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DEAR LIFE - EXPLORATION AND EXAMINATION OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT:

In 'Dear Life' Munro uses her now signature ability to offer us the essence of a life in often brief but spacious and timeless seeming stories to investigate the lives of many residents of the countryside and towns around Lake Hunro. Munro illuminates the moment when a person's existence is shaped—the time when a dream, or sex, or a new way of looking at things, or perhaps just fate—takes them off their usual route and into a new way of being. This collection of departures and beginnings, accidents, hazards, and virtual and real homecomings, infused with Munro's clarity of vision and exceptional ability for storytelling, provides a vivid and lasting portrayal of how bizarre, hazardous, and remarkable 'dear life' may be.

KEY WORDS: Complexities, Life, Relationships, Emotions.

INTRODUCTION:

'Dear Life' contains fourteen short stories written by Alice Munro. Many of these stories are set in small Canadian towns that are similar to the ones where Munro has spent much of her life, and many of them reflect on incidents from Munro's childhood or youth decades later. Some of the stories in her new book, 'Dear Life,' begin with post-World War II cultural and economic transformations and end at any point in the future. The past continues reappearing in these stories; there is no escaping it or its sense of consequences. The past, on the other hand, does not only catch up with Munro's characters; it also lurks quietly behind the scenes of the present. In "To Reach Japan," the collection's first item, Greta and her tiny daughter Katy are on their way to Toronto to house sit for a friend for a month while Greta's husband and Katy's father start a new career elsewhere. Greta, who is always quiet and reserved, gets too intoxicated with a younger man she meets on the train and loses track of Katy in a frenzy of longing during the journey. Of course, Greta considers everything that could have happened before reconnecting mother and daughter. The second story in the collection, "Amundsen," is written by Munro and is the second in the book. The narrative centres on a woman who has a brief affair with a man who decides not to marry her at the last minute. In "Leaving Maverley," Morgan, a half-curmudge only small town movie theatre projectionist, and his adoring wife take in a wayward girl named Leah, who soon falls in love with the minister's son. As is typically the case in Munro's writings, time is not kind to any of the three, doling out calamity in droves. Leah's marriage breaks down, and she loses custody of her kids. On the other hand, Morgan's loss of his wife is the most agonising. Two sisters live in a ramshackle trailer in a water-filled quarry after their mother left their strong, dull father for a younger, wilder person in "Gravel." When one sister drowns in the gravel pit as the other watches, there

is no mistake who is to blame. Is their mother a little too boisterous? Two stoned boyfriends on the verge of rescuing her? What about the narrator, who watched as her sister drowned? "Haven" is a story about a young girl who is forced to live with her aunt and uncle while her parents serve as missionaries in Africa. Her aunt loves her uncle, but he is aloof and self-contained. His compulsive hatred for his separated sister, who is musically inclined, eventually leads to realizations. The story "Pride" is about an awkward bond between an affluent girl and a disabled kid who grew up in the same town. The story "Carrie" depicts the story of an affluent eccentric who falls in love with a married architect. A returning soldier jumps from the back of a passenger train as it approaches his long-awaited reunion with his finance in the story "Train." “In Sight of the Lake” tells the story of an older woman who is concerned about her mental faculties deteriorating. Is her thinking deteriorating or strengthening her ability to be creative? Is it Nancy who is nuts, or is it the rest of the world? While researching undervalued female Canadian authors, the story's narrator, "Dolly," is cut off from the outer world. Her comfortable but unfulfilling life has been turned upside down by the appearance of her husband's old flame. "The Eye" is the first of four directly autobiographical works from Munro's childhood that wraps up the anthology. Munro's mother is Munro's polar opposite: Sadie is an independent, guitar-playing, dance-hall-going young woman. Munro's intimate discovery of Sadie's eye, which no one else seems, is a treasured moment. The subject of "Night" is comparable to "Train" in that it conceals or obscures a forbidden thought. The link between the tumor Munro had removed during her appendectomy and the thoughts that raced through her mind the summer after the procedure is astounding. Munro and her mother attended a dance at a neighbor's house, only to leave shortly afterward due to Munro's mother's emotions for one of the women present. On his way out, Munro spots a girl crying on the stairway, who is soothed by whispers from warriors returning to fight in World War II. Munro, who is now in her fifties, has been troubled by voices since she was a youngster. "Dear Life" is the collection's final and title story. The story "Dear Life" is about her coming of age. Her father started a business growing foxes and minks for pelts. After the business failed, her father went to work as a forger. Her mother was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease while she was in her forties. The family was unaware that it was a severe and terminal disease. Munro concludes her story “Dear Life” with her psalm of life:

> 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 would barely have afforded the trip, and my husband had a contempt for formal behavior, but why blames it on him? I felt the same. We say of some things that they cannot be forgiven, or that we will never forgive ourselves. But we do it all the time.
>
> (DL 319)

Eighty-one year old Munro writes on her last four concluding stories:

> The final four works in this book are not quite stories. They form a separate unit one that is autobiographical in feeling though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact. I believe they are the first and last--and the closet--things I have to say about my own life.
>
> (Book reporter, New York November 19, 2012)

The majority of her works are set in her home nation of Canada, often in little communities in the countryside or in the cities of Toronto and Vancouver. The majority of the stories are set in rural areas of Canada, and many of them take place in the past. Only a few are current. Munro grew up at a younger age than we do now, thus this is likely the case. The character sketches in the stories are particularly noteworthy. There are powerful but complex women whose lives are frequently altered or pushed in completely new ways because of spur-of-the-moment decisions or unexpected encounters. The "Bad guy" type seems to attract many males. They are generally the ones that bear the

repercussions. In addition, there are stories about younger girls in the anthology. Her distinctive characters make the collection stand out. Themes from her previous collections, such as death, love, grief, remorse, humiliation, lust, and loneliness, are revisited in her most recent collection. Despite the fact that many recurring topics are handled, Dear Life is as fresh and illuminating as, if not more than, any of her prior collections.

The narrative of "Dear Life" is another autobiographical account of Munro's boyhood home and environs. It is about Munro's memories of the space she and her family used to live in when she was a child. Munro's house was surrounded by a physical environment, which included roads, scenery, neighbours, childhood friends, and incidents related with them. She also discusses their domestic connection, the emotional space she shared with her parents, and her progressive separation from the home.

Indeed, Munro's work has a strong autobiographical element, as evidenced by her obvious geographic origins and gender-specific accentuation of her subject, or, as Munro herself put it:

> “personal” roots and dimensions of her work.
> (MUNRO in STRUTHERS 1981, 17)

It could be argued that Munro writes in response to her own life experiences, focusing on processing her childhood and adolescence at the start of her career, then career and partnership experiences, and finally the ageing process—stories Munro's not only get longer, but her protagonists age as well—until, eventually, Munro aspires to be a story writer.

> I’ve done what I wanted to do, and that makes me feel fairly content.
> (MCGRATH 2013, 3)

Munro's work can thus be seen as a long, discontinuous, and wide-ranging narration parallel to her own experiences—not it is for nothing that the last story in her eponymous last collection, "Dear Life," contains a moving reminiscence of her mother, and that a highly complex, incomplete mother-daughter relationship is a major theme in many of Munro's stories. According to her, the emotional conclusion of the story "Dear Life" is not only the last in this book, but it may also be the final chord of her writing career.

Munro revealed that she had received treatment for cancer and a heart problem during a Toronto concert in October 2009. She used the theme of cancer in her writings to depict the stages of deterioration in a person's life. When asked about her declining writing abilities and discontinuing writing short tales in an interview with Deborah Treisman for The New Yorker's "On 'Dear Life': An Interview with Alice Munro," she says: "I do stop—for some bizarre notion of being 'more normal,' taking things easy." Then there's a nagging thought.” Munro had challenges and setbacks throughout her writing career. Munro's stories mirror the dualities of her life: one is the everyday domestic life of a daughter, wife, and mother, performing her responsibilities, and the other is the life of a writer, allowing her imagination to fly. Munro discusses her method of clinging to "the two women," one of whom is a mother and wife, and the other a writer. “The two choices of my life, which were marriage and children or the black life of the artist,” writes Thomas E. Tausky in his piece “Alice Munro: A Biocritical Essay,” about the issues she experienced in her personal life. She discusses women's divided attention, balancing the obligations of her family and children, and her desire to be a writer. In many of her interviews, Munro discusses her conflicted feelings about marriage and motherhood, as well as her desire to write, which led her to flee her obligations as a daughter, wife, and mother.

The narrator of the story "Gravel" recalls the location of their residence. The first sentence depicts the terrible features of the environment and the incidents that it leads to:

> At that time, we were living beside a gravel pit. Not a large one, hollowed out by monster machinery, just a minor pit.
>
> (DL 91)

Her mother's landmark was the house and the gravel pit. When explaining the location of her home to others, she would say:

> We live by the old gravel pit out the service-station road,' she'd tell people, and laugh, because she was so happy to have shed everything connected with the house, the street—the husband— with the life she'd had before.
>
> (DL 91)

Her mother was no longer able to deal with the house or her husband, so she moved in with Neal. The narrator, now a small girl, has relocated to a new home with her mother and stepfather, Neal. Caro, the narrator's older sister, recalls the old house where they used to dwell. The narrator is too young to recall the old house specifically, yet it is somewhere in her mind.

> Sometimes I thought I did remember, but out of contrariness or fear of getting things wrong I pretended not to.
>
> (DL 92)

The narrator recalls their mother leaving all of the family's valuables in the house as a symbol of her connection with their father. She desired to live a life free of domestic constraints. She considered the house's environment suffocating and desired to escape it by relocating with Neal to a new home.

> But she said also that she had felt alive. Maybe for the first time in her life, truly alive.
>
> (DL 94)

She believed she was giving herself the opportunity to start a new life, free of the pressures of domestic life. The narrator recalls their former residence now that they have moved to this new one. The narrator is conflicted about the emotions associated with the prior home. In his consideration of space, Bachelard emphasises the significance of one's childhood home.

> He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams. It is no longer in its positive aspects that the house is really 'lived,' nor is it only in the passing hour that we recognize its benefits. An entire past comes to dwell in a new house. The old saying: 'We bring our lares with us' has many variations.
>
> (DL 5)

Bachelard remarks that the old house has memories and feelings, that the experiences one has had there are a part of one's soul and life, and that it is difficult to let go of those early memories. Although the narrator in Munro's narrative did not miss the old house, the memories of it were constantly resurfacing in her mind.

> Sometimes I wondered about our other house. I didn't exactly miss it or want to live there again—I just wondered where it had gone.
>
> (DL 96)

It is difficult to separate oneself from one's old house since it represents the space where one has lived and grown up; the old house's dwelling includes memories and situations related with it. The old house is imprinted on the mind and comes to mind whenever the past is remembered. The narrator recalls an incident that occurred in her previous residence. Caro tucked their dog Blitzee into her coat and drove her back to their old residence, which was only a few blocks away from their father's. Caro's ability to find her way back to her former house astounded everyone.

> There was great surprise that she had got there, found her way home like a dog in the story.
>
> (DL 96)

Caro was caught later for doing this mischief. In this context, Bachelard refers to an individual's inclination to one's old house:

> The successive houses in which we have lived have no doubt made our gestures commonplace. But we are very surprised, when we return to the old house, after an odyssey of many years, to find that the most delicate gestures, the earliest gestures suddenly come alive, are still faultless.
>
> (DL 15)

Caro in the story is deeply attached and clings to the past house and finds ways to return to it. At this time, the gravel pit was getting filled with water because of the melting of the snow. Caro asked their mother whether she could go and play in the pit, as it seemed like a lake:

> It was a little lake, still and dazzling under the clear sky.
>
> (DL 100)

Their mother, on the other hand, refused permission since she did not know how deep the pit was and thought it would be harmful to play in it. The narrator recalls an occurrence involving the gravel pit; at first, it was a sign of their location, but it eventually became a source of calamity for the family, and it became engraved in the thoughts of the family members for years. The narrator recalls how Blitzee, the pet dog, would go to the gravel pit and stare at it. Caro suddenly informed her sister, the narrator, that she had devised a scheme in which the latter was to inform their mother that Blitzee had leapt into the gravel pit and Caro had leapt after her to save her. In her later years, the narrator recalls Caro drowning in the gravel pit's water. The narrator's prior recollections were triggered by Caro's drowning. The narrator is astounded to observe how the place has changed through time, and how the houses and neighbourhoods have evolved. She talks about how many years have passed since Caro drowned and how their neighbourhood has changed.

One dreams of episodes from one's childhood; in this case, the narrator is plagued by the memory of her drowning sister Caro, which she identifies with the space of their childhood home and recalls in adulthood. According to Bachelard, he must demonstrate that the house has one of the greatest capacities of integration for mankind's thoughts, memories, and dreams. Dreaming is the unifying principle in this integration. Past, present, and future dynamisms all contribute to the house's unique dynamisms, which frequently clash, at times opposing, and at others inspiring one another. Bachelard addresses the effect that a person's living space has on them. It allows a person to fantasize and daydream about his or her future, according to him. It aids in the creation of illusions that provide a safe haven from the stresses of regular life. Helen Hoy in her article "Dull, Simple, Amazing and Unfathomable': Paradox and Double Vision in Alice Munro's Story" states:

> In fact, the matter-of-fact union of incompatible tendencies is Munro's means of bringing life, precision, and complexity to her depiction of emotions generally.
>
> (Hoy 103)

Munro's complex stories, according to Hoy, portray true-to-life experiences and universally experienced feelings of individuals. Anna Shapiro describes Munro's art of narrating her life experiences while also distancing herself while portraying them in her stories in her article "Quasi-Memoir from a Superlative Writer." Perhaps Alice Munro's overtly autobiographical 'I'—less animating, more akin to any number of intelligent and talented but not superlative writers—reflects a balance she's achieved through writing superlative story," she writes. Munro recalls his childhood home and the activities that took place there. This area of the house represents a safe haven for one's imagination and dreams.

CONCLUSION: -

Alice Munro presents numerous deep levels of love, hate, acceptance, and fury, as well as disdain for oneself and others, in her stories. Her characters engage in various activities because of their interactions and relationships with other people. They are likewise on a journey with a goal in mind. Some voyages are physically undertaken by train or on foot, while others are undertaken mentally. They form associations and bonds with strangers on their journeys, which have an impact on their future endeavours. Exploration and examination of one character's relationship with another allow an individual to enter new realms of existence and reality.

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