

# The Analysis of Female Consciousness in Alice Munro's Novels

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**Abstract:** Nobel Prize winner Alice Munro is an evergreen tree in the Canadian literary world. She began to publish works in the late 1960s, and many of her works have gained worldwide reputation during her more than 50 years of writing career. This article draws the outline of the trajectory of women's lives in Munro's novels, analyzes the heroine's living environment in the works and their relationship with men and nature, and explores the significant contributions that Munro's literary works have made to the development of female consciousness for more than half a century with positive impact.

## 1. Introduction

Alice Munro in Canada has a high reputation in the international society, it is not only depend on her works and success, but also because of her works with highly overall level, therefore, Alice Munro also became one of the 100 most influential contemporary writers. Under her ceaseless effort, she won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2013, became the 13th female winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, and accepted by more and more people in the world, it is not common in the history of the Nobel Prize for literature, which is out of her work, certainly also of her personal effort.<sup>[1]</sup> Alice Munro's works should be undoubtedly with a very high artistic value, but for the thought of female consciousness in her works still remains to be further discussed.

## 2. Alice Munro's Life and Works

### 2.1 Alice Munro's Life

Alice Munro was born in Ontario, Canada, a town of ranchers family. Her father was mainly engaged in the ranch work and her mother was a teacher. Alice Munro's success mainly comes from the accumulation of life in childhood. When she was in her teenage, she started to write. During the university, she had published the first story. Alice Munro has a certain talent in literary creation, and therefore, she also netted a part of the cost of living. Even so, she still insisted on working in the place such as dining-room, the library. Then after leaving university, she and her husband moved to Vancouver. A few years later, her three daughters were born, only her second daughter was dead just after 15 hours of being born. In my opinion, the real emotional expression in Alice Munro's later works is inseparable with her life experience and her daughter's death. Later, Alice Monroe and her husband migrated to Victoria. A few years later, another daughter of her was born. [1] In 1972, Alice Munro divorced with her first husband, then she returned to her hometown in Ontario and had become a local resident writer. She married the second husband in 1976. Then the couple moved to the town of Clinton, and settled there<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2.2 Alice Monroe's Works

Alice Munro created a great number of literary works. Most of her works has won various of prize. Alice Munro's first collection of *Dance of the Happy Shades* received a highly praise from people after published in 1968. She also wrote story named *Lives of Girls and Women*. After the completion of these works, she integrated them into a novel. For her works are always delighted to look forward, Alice Munro published stories *Who Do You Think You Are?* in 1978. Many of her novels have the same local place, so actually they are interrelated novels in a certain way. In Alice Munro's works, ideas about the women's unique trajectory is special and real. As it is seen that she also did not

disappointed the readers. In 2013, Alice Munro was judged as “Canada's most important literary writers” “contemporary master of short stories”. Since she began to write novels, she has completed 14 novels, more than 100 stories has been published, so to speak, she deserves the Nobel Prize winner.

### **3. The Youth Young girls' Confusion**

Munro created a series of young girls in her short stories. Their bodies are developing, but the idea is not yet mature. Their attitudes to the variety of major issues in life are in confusion and bewilderment. They can be confused about death, but no one can solve the issue. In their sexual confusion, it was yet unable to express. Munro portrayed a girl Adele who was confused about death. When her uncle died, she wanted to know how to close to death, her inner soul and feelings. Mother find information in an attempt to answer her questions, but her reply just made her sick to vomit. But Adele did not feel sad when she witnessed uncle's death, it also made her puzzled <sup>[3]</sup>. Uncle's departure and all the funeral made her confused. Munro created an extremely confused adolescent girl image successfully by Adele's seeing, feeling and inner conflict. Munro also shows the girl confusion of sex in the works. Munro's girl is full of naive, lack of life experience. Facing issues in life, they lose their ego.

### **4. The Middle-Aged women's Attempt to Struggle**

As it is seen that middle-aged women is the core of Munro's works. Most of her successful female characters are in her age group. They have get rid of the confusion of young girls, but with more intense self-consciousness to face the pressure in their life. Their intention to find themselves, the pursuit of independent female identity and spiritual freedom were expressed obviously. In *Runaway*, Carla is such a middle-aged woman, her husband's indifferent attitude to her was a kind of cold violence. As an important fellow of her, the little white goat called Flora is the symbol of freedom and wisdom, like fairies in Carla's side. Its disappearance if of the meaning of loss for Carla's spirit. Carla's first escape was because of the throb of revolt, the longing for love and the future of children <sup>[3]</sup>. Her second escape from marriage was because of her low social position and the awakening of patriarchal oppression and revolt, the fed up with her husband violently temper and male chauvinism, which finally came to the last straw. Although Carla failed to “escape”, her self-consciousness was awakening, which was an key step for women to find them personal identity.

### **5. The Ripe and Powerful Old Women**

As Munro's growing, she paid much attention to old women. She showed many people in their twilight facing a series of problems in the work t, but the old women in her novels was not pessimistic despair for their elderly. Instead, they were cool calm, mature and wise. Getting rid of the immature of the young and the inner spiritual struggle of middle-aged phase, they see the light of ups and downs in life and shape an extremely powerful temper <sup>[4]</sup>. In the story *Dance of the Happy Shades*, the piano teacher massa is such a figure that she is unmarried. She relies on teaching the children to play piano for living. It's not only a job, but also a kind of faith and persistence for her. She lives in poverty and her old age, life hard and body lack of energy, but she insisted on holding concert each year to support the students' learning outcomes.

### **6. Feminism Revealed in Alice Munro's Works**

Ecological feminism is the combination of ecology and feminism, which appeared in the 1970 s. Ecological feminists believe that there is a direct link between oppression of women's suffering and the persecution and the control which the nature is enduring. The root of their link is deep and consistent, therefore, it is crucial to come into a common sense among society that the emancipation of the natural characteristics of women should be identified by all people. The development objective

of ecological feminism is to liberate women and nature, criticize the patriarchal domination and oppression around the theme of nature and women, to advocate a harmonious co-existence between human and nature<sup>[4]</sup>. Ecological feminism criticism focuses on two aspects: one is the inevitable link between nature and women, the second is to reveal and criticize patriarchal discrimination and oppression impacted on nature and women. Ecological feminists believe that women are “natural”. And at the same time, they can also be “feminine”. Women and nature are inseparable because of the correlation existing between them including the symbols of status, experience and contacts. Integrated the three links, there is always a close relationship between nature and women. When the natural is under looting, women must be under slavery. In essence, to rescue nature means rescue women, and vice versa<sup>[3]</sup>.

Overall, ecological feminist paid close attention to the improvement of women's social status, as well as ecological havoc on earth, the forest disappeared, air pollution, water pollution and so on. They all are the serious threat to the harmonious development of modern society. Most of Alice Munro's literary works tells stories about women's love, marriage, relationship with the society and the nature. Usually, they exist as men's accessories. When they entered a family in the way of marriage to become a woman, they will face the trivial life struggling motherhood, potential betrayal and mid-life crisis. Their living conditions and environment are full of repression and misfortune, but they have a strong desire to break through barriers and obtain freedom<sup>[4]</sup>. In the sense of ecological feminism writing, Munro portrayed many vivid images of women in her universal ink and embodied them deep significant meaning about ecological thought.

## **7. The Characteristics of Feminist Thoughts in Alice Munro's Works**

### **7.1 The Basic Position of Feminism**

In many theoretical works, theorists put forward five basic conditions as the criterion to judge the elements of feminism: the author must be a female; they or their works should give priority to the perspective of women; the works reflect the female's life; works can inspire female readers' deep thinking about themselves; to eliminate the unequal relationship between men and women<sup>[5]</sup>. Take Alice Munro and her story named *How I Met My Husband* which is collected in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* as an example. Alice Munro is a female writer; she represents the female subject, and describes many female images as the main figures. The theme of the story is connected with the heroine tightly although the story is unfolded. Female figures suffered emotional setback, but finally they have got their clear self-awareness. The themes that conveyed through Munro's stories are always revealed by contrast from different views. Mainly describes two different characters in the novel's heroine, through their different views. The most enlightening truth the theme expresses is to eliminate the unequal relationship between men and women. Therefore, from the aspects of analysis, it is sure that Alice Munro is a feminist writer.

### **7.2 Feminism Attitude between “Radical” and “Moderate”**

Feminist in different camp of feminism always express their claim in different way. Some of them are radical, but some are moderate. Apparently, Alice Munro belongs to the latter. Standing in a woman's point of view was not only because she was a woman, but because she had a great acknowledgement with women's difficult life experience. Under the pressure of breadwinners, the prospect of women was dim. In feminist language environment, we can find that most of the typical speech they put forward to is related to social as well as men. Men will be seen as the enemy of women and nature because of their despotism and rudeness. Under the big rally, women have to fight male, often in extreme way and radical attitude<sup>[6]</sup>. According to their evaluation, Alice Munro is not a feminist writer in a strict sense, but her stories present many different and typical female figures with plentiful self-awareness. They paid much care about their body, willing and happiness, showed an clear understanding about the relationship between men and women, set an example or guide about life attitude for other women. Both she and her heroine are of a strong sense of female consciousness. To some extent, she is a feminist writer. But the difference between she and other feminism writers is

that she is not extreme, not aggressive, she is just using a relatively peaceful narrative to reveal the phenomenon and express their views.

## **8. Alice Munro's Female Consciousness in Her Works**

### **8.1 The Budding Period of Female Consciousness**

The motto "know thyself" is an old saying carved in the wall of the temple of Apollo in ancient Greece. This word has made a deep influence on human thought and cognition in thousands of years. In the 20th century, when women's self-consciousness were in germination, Alice Munro began to express the thought of "know thyself" again in the way of writing. *Boys and Girls*, for example, the story took place in a farm family in Ontario. Story, setting of this story is very similar to Munro's family. The elder sister in the story realized the different place of her father and mother, and then gave the admiration of powerful father's love, especially after the tedious housework with mother in the family, she was even much more yearning for father's power. In relationship with brother at any other ordinary time, she gradually found that the difference between boys and girls, even realized that she cannot resist fate. The elder sister in Alice Munro's novels is the representative of women in the new period, since they are in little girls' growing-up time, showing very little female consciousness in the bud. From her sister's comparison to different gender in her position, it made the hero to complete the definition of gender from "the other" eyes <sup>[6]</sup>.

### **8.2 The Development Period of the Pursuit of Self-Consciousness**

Female consciousness in a work of Alice Monroe after infancy, she began to pursue self-consciousness. It is in the second step in the development of female self-awareness. Compared with the sense before, obviously there is a progress. The boys and girls are also reflected in her works. The elder sister knew clearly about brother's different family status, but they still behaved a sense of strong realization of their value. Awareness of gender is the first step of awakening and the female consciousness is that second step. Although girls' work was boring and dull, they were of great optimistic attitude to life instead of enduring the endless loneliness hopelessly. They wore all kinds of beautiful clothes, did all kinds of interesting and their favorite things. Although the people around them were not friendly, they still insist on the struggle with various hostility and difficulty, and never give up.

### **8.3 The Deepening Period of Self-Fulfillment Consciousness**

Entering the 21st century, Alice Munro is more than 60 years, but she is still trying her best to show the spirit of her female characters in her works. She has published seven short stories. In these works, Alice Munro is no longer just express the exploration and pursuit of female self-consciousness, but paid much attention to their deep self-awareness. Her works always takes the growth process and pursuit of the female as the main axis. Through women's suffering from family and social pressure, they shaped their deeper and special feeling, view and methods to family and society. In her later works, the pursuit of self consciousness is no longer the first bud expression. With the development of the society, for the status of women is no longer just the start of the stage. The realization of women's self consciousness is reflected in various ways, even the subject has been deepened in her later works. From her original works to the following-up works, novels were embodied the details on the description of women's consciousness about self-realization <sup>[6]</sup>.

## **9. Summary**

To sum up, the close nature life path of Alice Munro led to her today's unique writing style. Since she stepped to writing road, she always maintained a positive innovative consciousness and kept the writing subject under developing and changing. Whether they are about "home" or "people", they all have a important inner subject--female consciousness. As a pioneer of the world's literary world, her female consciousness in novels plays a vital role to the development of ecological feminist literary criticism theory in the 21st century.

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