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**DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITIES IN  
ALICE MUNRO'S *THE BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN***



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**ABSTRACT**

*Alice Ann Munro, accredited as the Master of the contemporary short story needs no introduction. Her narratives scrutinize human complexities with a simple approach. Her tendency to move forward and backward in time has been the reason for her popularity and revolutionized feelings. Munro's works are deep rooted in the real world and drenched with magical realism. Her valuable insights into human nature and the complexities involved with it is depicted in her stories.*

**KEYWORDS**

*human complexities, magical realism*

## RESEARCH PAPER

Born as Alice Ann Laidlaw, Munro is a Canadian author of distinguished artistic skills, who makes her writing understandable and interesting. Winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature for her work as the “master of the modern short story” and 2009, Man Booker International Prize for her lifetime body of work, she is defined as a writer of integrity. Apart from this, she is a three times winner of Canada’s Governor General's Award for fiction. Her short stories are known to explore and expose human complexities in a realistic way. According to the Academy's Permanent Secretary, Peter England, “She’s really a broad author – but I think she has everything she needs in this small patch of Earth.”

Munro, acclaimed as the most celebrated short story writers in the world, is known for her surprising intellect and creativity. Her short stories are more like novels than short stories. They present a complete story with perfect settings, plots, sub-plots, atmosphere, the characters and everything that is involved in it. All her short stories especially her recent one *Dear Life* earned her accolades and fame. Her short stories are known for their strong regional focus, their settings mostly in Huron County, Ontario with the omniscient narrator who makes sense of the world. Coordinated with her narrative, she interweaves her hallucinatory realism, 'condensed' imagery and sensual ecstasy. The 'condensed' images she employs possess great significance and facilitate in assigning a meaning and significance.

Alice Munro’s short stories feature common people struggling with their day to day problems and crisis. Almost all her short stories are set in small–town and rural Canada. Her realistic portrayal of characters helps in illuminating their central traits. She convincingly unmask them without being judgmental. Her focal point is predominantly the lives of girls and women. Munro explores the complexities of human behavior and character, highlighting the complex working of the human mind. The rise and fall of the characters with their deterioration, oppression, effort to juxtapose, their adjustments, accomplishments, faithfulness, fidelity as well as infidelity are well appraised and portrayed in her narratives.

Referred as “the Canadian Chekhov”, she had interpreted real life incidents into short stories. *Runaway*, a book of short stories, was awarded Giller Prize of the Year. With eight short stories in its content, three of the stories are *Chance*, *Soon* and *Silence* are about a single character named ‘Juliet Henderson’. *Runaway* depicts the story of a woman, trapped in a bad marriage. The story *Passion* is about a lonely small town girl who flees a passionless relationship with an outsider. The stories *Trespasses*, *Tricks*, *Powers* portray the protagonist’s pain in their life.

Story after story Munro portrays human nature and its complexities with accurate details and simplicity. They offer a fully realized world unto itself. The stories mostly have women at their center who are of different ages and circumstances. They are real characters of flesh and blood with a life full of mistakes, complexities, apprehensions, abuses and atrocities. The characters have been lifted from actual life. The two themes which Alice Munro uses occasionally are 'missed opportunities' and 'lies'. She has utilized these two themes from numerous angles, intertwining them in her narratives. The eight stories in *Runaway* portray the simple lives of women who are wrapped with their complexities and heart-breaking incidences. Munro takes her characters towards the highest level of humanity where one can become experienced and perfect with time. Being called by Cynthia Ozick as "Our Chekhov", Alice Munro comments that being compared to Chekhov is a humbling experience as not only her, 'Chekhov has influenced everybody'.

Among all the stories she is more attached to *Save the Reaper* and *My Mother's Dream*. *The Progress of Love*, *Labor Day Dinner* and *Carried Away* are some of the best ones penned down by any author. Alice Munro started writing short stories when it was hard to get novels published in Canada in the Sixties. Munro along with Margaret Atwood got their start through Robert Weaver's CBC radio program, *Anthology*. Praised by other writers as a writer who can move characters through time, she is a master in the field which no other writer can. Analyzing Munro's fiction, it is comprehended that her primary emphasis is on the development of complex emotions in the protagonists. Her experiences of life balanced her in her making of a writer. Her writings reflect her essence and ethics. The subtle theme running through her narratives reveal her sheer protest against the different facets of stereotyped Patriarchal societal norms. The story, *The Bear Came Over the Mountain* is yet another outstanding fiction by Munro. It was included in her tenth collection of stories, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* in 2001. The title of the story draws similarity from a North American folk song, "The Bear Went Over the Mountain". The narrative involves a complicated and emotional love story of a couple, Grant and Fiona.

*The Bear Came Over the Mountain* depicts the perplexing complexities which develop in the lives of the characters who are ordinary human beings. The confusion and complexities in the relationships develop with a series of events and entangle the lives of the characters. The protagonists, Grant and Fiona, married for forty-five years undergo a change in their relationship with Fiona's deteriorating memory. Munro presents a story of love, betrayal, reconciliation with perfect ease. The narrative depicts a beautiful panorama of pictures of

different phases of married life. The love life of Fiona and Grant starts with passion and culminates with psychological reconciliation. Fiona's suffering from Alzheimer's disease widens the complex circumstances in her married life with Grant. As she is admitted in Meadowlake, the first thirty days help Grant realize his feelings and psychological attachment with Fiona. Grant's separation from Fiona makes him psychologically analyze their married life. Fiona's chastity and loyalty towards him make him feel ashamed of himself as he had been unfaithful towards Fiona in the past. Their relationship becomes complicated when Aubrey, a resident of Meadowlake, enters their circle of life. With Aubrey's wife Marian trying to help in easing the circumstances, Grant is portrayed sacrificing his life for his wife, Fiona. Fiona's memory loss and her growing attachment with Aubrey make Grant care more for Fiona. With the development of the crisis in their lives, Grant becomes more accommodating. Things become complicated and crisis deepens when Aubrey leaves the nursing home and goes back to his wife. The separation from Aubrey kills Fiona leaving her grieving and consequently deteriorating her health. The complexities of their life deepen and bring more twists and turns in their lives. With Grant's intervention, Aubrey is brought back to Fiona, but within this period of time, her emotions and affection for Grant are renewed. The variations in the emotions projected by Alice Munro exposes the complexities and intricacies of the human heart. Munro once observed, "The complexity of things- the things within things just seems to be endless. I mean nothing is easy, nothing is simple." The psychological crises in the lives of the characters depicted within the narrative move back and forth in time. The lives of the simple people put forth through the lens of Munro are the stories of daily life which is complicated enough with problems, confusions and complex circumstances. Her seemingly effortless style explores the complexities in the prism of life.

The emotional twists and turns depicted in Munro's stories stimulate emotional development in the readers also. Like any other story, in *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, also Munro perfectly blends all the components of a short story: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution in a well-structured narrative interweaved with emotions. Her artistic intellect aids in a balanced development of emotions in her female characters. In the climax of Munro's stories the characters are less humorous and more oppressive. The figurative images employed develop and establish the emotional link. The imagery employed in her stories depicts the complexities of human life and articulate the struggle involved in it. The literal and figurative images function as catalysts in the development of the characters and their psychic emotions. The figurative language used by Munro conveys the colorful as well

as the dark complexities of life which are less predictable. Munro had adopted an ironic approach to present the lines of the characters in the story. The narrative of *The Bear Came Over the Mountain* is devoid of any child characters or any possibility of another generation like any other story of Munro. Instead, it focuses on the devastating picture of older couples experiencing psychic and emotional turmoil.

In *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, the logical method used to develop the characters' deep complexities raises an element of surprise in the readers. The characters' desires, complexities, and conflicts are developed and established against each other to culminate in a satisfying climax. To quote William H. Coles in his writing, *Emotional Complexity in Literary Fiction*, "A character's inner emotions stems from a basic need or want, which is often not obvious until late in the story writing. Needs come from inner turmoil. And a turmoil has two sides." He further continues, "Delivery of emotions in a story must be paced and matched to appropriate intensity. In Munro's stories, we find the delivery of emotions resulting in conflicts and turmoil within the characters is too mature in subtlety.

Many of Munro's stories are almost autobiographical. They are full of precise, plain and clandestine representations of her life. *Dear Life* celebrates Alice Munro's victory over the complexities of life. It focuses and reveals the secret working of the human psyche. The intricacies of human emotions are beautifully represented in this collections of short stories. This collection ends with an autobiographical note, "I believe they are the first and last and the closest things I have to say about my own life."

One of her short stories had been adapted into the film *Away From Her* by Sarah Polley. The basic story turns into a potent tale developed skillfully by Munro. She shapes and maps the contours of the psyche of the characters of her stories and weaves a perfect picture. Her razor-sharp understanding of the characters and the way she portrays their lives prove her mastery in the fiction. Her depiction of the cruel circumstances of life and how it makes life miserable and makes everybody feel trapped and beaten. The complex emotional status of the characters are developed intricately in the narratives layer by layer. Their hopes, passion, emotion, failures, success and tragedy is presented by her entirely in life's broad panoramic canvas. From *Runaway* to *Dear Life* Alice Munro's short stories are simple representations of the lives of the inhabitants of this world.

Munro defines the margin of "Postmodernism". The narrative, the characters, the setup, the dramatic overturn is what Munro captures in her every story and makes her work "small pieces of wonder" which a reader cannot ignore. Her thoughts merge with the complex

thoughts, feelings, and emotions of her characters and so are always tuned with them. The readers can very well understand what she means to say. Talking about “Postmodernism”, the human complexities are the bargain of modern life. The sad living conditions of women of modern age are the result of the modern medium of communication. In Munro's stories, all the themes are inter-related to each other and what we get is a feminist view which she is eager to reflect. Her protagonists stand up against the patriarchal system and society. They all have a mind of their own and are striving to establish a niche for themselves. If we call Munro a feminist, then there remains no room for doubt as her stories are all representations of the feminine life. She presents the dramatic situations of her female characters and tries to justify their actions which are sometimes against the norms of the society. Munro's protest against the patriarchal society and its age-old perceptions are presented by her in a way which we know had been existing since ages and is still there in spite of the modernism and the advancements of the techniques and technology.

Munro is best at what the readers expect. She puts all her intelligence and creativity in her works. She can work wonders with the small piece of work what we call a “short story”. On receiving the news of her award, Munro has commented in an interview, “the short story in general. Because it’s often sort of brushed off, you know, as something that people do before they write their first novel. And I would like it to come to the fore, without any strings attached, so that there doesn’t have to be a novel.”

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