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## POSTMODERNISTIC FEATURES IN ALICE MUNRO'S SHORTSTORY: RUNWAY.

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Alice Munro [b. 1931] one of the Canada's most critically acclaimed contemporary writers started writing short-stories in the 1950 but became successful only in the 1960 with the publication of "Dance in the Happy Shades" in 1968. She is a gifted short-story writer whose strength primarily lies in her ability to present the texture of everyday life with both compassion and unyielding precision. Her descriptive style of narrative and faithful representation of reality or verisimilitude like event, place, rural communities made many critics place her fictions within the tradition of literary realism. The cursory glance over her works justifies this sort of classification.

Canadian short-stories are mostly based on one particular region portraying individual character with essence of human value, love, sex, beautifying through painted picture of landscape as it seems in Munro's short-stories. Most of her short-stories have the rural or semi-rural landscape of Ontario, South West Canada, as the background. Characters, generally, deal with personal conflicts, love, relationship and various kinds of family issues. Munro admits her adherence to characters and places she delineated in her short-stories. In a comment on this aspect of her story, she admits, "I always have to know my characters in a lot of depth- What clothes they'd choose, what they were like at school, etc..... And I know what happened before and what will happen after the part of their lives I'm dealing with". [ "A conversation" ] In an another interview she firmly stands on her earlier comment on the mimetic aspect of her stories: " I'm very, very excited by what you might call the surface of life.....It seems to me very important to be able to get the exact tone and texture of how things are". Munro's narrative approach to the selective representation of reality ,sometimes, at the cost of well-made plot, careful description of places and characters establishes her as a realist. Bharti Mukherjee reviewing Munro's collection entitled " Friend of my youth"[1990] in ' New York Times' remarks that Munro having many strategies of realist fiction, she in many ways, has " ,deepened the channels of realism". Though, because of the realistic features abundantly found in Munro's short-stories and her experimental approach made some critics feel reluctant to put her works under the category of postmodernist fiction, but quite a few critics outlined several elements indicating that Munro's writing is typical of postmodern paradox in that she uses a realist style, she describes the life of some ordinary characters without idealization, but she subverts the story's realism by adding gothic elements and by making impossible to arrive at a final truth. While reading her story one is indeed left with the feeling of suspense because her stories tend to end abruptly and

mysteries remain unresolved. Her experimentation with short-story within postmodernist framework can be defended in the following lines :

“The questioning of literature’s claim to truth, the blurring of reality and the play of textual pleasure not only result in the disruption of representation but also that of the postmodern. In stead of the postmodernism manifests itself in phenomena that defy classification, such as the abject or sublime, and in forms that resists definition: such as the short-story. To write when there are no strict rules of representation means that the writer works blind ‘in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done’ [ Lyotard 1984;81 ]. In other words the postmodern is always in a state of becoming so that its common characteristics are partiality, incompleteness and obscurity.[March- Russell-2009;230].

The theme or the subject of Munro’s story is closely associated with people. Her narrative technique of ‘invention’ and ‘reinvention’ and her unique ability to produce the familiar substance of her own small story and every next presentation is as fresh and unique as the first- a vision of multiplicity.....as she herself says in an interview, “ The complexity of thing--- the things within things--- just seems to be endless.”.... “I mean nothing is easy, nothing is simple”. [The New Yorker 2001 ] .

Munro’s story “Runway” is indeed a story about Carla, a young lady who originally ran away from her parents to marry Clark, a young horse trainer / boarder. However, again she did attempt to runaway from Clark with the help of their neighbor Sylvia. But she could not go through with it and returned home to Clark. But as the main, lateral line story progresses, a back story about a pet- goat Flora also takes shape. The story of Flora is apparently and innocuously presented at first but is presented throughout and is paramount in the pivotal scene and ending of “Runway”.

Here, the story“ Runway”, is to be looked at through the lens of postmodern art.“ Runway” the story, set in a small town, a countryside town ; a community with characters dealing with illness, death, and financial and domestic strife confirms to have realistic depiction of events. However, as the story progresses, Munro succeeds in subverting the linear representational models by making a constructive, semiotic and inferential process all the way through. In this story three different runways are delineated, first one is about Carla who wants to be free from her bad relationship; the second is about the neighbor Sylvia and third is about pet goat. The first important instance is the Carla’s decision to leave Clark, her husband. Carla goes to Sylvia’s home to tell her how miserable condition has been inflicted upon her. But it is noticeable that the violence inflicted on Carla, whether physical or psychological, is never directly mentioned in the story. At Sylvia’s persuasion Carla decides to leave Clark, her husband and rides on bus for Toronto, the nearby town, but suddenly she reflects on her decision to leave and then regrets leaving. She steps down the bus and returns to Clark. Then Clark goes to Sylvia’s doorstep with the clothes that Carla had borrowed from her , warns her not to interfere in their lives .At this moment , Flora’s, the pet goat, sudden reappearance shocked both of them. On his return to home he tells all to Carla that he had talked with Sylvia but he tells nothing about Flora. THE Following week, Carla gets a letter from Sylvia that informs her about Flora’s reappearance ; Carla destroys the letter. Nothing about Flora is stated in the story ahead. However, Munro succeeds in creating the situation which exposes the state of mental agony Carla suffers and her feelings regarding the thought of what Clark might have done to Flora. Her feelings of apprehensive danger that swims in air gets reflection in this line: “I was as if she had a murderous needle somewhere in her lungs, and by breathing carefully she could avoid feeling it.” With the passing of time Carla thinks of going into the wood to search out “ the Skull, with shreds of bloodied skin still clinging to it...”But she gives up the idea. The question---what happened to Flora? , remains unanswered and unresolved till the end of the story. What did Clark do with Flora? Did he use Flora as scapegoat? What does it mean? Does it mean that in near future the same treatment would be given to Carla? The readers are left to speculate on it.

Sylvia's closeness to and her emotional attachment with Carla is never made clear in the story. Though, it is explained that this emotional attachment between the both grows while Carla has been working for Sylvia during the period of her husband's illness. But it is never made clear in the narrative that this emotional attachment is whether repressed maternal love or homoerotic, even though it is provocatively suggested. Here, too, it is left on reader to decide the nature and implication of Sylvia's feelings.

Clark's psychological harsh of his wife is suggested through sarcastic remark, for ex- when Carla inquires of Flora, the pet goat, at her [Flora] first 'runway', Clark's sarcastic reply, not directly rather symbolically, that "Flora might have just gone off to find herself a billey", is obviously a psychological abuse to Carla over her first decision of 'runway' from her parental home. Even in the end of story, the reader is left in suspense with a question regarding the truth of Flora. The only source the story presents is Carla's observation over the woods nearby, as mentioned in the text: "circling and dropping to earth, disappearing over the woods, [and] coming back to rest in the familiar bare tree", leaves reader in a position to draw the conclusion.

In this story, Munro appears to be employing the postmodern features by replacing representational model of reality with the admixture of fiction with reality; fragmentation of authority; non-linear thinking and ambiguity. The story shows her experiment with language and diversified thought of characters, too. The narrative succeeds in blurring the lines of fact and fiction, truth and illusion leaving readers in the state of suspense and uncertainty.

#### References:

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