical environment. Munro holds a typical way of narrating the story with maximum effect on the reader.

Though researches have been done on the works of Alice Munro, still her works remain a vast ocean and need further exploration. A comparative approach with 233 other famous short story writers, Psychological portrayal of women, the quest for femininity, the relations between sexes, Gothic Conventions, psychological realism, social realism, magic realism, historical realism, photo-realism, and natural realism are some of the areas need further exploration. This Canadian author has established himself as a master of the short tale throughout the years. The form's packed and contained powers enable Alice Munro to pick away at the clean and commonplace facades that encase her protagonists' livelihoods, revealing darker realities beneath.

The paper has dealt mainly with Munro's *Dance of Happy Shades*. A comparison to Munro's earlier stories and an analysis and discussion of the spatial expansion to quality- how the increasing length of her stories perhaps connect to more depth would provide a good scope for further investigation. Reading Alice Munro's stories is like trying to cross a river by jumping from float to float; separate stories may be connected or have been connected by way of motif, topic, or character. The reader is never on safe ground, always aware of the movement or elasticity of time and space.

The links between remembrance and identity in Alice Munro's short-story cycles were investigated in this paper. The underlying subject of "making sense of the world" finding one's identity among the various identities externally imposed, history, and tradition is inextricably linked with a broader reflection on the anthropological nature of space, as it was argued regarding the two continuous integration. Southern Ontario's tiny towns and rural environs are places of identity: historical foundational pillars are seen through the lens of location and uniqueness. Del Jordan, Rose, and Juliet, Munro's female protagonists, go on

feminist missions to establish society's expectations of their location, both in the past, as attentive and mature childhood and family narrators, and in the moment, as middle-aged women having to come to terms with the outcomes of their pursuit, to statement Beverly Jean Rasporich.

The Canadian author uses the short story as a vehicle for critical reinterpretation by presenting miniaturized but strongly expound and advanced pictures of her characters, which are heightened and enlarged by the constant time shifts, the weaving of remembrances from various times, which have a driver for essential transformation. In the end, the feminist perception of revealing the real selves hidden beneath social roles imposition on the protagonists, a comprehensive procedure of self-realization, getting older, passing through various stages and initiations, to ultimately find one's identity free of limitations and culture, to find the composer Alice Munro's voice is at the heart of these stories.

Women's work frequently defies conventional literary classifications. Munro explores the typical and established women's lives of her generation. She uses her work to represent the lives of women at all stages of their life, as well as their inner quests under patriarchal dominance. Munro has utilized parody and meta-fiction as modernist contradictory forms that use and misuse masculine tradition's texts and norms. During the 1960s, women's books tended to focus on women's concerns within a Nationalist context. Women's lives in Canada were typically more difficult than men's. "Cultural norms based on a Garrison circumstance limited the pioneer woman in Canada, and climate and terrain trapped her into a confined life," argues Elizabeth Waterston. Women in Canada are now experiencing a great deal of stress and upheaval. The representation of women wishing for freedom from the constraints of their surroundings has become a popular theme. Nationalist and feminist organizations heralded a substantial shift in Canadian society. Beverly Rasporich believes that all three periods are discernible in Munro's literature (1990) Munro places a high value on femininity, questioning and rebelling against its enslaving consequences. (Rasporich) Another major topic in Canadian women's literature during the previous half-century is a sense of weakness in comparison to other prominent women in Western cultures. Lorna Irvine and Coral Ann Howells have pointed to share a 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 personifiesCanada" (Irvine, 37) in 1986. Munro is known for being a genuine writer from South Western Ontario and a feminist who investigated the subtleties of female awareness. Munro is a multifaceted artist who resists classification.

Coral Ann Howells, for example, sees two dominating conflicting discourses in her stories: truth and imagination. Because of her distinctive narrative writing approach, which has gained a lot of real attention, she has wowed readers and reviewers with her amazing workmanship. Munro's "Feminist Quest" seeks freedom of inspiration and articulation via the field of art, even though she has the view of women as artists. In the introduction, Rasporich 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 realizes the importance of the imaginative artist figure in her stories, but at the same time he fails 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" (48). Even though Blodgett believes Del to be a growing writer, he ignores the gender problem, choosing to see her merely as an artist rather than as a mature woman who is also a burgeoning writer. Alice Munro won the Giller Prize for her collection of short stories, *Runaway*, which was released in 2004. Alice Munro's work is outstanding. What she writes is worth paying attention to because she has a tremendous drive and talents of intelligence and sensitivity, curiosity, and imagination. She admits that her tales disclose things that frequently corroborate the reader's own private experience or bring to life something that had been buried just under the surface of consciousness until then. She resists her inner impulses in the face of the meaninglessness of everyday existence. Munro's eleventh collection of short stories, *Runway*, was released in 2004. As the title suggests, *Runway* is a story about a runaway. Carla, a young wife, flees from her husband, and a goat named Flora flees from her in a subplot that provides the story's emotional point. This, according to Brad Hooper, is one of Munro's most accomplished psychological stories. It is told in the third person and takes place in a rural area of Canada. The narrative depicts the difficulties between Carla and Clark, a young couple, on the one hand, and Clark's desire to murder Carla's favorite pet, a white goat. Some reviewers praised "Runaway" for its "innovative" style.

The narrating technique of the collection is not straightforward which tells us the complexities of Juliet. She is fighting for an explanation that would define her mental status whether she is physically supportive and stable. On the other side, in *Dance of Happy Shades*, combat is mostly with a physicality which is against the sociological architect which prohibits females from making their preferences. The exposure of this research concentrates only on the short stories set in the contemporary Canada of the '60s. Consequently, my examination discoveries can't be summed up to hold a more extensive comprehension of sexual

orientation development. All through my perusing of Alice Munro's short stories, her impeccable and inconspicuous portrayals of the connection amongst moms and girls have pulled to my advantage. To encourage the comprehension of this essential component in sex generation, it would hold any importance with devoting a more significant examination, later on, developed simply on Alice Munro's "fixation" with the mother-little girl connection. Munro moves her point of view to another period of female experience, that of menopause and maturing. This period, like the beginning of adolescence, is another attempting stage, as the female body now experiences passionate, mental, and physical change. Be that as it may, the mission for character proceeds, however, the circumstance now is very extraordinary. Munro looks at the top to bottom, the female cognizance at this point of life wants, states of mind towards sex and men, and in addition of their position in family and society

Munro has additionally demonstrated that ladies are not generally cowed around male mastery. They too have their say in each familial issue and on occasion apply their personality. Although Munro can't be named as a women's activist essayist in the feeling of Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood are, she is on a basic level a craftsman profoundly worried for ladies. Her works are expected to animate social awareness, so ladies conditions might be enhanced, and they may not be subjected to exploitation.

One final thought, although this appears to be the end, the reader must remember that the narrative is not recounted by the kid. The adult narrator speaks from the edges (unmonitored space), the only place where the creative aim of creation may be questioned. As a result, the narrator's identity has not been entirely established by an ideology that assigns her a position and set of behaviors based on her sex, much as aggressive foxes remain to emanate a strong primal smell "of the fox itself" even after death. The child's idealized perspective and the bitter, sorrowful mature attitude imply that she continues to oppose and critique the patriarchal culture that labels her.



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