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An Eco-critical analysis of Alice Munro's Walker Brothers Cowboy

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Abstract:
The Eco-feminism is evident in most of the short stories of Alice Munro. The short story reflects the author's preoccupation with the natural environment and ecological issues in Canada, as perceived from the perspective of a young child. Simultaneously, it implies discreet references to the numerous implicit facets of male supremacy over females. The narratives exhibit a significant influence from Munro's personal experiences and the marginalized status of women across various age groups in societal contexts. A young female narrator, who possessed a fondness for nature is presented in the story.

Key words: Ecology, Feminism, Canada, Landscape, Society, Youth

Introduction:

Alice Munro's short story, *Walker Brothers Cowboy* depicts the childhood memories of the author from an ecological view point. The narrative is presented from the perspective of a youthful female protagonist who provides an account of her observations of the surrounding environment.The juvenile individual who possessed a fondness for nature experienced a considerable amount of contentment upon receiving this information. The individual expressed apprehension regarding the potential for the Lake to revert to its previous state as a desolate plain, a phenomenon observed in other natural environments.

Background- The author and the landscape:

Alice Munro's debut short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, won the inaugural Governor General's Award in 1968. This honour launched Munro's literary career and creative journey.

Dance of the Happy Shades (1968) is a collection of short tales with mostly female protagonists. These stories' female characters fluctuate between spectator and participant. The narrator alternates between participation and observation. In certain stories, one-character plays both the participant and the spectator.

First and third-person narratives are unrelated. The stories show women's lifelong struggles. The anthology, set in rural settings, honors Munro's father, Robert Laidlaw. Munro was a housewife and writer when writing these stories. She managed her home well and loved her girls. She wrote tales during her free time despite her home duties. Munro calls this book's tales "practice stories". The anthology's works were written across two decades. Each short story collection by Munro improved.

Dance of the Happy Shades comprises a collection of fifteen short stories, including "Walker Brothers Cowboy", "The Shining Houses", "Images", "Thanks for the Ride", "The Office", "An Ounce of Cure", "The Time of Death", "Day of the Butterfly", "Boys and Girls", "Postcard", "Red Dress — 1946", "Sunday Afternoon", "A Trip to the Coast", "The Peace of Utrecht", and "Dance of the Happy Shades". Subsequently, the musical compositions "Postcard", "Walker Brothers Cowboy", and "Images" were incorporated.

The narratives exhibit a significant influence from Munro's personal experiences. The themes exhibited in different narratives are diverse, with certain ones emphasizing "gothic realism" while others accentuate the marginalized status of women across various age groups in societal contexts. The narratives frequently culminate in epiphanic moments that leave a sense of unresolved mystery, while lacking any complexity.

Autobiographical elements:

The initial narrative in the collection, entitled "Walker Brothers Cowboy," delineates the gender-based duties undertaken by the narrator's parents, and bears a striking resemblance to the responsibilities assumed by Munro's own parents. Her literary works are typically inspired by factual events, and the personas she develops are derived from individuals whom she had personal connections with. The short story reflects the author's preoccupation with the natural environment and ecological issues in Canada, as perceived from the perspective of a young child. Simultaneously, it implies discreet references to the numerous implicit facets of male supremacy over females.

Eco-feministic analysis:

The narrative is presented from the perspective of a youthful female protagonist who provides an account of her observations of the surrounding environment. The setting of the narrative is a fictitious, diminutive municipality in Canada known as Tupperton, situated in proximity to Lake Huron. The initial manifestation of the impact of warfare on Tupperton is observed in the opening sequence of the narrative. The impact of the war on the town's liveliness is evident in the children's evening activities, which are described as "ragged" and "dissolving" (Dance 2) in the literary work.

The origin of the narrative can be traced back to the period of the Great Depression, which was characterized by a significant economic downturn in Canada.The opening chapter of "Walker Brothers Cowboy" commences with the protagonist and her father venturing outdoors to verify the existence of the Lake by asking, "if the Lake's still there?". The inquiry

posed by the young child underscores the significant reality that warfare poses a threat not only to human beings, but also to the natural environment. (Give quots from story)
The effects of war have caused contamination and destruction. On the contrary, Munro has extolled the regenerative capacities of nature alongside its subjugation. (Quote)

The paternal figure elucidates to his male offspring the origins of the expansive body of water known as Lake Huron. The area currently occupied by the lake was previously characterized as a vast expanse of level terrain. The juvenile individual who possessed a fondness for nature experienced a considerable amount of contentment upon receiving this information. The individual expressed apprehension regarding the potential for the Lake to revert to its previous state as a desolate plain, a phenomenon observed in other natural environments.

The child sought refuge in the natural surroundings and expressed a wish for the preservation of the Lake in its current state, complete with the secure swimming floats, breakwater, and Tupperton's illuminations (Dance 3). Subsequently, the narrator expounded upon her father's means of financial sustenance. Prior to commencing his career as a fox farmer, he was employed as an itinerant sales representative. During his tenure in the fox fur industry, he engaged in the breeding of silver foxes and subsequently marketed their pelts to manufacturers of capes, coats, and muffs (Dance 4). Following the aftermath of the war, the national economy was adversely impacted, resulting in a decline in fox fur sales and subsequent business hardship.

Historically, fox fur clothing was considered a luxury item primarily worn by affluent individuals for the purpose of enhancing their appearance. The expensive clothing was indicative of an individual's affluence, as it was not within everyone's financial means. It gained popularity within the fashion industry as well. Typically, individuals who donned such garments were affluent women belonging to the upper echelons of society. These women were compelled by the patriarchal system to dress lavishly, as their clothing served as a symbol of their spouse's societal status and financial prosperity. Regarding the unwed female, the donning of fox fur was considered a fashionable garment that enhanced her appeal to the opposite sex.

The fur industry is known to subject animals to a significant amount of cruelty. The epidermis of the animals is forcibly removed and their remains are subsequently disposed of. The animals are confined within cramped and poorly lit enclosures commonly referred to as pens, with limited room for movement. The confined areas were scarcely spacious enough to accommodate the creature in an upright position, let alone provide sufficient room for rest. The fur industry experienced a period of prosperity in the 1930s and earlier, followed by a significant decline in the 1960s. In contemporary times, there has been a resurgence in the popularity of fur clothing. The utilitarian functions of the object have undergone a transformation over time, as it is now commonly employed by individuals for the purpose of

maintaining personal warmth. Although the function of clothing may have evolved throughout history, it is imperative to acknowledge the inhumane treatment of animals involved in its manufacturing process.

The prescribed attire for women was determined by patriarchal norms. Individuals were limited to expressing their sexual identity solely through the acquisition of high-priced apparel. The concept of female individuality was notably absent during the 1960s, with prevailing definitions being predominantly male-centric in nature. The animals are subjected to inhumane treatment in the production of fur clothing, while women are compelled to cater to the male gaze and fulfill their desires. Both nature and women are at risk.

The protagonist's maternal figure fell prey to the affectations of high society, exemplified by her sartorial and behavioral choices that emulated the refined comportment of a "lady". This disdain for rural life stemmed from its perceived deficiency in upholding the standards of upper-class decorum. The narrator's attire would be styled in accordance with the dress codes established for refined women belonging to the upper echelons of society. The individual in question displayed a strong determination to maintain certain social conventions, to the extent that she refrained from engaging in conversation with other female residents of the locality who, being of a more modest disposition, did not adhere to her particular standards of sartorial elegance and instead opted for attire that lacked a defined waistline.

Conclusion

The work reflects the author's preoccupation with the preservation of the natural environment and the welfare of untamed fauna. The statement also serves as a critical analysis of the societal stratification that governed interpersonal interactions during the initial stages of industrial development. Munro exhibited a sense of pride in her physical appearance, characterized by her flowing hair and modest attire. The individual in question had declined to embrace fashion as a means of reinforcing patriarchal norms that impose oppressive social expectations on women. Furthermore, the analysis of ecofeminism in her literary works could be approached from various theoretical perspectives.

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