

**RESEARCH PAPER****Exploration of Innovative Characteristics of Alice Munro's art of Short Story Writing with Specific Reference to her Short Story *Dear Life*: Contextual Analysis****¹Muhammad Hassan Khoso* ²Wajid Hussain Khoso and ³Sumia Nourain**

1. Assistant Professor of English Govt. Boys Degree College Matli Sindh, Pakistan
2. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Iqra University Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan
3. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Iqra University Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

Corresponding Author

khosomuhammadhassan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to analyze Alice Munro's short story "Dear Life" using close reading techniques to illustrate her exceptional skill in short story writing. Alice Munro is widely recognized for her mastery in crafting short stories, contributing significantly to contemporary literature. Her collection, "Dear Life," exemplifies her ability to breathe new life into the genre, distinguishing her from her peers. The study employs a close reading technique, meticulously examining the text to identify and analyze the distinctive characteristics of Munro's writing. Specific references from "Dear Life" are used to highlight these novelistic features. The analysis reveals that Munro's writing is marked by a unique narrative style, deep psychological insight, and rich character development. Her ability to weave complex themes into concise narratives sets her apart from other short story writers. Further studies could explore comparative analyses between Munro's works and those of other prominent short story writers to better understand her influence and innovation in the genre. Additionally, investigating the reception of her work across different cultures could provide a broader perspective on her impact.

Keywords: Anti-Mimetic Narrative, Genre-Bending Techniques, Metafiction, Multi-Modality, Postmodern Narrative

Introduction

A short story is a genre of fiction that is shorter in length than a novel (Divya and Oormila, 2023). Edgar Allan Poe illustrates that a short story should be read in a time span of a half-hour or two hours. One should finish reading it in one sitting. Typically, short stories like novels have a beginning, middle, and end. However, unlike novels, short stories have fewer characters and specific settings. Short stories are simple in nature and can easily be read and recalled (Divya and Oormila, 2023). Like other fictional genres such as novels, short stories also follow the specific mechanism of basic fictional elements such as plot, characterization, storytelling style, subject, tone, setting up, and mood (Divya and Oormila, 2023). The short story is one of the latest genres of literature. Cuddon (1999) defines "A piece of fiction shorter than a short novel ranging in words from 500 to 5000". It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It possesses characters and depends up self-contained events and incidents. It contains a plot and other solid components necessary for carrying action forward (Shah & Khoso, 2018).

Alice Munro is one of the highly experimental short story writers as she uses innovative formatting of short story writing techniques. The short story *Dear Life* contains a very simple story of a little girl who narrates her personal experiences of her past life in the first person. She describes events in Ontario. Thus, the short story has a simple telling of events. However, the author has presented them in an innovative style by employing certain experimental techniques that make her different from other contemporary short story

writers. The techniques of regionalism and patriotism, intermixing of fiction and reality, plot and descriptive structure, and psychological realism, etc. have been profoundly employed by Alice Munro with innovation. Her innovative characteristics of short story writing go away from the traditional norms or established principles of contemporary short story writing. It violates the traditional notions of the above characteristics. She is regionalist and patriotic yet her approach is universal. This research paper is an honest attempt to understand in what sense, Alice Munro is innovative and experimental in her short story writing with specific reference to *Dear Life*.

History of Short Story

In Britain from 1832 to 1849, Edgar Allan Poe began to write stories consisting of elements of mystery. Some of his stories blended with elements of mysteries are "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Cask of Amontillado", "The Pit and the Pendulum", and the starting detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (Shah & Khoso, 2018, p.14). Most of the short stories produced in the early 20th century dealt with issues like Industrialization. People migrated to urban areas and thus cities were overpopulated and many social problems arose. Some of the short stories highlighted labor issues and pin-pointed hard problems of the working class. Many short stories were influenced by the aftermaths of two world wars (Shah & Khoso, 2018)

James Joyce was the psychological writer of novels but he also greatly contributed to the field of short fiction. It is generally believed that Joyce's 'Dubliners' is the first short story to be counted in the line of short fiction in the modern period. This short story contains Joyce's psychological principles that he practiced in novels. It is also said that Joyce wrote short stories for money on the advice of Russel, a writer and his friend. His short story, 'sisters', in which he brings out the elements of high modernism is famous. It is full of aesthetic possibilities. It was without any specific consideration of the plot. It is written in open-ended narrative structures without having a plot. We do not find any conventional ending to the story. The theme of the story is based on moral ambivalence. Joyce does not focus on resolving day-to-day puzzles and curies but his main target remains how a man falls and how he is responsible for his downfall (Shah & Khoso, 2018).

Virginia Woolf, a writer of psychological novels also contributed to the genre of short stories all along her career. She was a very technical writer. She had the art of turning her earlier essays into short stories. She carried on an argumentative type of unconventional plot in most of her short stories. The main purpose she exposed in her short fiction was to highlight the relationship between what the mind holds and what experience is gained and the way the writer expresses that experience in such narrative form. She gives priority to her characters, not to the plots. Thus, she practices this exercise in her all-short stories (Shah & Khoso, 2018).

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) was grown up in colonial New Zealand. She was well-known as an author of the modernist movement. She was entitled as one of the best of short writers of the time. Chekov was said to be her influencing writer. She has revolutionized the short story by freeing plots by the expansiveness of the interior conflicting life. She takes up the questions of identity, desire, and uneasiness. Her masterpiece stories are 'At the Bay' and 'Prelude' in which she gives a life account of her childhood in New Zealand. She writes with a nostalgic style. She also wrote against increasing industrialization in her short stories. She delineated the landscape of her territory with subtle psychoanalysis (Shah & Khoso, 2018).

Canadian history of short stories

In Canada, the inception of short stories dates back to the late nineteenth century, gaining significant traction around the 1830s. However, it was during the mid-nineteenth

century that the form experienced widespread popularization through its publication in daily newspapers and magazines. This proliferation of short stories in Canada's literary landscape paved the way for the emergence of notable figures such as Ken Mitchell, Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Eleanor Atwood, and Alice Munro, among others, who have made indelible contributions to the genre (Divya and Oormila, 2023).

Furthermore, the evolution of short fiction in Canada mirrors the country's socio-cultural and historical transformations, offering a rich tapestry of narratives that reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of its inhabitants. From explorations of identity and belonging to examinations of rural life and urbanization, Canadian short stories serve as both a reflection and critique of the nation's evolving ethos. Alice Munro's seminal works, particularly those found within the anthology "*Dear Life*," stand as exemplars of this tradition, offering nuanced portrayals of Canadian life and consciousness. Through her keen observation and masterful storytelling, Munro has solidified her place as one of Canada's foremost literary figures, shaping the landscape of short fiction both within the nation and beyond.

Alice Munro

Alice Munro's distinctive writing style sets her apart from other contemporary Canadian short story writers. Renowned as a territorial author, Munro consistently draws her narrative material from the rural landscapes of Ontario, Canada. This geographic specificity not only lends authenticity to her stories but also underscores her deep connection to the region's cultural and social dynamics. Munro's mastery of the short story form has propelled her to the upper echelons of modern literary achievement, garnering widespread acclaim and recognition.

Indeed, Munro's oeuvre stands as a testament to the enduring power and relevance of the short story genre on the global stage. Her ability to capture the complexities of human experience within the confines of a brief narrative is unparalleled, earning her accolades such as the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 (Divya and Oormila, 2023). This recognition solidifies Munro's status as a literary luminary whose contributions transcend national boundaries and resonate with audiences worldwide.

Scholars and critics alike have often drawn parallels between Munro's work and that of other renowned short-story writers such as William Faulkner, Anton Chekhov, and Kate Chopin (Alshara et al., 2017). This comparison underscores Munro's place within the broader tradition of literary excellence, positioning her alongside titans of the genre whose innovations have left an indelible mark on the literary landscape. Munro's unique blend of psychological insight, narrative depth, and linguistic precision invites readers to explore the complexities of the human condition with an intimacy and profundity that evoke echoes of her esteemed predecessors.

Titles given to her

Alice Munro is a regional Canadian writer. She has received many awards and prizes globally for her contribution to fiction. She is entitled as the "master of the contemporary short story". Like Chekhov, Munro's main focus is on the characters whereas the plot to her remains at the secondary level (Alshara et al., 2017). She is titled as "Canadian Chekhov" (Mandal and Kumar, 2022, p.170). She writes in Chekhovian realism (Keshav and Sharma, 2019). At the ceremony of Nobel Prize, Munro was declared as "master of the contemporary short story" (Chandio et al., 2020, p. 486).

Alice Munro is a prominent Canadian contemporary female short story writer. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. She is an autobiographical writer. Her short stories have been translated into many languages across the world (Alshara et al.,

2017). She produced various collections of short stories but her recent collection is *Dear Life* published in 2013. She, with her personal experiences, inter-mixes reality with fiction in an ordinary language. Her *Dear Life* is full of her description of her native land Ontario. She portrays the real nature of people shaped in fiction. It is her art of presenting old things and values in a new style. Thus, she is rightly called an 'artist-historian'. This study is based on contextual analysis of *Dear Life* to judge how Alice is an artist-writer of short stories.

DEAR LIFE: Short story at a glance

Dear Life, a collection of short stories

Dear Life (2012) is said to be the latest and the last collection of Alice Munro's short stories. It is a collection of fourteen short stories. 'The Eye', 'Night', 'Voices' and *Dear Life*, the four short stories at the end of the collection in a group are named as 'Finale' (Chandio, et al., 2020). The *Dear Life* is one of the last four notable tales of the book (Divya and Oormila, 2023). These all-short stories are autobiographical in nature based on memories of Alice Munro. The settings of these stories take place around Lake Huron of Ontario (Chandio, et al., 2020).

Writing style

Alice Munro, hailed as a virtuoso of fiction, possesses a distinctive writing style characterized by its simplicity and profound insight into ordinary rural life (Mandal and Kumar, 2022). Munro's narrative technique eschews conventional chronology, opting instead for a nonlinear approach that deftly manipulates time to reveal the intricacies of human experience (McGrathm, 2012). By subverting the traditional narrative structure, Munro challenges readers to confront the inherent disorderliness of existence, reflecting her belief that life's events unfold in a manner that defies neat categorization.

Central to Munro's storytelling is the use of first-person narration, which imbues her narratives with an intimate and personal quality (Divya and Oormila, 2023). This narrative choice allows Munro to delve deeply into the inner lives of her characters, tracing their growth and development over a span of five years, culminating in the pivotal threshold of adolescence.

Munro's stories are replete with mysterious paradoxes that invite readers to grapple with the complexities of human nature (Chandio et al., 2020). Through her deft handling of ambiguity and ambiguity, Munro crafts narratives that are at once enigmatic and deeply resonant, leaving readers to ponder the intricacies of her characters' inner lives long after the final page has been turned.

Furthermore, Munro's writing exhibits a remarkable versatility, seamlessly blending moments of subtle humor and irony with more serious thematic concerns (Chandio et al., 2020). This infusion of humor serves to alleviate the somber tones of her narratives, adding depth and complexity to her exploration of the human condition. By skillfully interweaving humor and irony throughout her stories, Munro captivates readers with her keen wit and incisive observations, demonstrating her mastery of the craft of storytelling.

Non-linearity of plot, events

Munro's narrative technique is characterized by a deliberate rejection of linear chronology, as highlighted by Boyd (2014). Instead of adhering to a straightforward temporal progression, Munro employs frequent time shifts throughout her short stories, resulting in a fragmented and non-linear narrative structure. This departure from traditional storytelling conventions is evident in her acclaimed work "*Dear Life*," where the

narrative unfolds through a series of temporal shifts, defying the reader's expectations of a linear progression of events (Alshara et al., 2017).

Central to Munro's narrative approach is the segmentation of the text, wherein narrative events are presented in a manner that eschews conventional ordering. Rather than following a sequential pattern, Munro strategically positions key events to create a sense of ambiguity and complexity, compelling readers to actively engage with the text to discern its underlying meaning.

Nischik (2014, p.13) observes that Munro's focus extends beyond the portrayal of the known or recognizable aspects of her settings. Instead, Munro delves into the enigmatic, the unseen, and the alienated facets of the rural landscapes she so intimately understands. By foregrounding the puzzling and the surprising, Munro invites readers to explore the complexities of human experience within the context of familiar yet often overlooked settings. This emphasis on the unfamiliar and the alienated serves to enrich Munro's narratives, imbuing them with a sense of depth and resonance that transcends the boundaries of conventional storytelling.

Innovative approach

Munro's literary endeavors transcend the conventional boundaries of the short story genre, as noted by Nischik (2014, p.13). Through her daring experimentation, Munro pushes the limits of narrative form, exploring non-linear, expansive, digressive, multi-perspectival, and epiphanic writing styles. By embracing these innovative approaches, Munro challenges readers to reconsider their preconceived notions of storytelling, inviting them to engage with narratives that defy traditional conventions and expectations.

Central to Munro's creative process is her exploration of the relationship between reality and fiction within her texts (Nischik, 2014). Through her meticulous attention to detail and keen understanding of human psychology, Munro crafts narratives that blur the boundaries between fact and imagination, weaving together elements of both to create a rich tapestry of lived experience.

Furthermore, Munro's texts serve as repositories of poetological inquiry, wherein she grapples with fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of literature itself. By incorporating poetological issues into her stories, Munro invites readers to contemplate the inherent complexities of the creative process and the ways in which literature shapes our understanding of the world.

Indeed, Munro's writings reflect a profound understanding of the fragmented and incomplete nature of human experience. Through her fragmented, digressive, and incomplete narratives, Munro seeks to capture the inherent disorderliness of life itself, mirroring the fragmented and unfathomable nature of individual existence (Nischik, 2014). In doing so, Munro confronts readers with the inherent limitations of literary texts in fully encapsulating the complexity of human life, challenging them to embrace the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in the human condition.

Characters and Characterization

Munro's approach to character development is marked by a deliberate withholding of hints or foreshadowing of forthcoming events within her narratives (Chandio et al., 2020). Rather than telegraphing the trajectory of her stories, Munro opts to surprise readers with unexpected twists and turns, keeping them engaged and intrigued until the very end.

This narrative strategy adds a layer of suspense and unpredictability to Munro's storytelling, allowing her characters to evolve organically within the context of their

respective narratives. By eschewing traditional narrative conventions that rely on foreshadowing or explicit cues, Munro creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and tension, compelling readers to actively engage with the text as they navigate the intricacies of her characters' lives.

Furthermore, Munro's decision to withhold hints of upcoming happenings underscores her commitment to crafting narratives that reflect the messiness and unpredictability of real life. By embracing the element of surprise, Munro captures the capricious nature of human existence, inviting readers to confront the uncertainties and ambiguities that define the human condition. In doing so, Munro challenges readers to reassess their assumptions about narrative structure and character development, fostering a deeper appreciation for the complexities of storytelling.

Realistic approach

At the heart of Munro's artistic endeavor lies a steadfast commitment to portraying the realities of Canadian life through the medium of fiction (Mandal and Kumar, 2022). Munro's strength as a writer resides in her meticulous depiction of the every day, rendered with a fearless accuracy that captures the nuances of ordinary existence (Divya and Oormila, 2023). Through her keen observation and unflinching portrayal of life's complexities, Munro invites readers to confront the realities of Canadian society with both empathy and insight, illuminating the human experience in all its richness and diversity.

Psychological realism

Munro's storytelling prowess is often lauded for its clarity and psychological realism (Chandio et al., 2020, p. 486). With a keen eye for detail and a deep understanding of human psychology, Munro crafts narratives that resonate with emotional depth and authenticity. Her ability to delve into the inner workings of her characters' minds, exploring their motivations, fears, and desires, adds a layer of psychological complexity to her stories that resonate with readers on a profound level (Chandio et al., 2020). Through her nuanced portrayal of human experience, Munro invites readers to grapple with the complexities of the human psyche, fostering a deeper understanding of the intricacies of human behavior and emotion.

Themes

The themes that pervade Munro's stories often center around human relationships, explored through various familial and social dynamics. From intimate portrayals of mother-daughter and daughter-father relationships to examinations of sibling dynamics and love relationships, Munro's narratives offer a rich tapestry of human connections (Nischik, 2014). Moreover, Munro addresses gendered issues, professional challenges, aging, and other facets of the human experience from a distinctly female perspective, shedding light on the multifaceted experiences of women in Canadian society. Through her exploration of these themes, Munro invites readers to contemplate the complexities of human relationships and the ways in which they shape our lives and identities.

Autobiography/regionalist

Munro has acknowledged at many caissons that her fiction represents her actual experiences of life, therefore, many of her stories including *Dear Life* to do with her autobiography (Alshara et al., 2017). Munro fictionalizes her life events through the mouth of the narrating protagonist who like Munro seems to have not good relationship with her parents. The content of the story seems to be the confessions of the author who exposes the hidden feelings in the fictional narrative style (Alshara et al., 2017). Alshara et al., (2017)

state that the setting and people in her short story *Dear Life* are of great importance for Munro for that she constitutes her personal experiences in the light of these components.

She gives very minute details of her region with great care with autobiographical touch reflecting the author's familiarity and affection with the places where she grew up (Alshara et al., 2017). Her short stories are autobiographical in nature. She presents her life experiences through a narrative style (Divya and Oormila, 2023).

The scene is her narrative homeland Ontario. She describes the location of her house and the landscape of the entire region. She portrays the scenes of Wing Ham's lower town where she grew up. She mainly makes her tumultuous relationships with her parents the subject of discussion (Divya and Oormila, 2023). Munro has immortalized a particular region and its inhabitants globally. South Western Ontario nowadays is commonly known as "Munro Country" (Nischik, 2014, p.12). Her selection of settings in her stories is not bound to documentary interest. Her aim is to over-arch topics of the human condition in light of the regional depiction of scenes (Nischik, 2014).

Literature Review

Dr. Divya and Oormila Heleena's research paper sheds light on Alice Munro's short stories from the narrative perspective. Their paper focuses on the primary components of narrative approaches such as plot, place, character, and style of the author as presented through her four short stories in the collection of *Dear Life*. These include 'The Eye', 'Night', 'Voice', and *Dear Life*. Their findings demonstrate that the main characters of Munro's four short stories are intelligent and independent women. Her story is straightforward in manner. Settings are various areas of Munro's small town. She allows the first-person narrator to narrate events without offering her commentary. Her short stories are based on realism in which she highlights the issues of the daily lives of women (Divya and Oormila, 2023). However, their paper does not discuss Munro's experimental approach towards these primary components of narrative approaches.

Moayad Ahmad Alshara and his co-authors' study of Alice Munro's short story *Dear Life* is based on their exploring of the autobiographical elements stylistically. They explore stylistic features through Munro's autobiographical short story *Dear Life* textually. Their findings demonstrate that the setting and characters in *Dear Life* function as tools for expressing her actual experiences of her life in her hometown (Alshara et al., 2017). However, their study does not shed light on the abilities of Munro as an experimentalist short-story writer having employed the components of fiction with innovation.

Fozia Chandio and her co-authors' study discusses the stylistic analysis of Alice Munro's short story "The Eye". Their paper discusses stylistic aspects such as themes, characterization, point of view, writing presentation, Gothic elements, poetic, allusions and imagery, etc. Their paper illustrates that Munro's approach to narrating fiction is ambiguous (Chandio et al., 2020).

Material and Methods

This study intends to explore the innovative characteristics of the short story writing of Alice Munro with reference to her short story *Dear Life*. Since this is a textual study, it follows descriptive, innovative, and analytical methods of research (Kulkarni and Kallur, 2021). As the main objective of this paper is to explore the experimentation that Alice Munro has brought in the elements of fiction through her short story writing, the previous research papers, theses, e-Books and conference papers constitute the theoretical bases (Kulkarni and Kallur, 2021) upon which the interpretation and analysis of Munro's short story *Dear Life* is based. Many critics and scholars have traced different elements of the short story writing of Alice Munro. Components of fiction such as plot, characters, setting, subject,

etc. constructed from the review of literature have been taken into consideration while developing the base of this research.

Results and Discussions

Regionalist and patriotic yet universal in approach

Munro's literary works exhibit a regionalist and patriotic sensibility while simultaneously embracing a universal approach to storytelling. Rooted in her deep connection to the Canadian landscape and cultural milieu, Munro's narratives often reflect a keen awareness of regional nuances and identities. Through her meticulous attention to detail and vivid depictions of rural Ontario life, Munro captures the essence of Canadian society with a sense of reverence and pride (Nischik, 2014).

However, despite the specificity of her settings and themes, Munro's narratives transcend mere regionalism, resonating with readers across cultural and geographical boundaries. By delving into universal themes such as love, loss, identity, and the human condition, Munro speaks to the shared experiences and emotions that bind us all as members of the global community. Her stories offer insights into the human psyche and the complexities of interpersonal relationships that are both deeply personal and universally relatable (Mandal and Kumar, 2022).

In this way, Munro's writing achieves a delicate balance between the particularities of her Canadian heritage and the broader, timeless truths of the human experience. While grounded in a specific geographic and cultural context, her narratives possess a universal appeal that transcends borders and speaks to the fundamental aspects of what it means to be human. Munro's ability to bridge the gap between the local and the universal underscores her stature as a truly exceptional literary voice, capable of capturing the essence of both her homeland and the human condition at large (Divya and Oormila, 2023).

Geographically specific yet universal in approach

Alice Munro is a true regionalist and patriotic. Being a regionalist, she gives an account of almost everything in her hometown. Being patriotic she is dedicated to showing feelings and emotions sympathetically towards her own country and hometown. She gives the topographical description of western Ontario, a small town in Canada where she used to live. The critics call her the Canadian Chekov due to her topographical description of her hometown. She presents picturesque images of the countryside with powerful aroma. Alice Munro may not be called as a documentalist purely rather she is said to be the recorder of sounds and smells of mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, forests, games and so on of her home town Ontario. Primary school, high school, bridges, Maitland River, wooden walkway, rickety houses, mill race, westward road, Salada Tea, hurrying water, highland fling, dug well, small hill, golf clubs, golf dinner parties, a farm house, a 5 acres plot, pens and shelters, pasture, patch of silver bush, rivers, manure, sawmill, hotel, churches, patch of evergreen trees, hillside, foundry, mountain etc. are her world that she is acquainted with. The example of the above picturesque images of the countryside can be read clearly from her short story *Dear Life* through the mouth of a little girl narrator who is to be seen recounting her personal experiences at the beginning of the story:

I lived when I was young at the end of a long road, or a road that seemed long to me. Behind me, as I walked home from primary school, and then from high school, was the real town with its activity and its sidewalks and its streetlights for after dark ... After that, the road divided, one part of it going south up a hill and over the river again to become a genuine highway, and other jogging around the old fairgrounds to turn west ...two bridges over the Maitland River: one narrow iron bridge, where cars sometimes go into trouble over which one should pull off and wait for the other, and a wooden walkway which occasionally had a plank

missing, so that you could look right down into the bright, hurrying water. I liked that, but somebody always came and replaced the plank eventually. (Munro, 2012, p.585).

She further describes

I had the help of the elm trees, which hung over the pasture, and the shining river, and the surprise of a spring that came out of the bank above the pasture, providing water for the doomed horses and the cow and also for me, out of a tin mug I brought there. (pp. 597-98).

However, despite being a regionalist and patriotic, Alice Munro's approach is universal. Her disclosing mysterious feelings and emotions of her characters are not merely specific to the people of her region but also fit to every human being in the globe. Whatever themes she embeds in her stories, they deal with issues found throughout the world. However, her treatment of them is different from other contemporary writers. Through her short stories including *Dear Life* Alice Munro talks of universal issues like internal and external conflicts of people, feminine voices, family furnishings and ego of people. She explores diversity of life aspects such as contradictions, alter emotions, ego, anxieties, marriages, friendships, courtships, and so on. She unfolds the utmost emotions including aspirations, complexities, passions, self-delusion, jealousy, guilt, selfishness, superiority, fear etc. that happen in the life of every human being. With the close reading of her works it looks as if she is transforming readers' feelings with ease. Her stories are interwoven with those characters that are infused with embarrassment, shyness and guilt as a driving force, the absolute truth of human nature. She unearths the chaotic desires that human beings encounter in routine life.

Intermixing of fiction and reality

Alice Munro is well-known for intermixing of fiction and reality in her short stories. She fictionalizes the historical facts autobiographically. *Dear Life* is one of her short stories in which she mixes history with autobiographical touch. In this connection, Murphy (2009, p.41) states, "to an extraordinary extent, the raw material of Munro's work comes from her own life, a fact she readily admits." She truly briefs about cultural history and social structure of her hometown using short story, one of the fictional literary genres, as a medium. Though Munro has given autobiographical touch in her works, she does not seem to be orthodox in approach to what Megrath says that "Munro has never been an autobiographical writer in the strictest sense" (qtd.in Alshara et al., 2017, p. 37). Her style of fictionalizing of real places and people is type of a geographic metafiction. Her approach is realistic with honesty and dignity. Atwood says, "Honesty, in Munro's work, is not the best policy: it is not a policy at all, but an essential element, like air" (qtd.in Anurakti, 2015, p.73). Honesty is the landmark illuminating vision or glimpse through which she takes readers beyond what already is known. Alice Munro peeps into very nature of human beings without delineating fictitious description for the sake of story. In *Dear Life*, the most uncomfortable feelings and emotions are dealt with such a comfort and ease that readers never get bore and never feel the work fictitious. She does not let her characters pose false nature in her stories. Settings, original voices, fantasies, feelings and emotions of ordinary domestic life that prevail in her small town are vividly portrayed in *Dear Life*. She pinpoints the environment known to her. The last sentence in *Dear Life* describes how much Alice is honest to describe the most irritating truth in general perception:

"When my mother was dying, she got out of the hospital somehow, at night, and wondered around town until someone who didn't know her at all spotted her and took her in. if this were fiction, as I said, it would be too much, but it is true".

Descriptive skill

Alice Munro, undoubtedly, is a powerful descriptive writer. She employs descriptive skill as a powerful tool for drawing readers' attention towards her short stories. Alice's description is full of sounding words and sounding mystery that extols feelings of readers. It is her style that spells out fragrance for readers. One cannot go off in middle of her stories without giving complete reading. Skagert (2008) writes that Munro is an inspired descriptor. She bridges connections between reality and fiction. She does not lash out something extraordinary but it is her descriptive quality with what she presents ordinary things extraordinarily. Her raw material though looks to be old; her descriptive style gives that material a new and fresh look.

Alice Munro is writer of vivid description for that she writes neatly and to the point without over exaggeration. She uses simple and an ordinary language that a layman can easily understand. She is not as philosophical as most of the psychological writers are. Her *Dear Life* is an illustrative example which is neatly knitted in tone and understanding of human nature with clarity of thought. Unlike traditional story writers she writes in crystalline style without blend of too much literary or stylistic devices like metaphor and similes. She gives hints to the point and allows readers to have a close proximity to the characters. Characters speak in straightforward style without any ambiguous overstatements.

Characterization

Alice Munro picks up ordinary people in ordinary circumstances and narrates them with ordinary tone. In *Dear Life*, characters are chosen from surroundings of her native area situated in Ontario, a town near Lake Huron. Her characters are human beings and are depicted realistically without blend of exaggeration. Her characters arise with strong passions with unexpected objectives. She deals with domestic life and setting of her stories revolving around the characters of a small canvas. Her characters in the story include: young girl with complex feelings and broken relationships with parents, rude mother, angry father, a veteran soldier, a kind grandmother, a mysterious girl and so on. Her characters lead controversial lives which lead to an extraordinary drama of life. She presents ordinary characters in such a way that one puts oneself in the story. Her stories are presented in the Gothic style where downfall of characters is due to their own faults as if it happens in natural life. Her characters are drawn in such a constrained environment that they exhibit moral conflicts as it takes place in the routine life.

Experimentation and innovation of plot

Alice Munro is an experimentalist. Her fashion of writing is contrary to traditionalists. Physical structure of her short stories seems as though she has followed the Victorian conventional women writers but her technical processing of short stories is quite different. She is a psychological writer and has persuaded technique of stream of consciousness but with innovations. She does not run on the line of the psychological writes of 20th century. She deviates from them in the conventional line and comes up with variety that makes her style unique. She has fragmented her short stories but one cannot clearly distinguish where fragments distract from actual thoughts. She does not follow any conventional development of plot. She deviates from the rigid rules of the plot with digressions. She mixes both conventional and unconventional development of the story or plot by unearthing linkage between fiction and reality. It is her innovative contribution in the plot development that sometimes minor part of the story becomes the major part and vice-versa. Though her stories do not have an appropriate beginning and end, there are remarkable traces of traditional exposition and denouement.

Despite digressions, her plot is intelligible. Though she uses stream of consciousness technique where writes become ambiguous and readers do not pick up meaning, she is well understood. She keeps the flow of thoughts intact. Her depiction of characters and narration

is ordinary. She leaves segments of emotions through the beautiful weaving of characters. She portrays ordinary male and female characters, ordinary events and ordinary thoughts. She hardly leaves anything for readers to judge for that she appears to be a textual artist-historian who records and presents minute details of characters and events. She can be rightly called a documentalist, a landscape painter, a metaphysical analyst, and an impressionist.

Alice Munro has experimented in the art of short story writing. She has revitalized the genre of short story writing by amalgamating past against present with one point of view. Her art of deconstruction of conventional fashion can also be exemplified through her short story *Dear Life*. Her beauty lies in the portrayal of ordinary personas in ordinary environment with ordinary language in *Dear Life* without following the traditional principles of the plot. She uses fragmentations and flash back and forward focusing on tentative internal conflict of characters and their lives. Her panoramic environment is led by the epic view of the child who is encountered by the mysterious surroundings. The plot of *Dear Life* is not complex. It is simple but gains popularity for the writer being innovative in style. The plot is not coherent and chained in the traditional manner, but rather moves up with fragmentation. The story is based on a single unreliable narrator who tells some other stories of other characters. The narrator is first person.

The characters of her story *Dear Life* unlike the psychological writers are puppets in the hands of the only narrator with one point of view. She delineates some mysterious characters or leaves mysterious impressions about them. She makes readers find curiously the undisclosed facts or events regarding the characters and their lives. Michael Ravitch (2002) is of the opinion that Alice is not the writer of mysteries apparently but mysterious forces are drawn altogether with proceedings of actions throughout the story. For example, the narrator of the story *Dear Life* presents the dual nature of her father. Her father used to visit a lady, acquainted with the name 'Nora'. The narrator is unknown about the reasons of her father's visits but she only remembers the name of the lady and her father's going there. Moreover, readers also have to remain in mystery and cannot guess. Alice does not give full descriptions of events. She gets actions ahead with secrets by blurring of eyes. Mrs. Netterfield is another mysterious character. The narrator tells how she used to stare at her house and showed interest in visiting to the narrator's house. The rest of the description regarding the character remains mysterious and readers are not made aware of any more about Mrs. Netterfield. Overall, the plot of the story is simple and there is no complexity whatever. This demonstrates her uniqueness.

Psychological realism: Internal and external conflict exposition

Psychological realism is among literary devices that writers often use to expose internal conflicts of characters in any piece of literature. Sigmund Freud is said to be the pioneer of introducing psychological study with innovative terminology. His influence was left over most of the modern writers such as William James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, William Faulkner and so on. They have employed the stream of consciousness technique to tackle the psychological core issues in their writings. Stream of consciousness is the technique with what the writers speak through the mouths of characters in fragmented or disordered speech and time. Characters, events or time are presented in zigzag way or without any sequence. Alice Munro has also employed the technique of stream of consciousness in her short story *Dear Life* as there is no organized sequence of events in the short story. The narrator sometimes describes one event and without concluding it she begins to tell another event and consequently restarts the previous. There is also no time distinguishing in her short stories to what Bloom (2009) says that Munro does not follow time shifts chronologically. She moves between the present, the past and the future. Significantly, these time shifts can best be noted in her short story *Dear Life* when the little-girl narrator tells: "It was a beautiful day in the fall. I had been set out to sleep in my baby carriage on the little patch of new lawn" (Munro, 2012, p. 609).

Alice Munro is an artist of exposing internal and external conflicts. She rarely deals with external structure of the life. Her purpose is not that of dadaism or social critic who acts as reformist rather she artistically filters and refracts social miseries through her personal experiences. According to Ravitch (2002), Alice Munro has power to uncover the most trivial conditions of the inner life. There is juxtaposition of emotional and physical journey as characters move between the city and the countryside. According to Freudian concept of psychological issues, human beings come across several painful experiences throughout their lives from their childhood. Those painful experiences in the past never rot off rather become the part of unconscious side of mind and overcome when they get older. To be more specific, children get dysfunctional attachment with parents due to destructive behavior by receiving ill treatment from them. Alice Munro in her autobiographical work *Dear Life* through the mouth of narrating child unfolds internal deep feelings based on painful experiences by delineating minute details of characters. One of the illustrative examples of the painful experiences that the narrating girl narrates is her unwilling to go to school because she is beaten up there as she tells: "Where bullies had taken away my lunch and threatened to beat me up and nobody had seemed to learn anything in the midst of the uproar".

In *Dear Life*, characters are suffocating figures whose lives become dramatic and face drastic changes in their lives due to the conflicts inside and outside. Each character narrated by the narrator having intuitive tussles, and thus meets the ultimate consequences due to their epic fall. We have the narrator's father who wants to be millionaire and opens the field of animals. He does want to speak with persons lower in rank to him but when his business collapses, he is shown as changed person without any sympathetic tone by the narrator. She tells:

"After the optimism of that season of redecoration, however, our business dried up again, and this time it never came back. My father pelted all the foxes, then the mink, and got what shockingly little money he could for them, then he worked by day pulling down the sheds where that enterprise had been born and had died, before heading off to take the five-o'clock watch in the foundry. He would not come home until around midnight". (p. 603).

The narrator-girl gives accounts of her own hometown. She narrates rise and fall of her family in general and her dysfunctional attachment with her parents in particular. The narrator child has no good relationships with parents because she is psychologically disturbed due to mistreatment being given by her parents. She unfolds their inner mind by showing their rude behaviors. Her father used to beat her on account of her hurting feelings of her mother as she tells:

Later on, I had to stay in the house to help my mother, and I was full of resentment and quarrelsome remarks. "Talking back" it was called. I hurt her feelings, she said, and the outcome was that she would go to the barn to tell on me, to my father. Then he'd have to interrupt his work to give me a beating with his belt. (p. 598).

These harsh treatments make the narrating child psychologically upset and she plans even to run away from the house as she recounts: "Afterward, I'd lie weeping in bed and make plans to run away". She was uncomfortable at home. She begins to be a rebellious against her parents.

Another psychological mishap takes place when she sees dining room and she hates because her father's beatings had taken place there. It is due to their unfair treatment that the narrator does not sympathize with them at their down fall. When her father loses his business and her mother suffers from Parikson's disease, she is not affected in any case on their downfall but rather it looks she feels proud to depict their downfall. These painful experiences remain with her throughout her life. It is also explicit from the description at the end of the story when the narrator is unable to attend funeral ceremony of her mother.

Though the narrator attempts to give her justification of not going there, she has regretted at the same time as she tells:

I did not go home for my mother's last illness or for her funeral. I had two small children and nobody in Vancouver to leave them with. We could barely have afforded the trip, and my husband had a contempt for formal behavior, but why blame it on him? I felt the same. We say of some things that they can't be forgiven, or that we will never forgive ourselves. But we do—we do it all the time. (pp. 624-25).

Conclusion

The discussion of Alice Munro's characteristics of short story writing with special reference to *Dear Life* reveals that she is an innovative and experimentalist writer in every aspect. Regionalism and patriotism are the key aspects around which her stories including *Dear Life* revolve. Her priority is her region. Her territory comprises of agriculture and animal farms. Her narration is contained to her native area of Ontario. Her mechanism of writing revolves around domestic life of Lake Huron. Her landscaping and painting material is hills, rivers, bridges, houses, schools, churches etc. of vicinity of native town.

Though Alice is the rationalist and patriotic, universality of her themes cannot be ignored from her works. For instance, in *Dear Life*, she picks up characters from her hometown and gives voices for whole humanity. She discloses atrocities that an average human being possesses. She does not flatter her personas and does not present them above human nature. In *Dear Life* she attempts to dissect eternal reality by exposing inmost self-world of characters in comparison with temporal reality. The narrator of the story passes from the experience of childhood to the adulthood from the daughterhood to the motherhood. The readers, too, observe the shift of ideas from one experience to another experience. This is one of the artistic qualities of Alice that she with transience drives her readers to universal experience by transfiguring routine life of her characters irrespective of beliefs and values.

Her imaginative power is expanded. Her themes are universal. Her exposition of true human nature is irrespective of any confinements. She unfolds inner conflicts that every human being faces on the face of earth. Her essence of writing is beyond Ontario. She incorporates insight of uncomfortable feelings and emotions of persons comfortably. It transports perception of readers from the beginning to the end of the short stories. Alice takes readers along with her whenever she wants. Her vision is to transcend readers momentarily by revealing the beating of hearts of characters.

The plots of her stories do not follow rigid rules of the traditionalist. She employs the stream of consciousness technique without following the traditions of the psychological writers. She does not leave any judgmental impressions for readers but rather blurs her narration with mystery and universality. Her characters experience both emotional and physical journey enabling readers transcend their feelings from realism to super-realism. Though in outlook she is to be presumed as plain writer, mysterious elements make her style different from many others.

Recommendations

With the ultimate findings that this paper receives it can be concluded that Munro's mastery of short story combines all those fine techniques that are required to make a story appreciable and valuable. Her techniques of writing vary time to time in the story. To break the monotony of a serious subject a subtle implementation of humor is observed. In fact, her craft of humor and irony is easily spotted. Munro's typical element of southern Ontario gothic is also analyzed through the text. Use of references and allusions is also found with certain meaningful purpose. Brilliant use of imagery determines real like impression of

scenes e.g. locals and situations. Fine use of euphemism, with almost an ambiguous point, is noticed. In fact, Ambiguity and vagueness prevails to such an extent that the text sounds complex utterance as a result it inwardly invites heavy interpretation. The text is a nontransparent inexplicable text that leaves you to ponder over what you read and explore inside why it was written. Above all Munro's art of well-crafted sentences is phenomenal. She can be considered an expert in art of exploring the thoughts of women with her wonderful dreamlike or to say more exactly almost dreamlike fragmentary utterance of a memoir-like-story which more looks material from diary that reveals that she has a deep insight into human relationships.

References

- Alshara, M.A, Panhwar, A.H, & Hasan, M.A. (2017). Analyzing Style and Autobiographical Element in Alice Munro's "Dear Life". *European Scientific Journal*, 13(13), 34-42.
- Anurakti. (2015). "Look, You're Not Alone—This Happens To everybody", Acceptance of Unabashed Truths in Alice Munro's Stories. *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, 3(3), 73-80.
- Bloom, H. (2009). *Alice Munro: Bloom's Modern Critical Views*. Infobase Publishing.
- Boyd, M. (2014). Alice Munro: An Appreciation. *Bridgewater Review*, 33(1), 12-14
- Chandio, F., Ahmed, Z., & Sajid, A. (2020). Theme of Isolation and Child versus Adult Feelings: Stylistic Analysis of Alice Munro's Short Story "The Eye". *Review of Education, Administration and Law*, 3(3), 485-494
- Cuddon, J. A. (1999). *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. (4th ed.). Penguin Group.
- Divya,C.,& Oormila,H.(2023). Alice Munro's select short stories: A narrative techniques analysis. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 11(2), 295-298.
- Keshav,G.P., & Sharma,A.(2019). Narrative exuberance and powerless female depicted in Alice Munro's "Runaway". *International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE)*, 7(5), 252-257.
- Kulkarni, D.S., & Kallur, N.H.(2021). Simple story, complicated plot: a postmodernist reading of Mark Z. Danielewski's Only Revolutions. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 9(4), 250-253.
- Mandal, A. K., & Kumar, A. (2022). Socio-Cultural reality of Canadian Women in the fiction of Alice Munro. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 7(6), 170-172
- Mcgrathm, C. (2012). *The Sense of an Ending: 'Dear Life,' Stories by Alice Munro*. The New York Times.
- Munro, A. (2012). *Dear Life: Stories*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Murphy, G. (2009). *The art of Alice Munro: Memory, identity, and the aesthetic of connection*. In Alice Munro (pp. 41-56).
- Nischik, R. (2014). *Alice Munro: Understanding, Adapting, and Teaching*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Ravitch, M. (2002). Alice Munro. *The Yale Review*, 90(4), 160-170.
- Shah, S.R.A., & Khoso, M. H. (2018). An analytical study of development of short story in modern period of English literature. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 6(1), 13-17.
- Skagert, U. (2008). *Possibility-Space and Its Imaginative Variations in Alice Munro's Short Stories*. Stockholm University.