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Literary Analysis

GLORIFICATION OF WOMEN AND FEMINIST EXISTENTIALISM IN ALICE MUNRO

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Abstract

This study presents an overview of the existentialism philosophy to the women's lives in Alice Munro's stories and Munro's feministic attitude reflected in her short stories. Alice Munro has won the heart of all women around the world through her dedication and consistent contribution to establish the women's rights in the contemporary modern society. The paper was mainly based on secondary data from different books and internet sources. However, this article has depicted the application of the existentialistic theory of Jean-Paul Sartre to Munro's characters and shows how her characters are worthy enough to carry on this theory without conflicting feminism.

Keywords: Women, existentialism, glorification, feminism, women's rights

1. Introduction

As a woman, Alice Munro has an accurate probe into the life of women of this era. This Canadian short story writer is living her whole life in Canada. Still, her stories deal with not only the life of Canadian women but it reflects the ordinary lives of all women of this universe extraordinarily. Alice Munro has recently mesmerized the readers with her short stories and unique themes. Many variations found in her writings make us think about the theme and the characters. Her women characters are unique though they are very convenient, and most of them are from the rural areas, but they carry the essence of the true women's spirit and freedom. Alice Munro depicted the characters with such vigor and a touch of softness that they touch our hearts and make us think of women from a new point of view. Here we find that she applied the theory of existentialism so that it is sublime but so vivid.

Women are still lacking behind in respect to the modern era. Though the whole world is watching the rise of women's power, it is true for very few. The ordinary women are always deprived, and Alice Munro tries to give a different hue to such common women where they can demonstrate their power through their typical everyday work. She picks up these characters from everyday life and tries to prove that they are extraordinary in their way with her own experience. This study will go through some of her short stories and try to prove that she drew the characters from her own experience and through them she tries to put the frame on women's powerful existence in terms of extraordinary way. The present study aimed to make the readers realize and comprehend women's presence with a different point of view from Alice Munro's short story. However, the study depicts Alice Munro's existential feminist attitude through her philosophy to live the ordinary life extraordinarily.

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2. Literature Review

Jean-Paul Sartre, the founder of the existentialistic theory, asserts that the crucial defining perception of existentialism is that a person's existence is before their essence. The term "existence precedes essence" became a saying of the existentialist movement. It means that only the individual can explain their identity through their existence. According to Sartre, "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world– and defines himself afterwards".

Literature is the adaptable medium for encouraging women's rights in the 20th century. Alice Munro, as a Nobel laureate, utilizes this medium very beautifully. In her stories, we find the emotional development of girls and women. Munro presents her stories in 'ordinary experiences to appear extraordinary, invested with a kind of magic (Sheldrick, 1997). Another researcher opines that "her gift to us in a variety of female characters portrayed from childhood to old age, whose hidden selves she explores beneath their artificial disguised or misinterpreted social faces….many of her characters belong to a dying defunct" (Rasporich, 1980). Her stories are like this to show the whole life of women and girls with her adorning words. Her stories nicely present man-woman relationships. "Her stories have a 'soul', and the image of their construction is, for her, the domestic image of a house. The gender implications of the opposition of these two ways of describing the genres are obvious" (McCain, 2002). Alice Munro herself says that "I never thought of it is important, but I never thought of myself as being anything but a woman, and there were many good stories about little girls and women. After you got maybe into your teens, it was more about helping the man to achieve his needs and so on, but when I was a young girl, I had no feeling of inferiority at all about being a woman" (Munro, 2013). However, Munro's idea is not about the competition with man, rather she tries to highlight the potentiality of women, and she did it well (Nitu, 2018).

3. Methodology

The study collected materials from critical interpretative essays and research articles on Alice Munro's short stories. Several critical journals and magazines were collected to get information about her short stories. The researcher also goes through several through different literary articles, critical compositions, and websites to find related study materials, to be acknowledged in the related topics, and also collects critical books, existing relevant information to have specialized information on literary works to compose the thesis in a more credible way.

4. Findings

4.1. Exaltation of Women

Alice Munro's works are generally written from a female perspective, reflecting marriage and the maturation of a woman's experience. It can be argued that Alice Munro cares deeply about women, and her works are feminist novels. As a result, Alice Munro feels that a woman should have high self-esteem and be appreciated by men in marriage from a female standpoint. This viewpoint is represented in most of Alice Munro's writings; for example, in the novel "The Progress of Love," the main story is about three generations of women's beliefs on marriage and self-identity at different times. The first generation of women "grandmothers" in marriage are unaware of their true selves; they believe that women are dependent on men and that when men ignore them, they must find ways to reclaim their favour. "My" mother and Aunt Rebel are second-generation women. "My" mother has a strong sense of self; she yearns for men's admiration and desires to be an independent and autonomous personality. However, "my" mother is more patient, and she makes an effort to do things on her own, but there is no meaningful reform in people's fates. Aunt Rebel resembles "my" grandma in that she enjoys dressing up and is keen to attract men's attention through her beauty. The third generation of women, "I," is similar to "mother," but more courageous than "mother." "I" want to control my marriage and have my independent income sources to give myself respect, and "I" want to influence my destiny and the fate of women throughout the world via my efforts in the marriage. It is easy to see in this novel that Alice Munro embraces the "I" attitude, which shows that the writer believes that women should have self-esteem, and that only having self-esteem and a specific income stream can a woman become an independent individual, and that only their desire to

control their destiny can truly let men respect them (Akter, 2021). At the same time, the author believes that in marriage, women should be treated with honor, in the same manner, that men are treated with respect, and that this is the only way to have a decent marriage (Gao, 2017).

4.2. Women's Rights

Alice Munro is a strong advocate of women's rights, and her writings reflect her feminist beliefs in the contemporary era. Munro depicts how Canadian women battle to survive and prove their identities in her short stories. Alice Munro also discussed victimization, gender discrimination, and patriarchal dominance. She believes that a woman's space must be created inside the repressive patriarchal societal structure (Keshk, 2019).

5. Discussion and Analyses

Munro's short story encompasses every aspect of contemporary modern society. While presenting the personalities and story backdrop, the psychological development of characters adds depth to the philosophical viewpoint. Munro's attitude toward writing was distinct from others from the outset of her career. Her writing is mainly concerned with postmodernism, deconstruction, existentialism, feminism, emotions, and the clash between realism and idealism. Alice Munro is a notable feminist short story writer (Akter, 2021).

Munro must be viewed as "a writer on the side of women" (Myszor, 2001). Munro's short stories are feminism and interdisciplinary literary study. We must comprehend the concepts of feminism and literature in this perspective. Feminism is an anti-establishment ideology. It is a concept or movement that promotes women's equality. Literature, on the other hand, reflects life as it is. In other words, literature in the twentieth century is a diverse vehicle for promoting women's rights. Munro, a frank feminist fiction writer, uses the short story genre to depict the tragic realities of women living in the small-town landscape of Ontario, Canada, where she grew up.

Munro's stories are a series of episodic recollections that follow the emotional growth of girls and women. According to Catherine Sheldrick, Munro tells her stories in a different way "ordinary experiences so that they appear extraordinary, invested with a kind of magic" (Sheldrick, 1997). Munro challenges society as a female artist as well as a woman. For Munro, the feminist quest includes "the search for freedom of imagination and expression through the medium of art" (Rasporich, 1980). Munro's external circumstances and inner life appear to have significantly impacted her during her childhood.

While being up in a highly traditional neighborhood, Munro is an outsider in a patriarchal society. She is a real person. Munro adds, "I've always known that I have a distinctive perspective on the world, one that would land me in serious problems and humiliation if it were revealed" (Gibson, 1973).

In Munro's literature, the protagonist is a chronicler of a specific location, southwestern Ontario. Her fiction must be scrutinized from a feminist standpoint. Alice Munro's stories are "well-made." They are the work of journeymen. They deliver Munro's feminist ideas. The situation of women in patriarchal society is the theme of her stories. Munro also highlights the impediments to women's liberty and individuality in her stories. Her stories focus on sexual liberation, working-class economic emancipation, and female liberation from male cultural dominance. It was all about the person, and how they received what they desired and needed, in its most basic form.

Munro focuses on societal and personal differences and the seclusion of a town's outcasts. Characters in Munro's stories progressively learn to rethink their fundamental assumptions. Munro's stories are told in episodic recollections that chart the emotional growth of adolescent and adult female characters. The experiences and events in the stories of Dance of the Happy Shades are "those of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood and the stories deal with problems of communication between generations or between the sexes" (Gadpalli, 1988). The tales of Munro Dance of the Happy Shades raises concerns about women's roles in society, both in the past and now. Munro uses her characters to depict the private lives of individuals, speaking for a collective feminine experience.

6. Conclusion

Munro imagines a way out for females subjected to injustices due to unreasonable ignorance and unfair treatment. She claims that the perfect woman figure does not break up relationships with other women or blindly enter her father's world. Instead, she connects with women, confronts reality, and then participates in self-reflection on her daily life. Munro's women characters are strong enough to deal with the modern world where they can make a stand as a human beings and as a balanced genus that can single-handedly manage everything. Through her writings, Alice Munro contained the idea of feminism and existentialism. Modern-day women are independent, hardworking, and efficient. They are emotional, but Munro thinks they don't misuse their emotions. Her stories are the spectacular picture of womanhood depicting the perfect women's vigor. Through Alice Munro's stories, we come to know the beautiful world of women and their height of ability. All the female characters of Munro's short stories show the extraordinary potency of women through their behavior, activities, and feelings and how they are influencing society.

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