

An eco-feminist Interpretation of Alice Monroe's Short Story "Dear Life"

Yudan Xu

Guangxi University of Science and Technology, Guangxi, China

Abstract: The inequality of social status between men and women has always been one of the social problems warmly discussed in novels. Alice Munro is a contemporary Canadian woman Author, awarded the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature, is known for describing women's lives, inspiring them, and guiding them; William Faulkner is an American, the representative writer of the Southern Renaissance, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949, represented women in the American South through a series of female characters, the sympathy of tragic fate led the trend of female consciousness in America at that time. This paper discusses the female consciousness in Alice Monroe's novel and analyzes the awakening of female consciousness.

Keywords: Alice Monroe, Female consciousness, Feminism.

1. Introduction

Alice Monroe (Alice Munro) is a famous female writer in contemporary Canadian literature, and her short stories also enjoy a high reputation in the contemporary international literary world. In 2013, Monroe beat Haruki Murakami and Atwood to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. She devoted her life to the creation of short stories, focusing on women's issues from the identity and perspective of female writers, such as female identity or the relationship between women and ecology. The novel *Gravel*, from the fourth of Monroe's 2014 collection of short stories, *Dear Life*, gives readers a stunning reading experience with its unique narrative techniques and concise words. Many of the works in *The Dear Life* have left a deep impression on the readers, such as "The Final Song" and "Drift to Japan". "Munro's excellent narrative skills and structural design of the story give the short stories deep and rich connotations. In fact, in just a few pages, you can even feel the complex emotions of reading a novel." (Charlie May, *The Meaning of Short Stories: Alice Monroe & It; Passion & gt;*). Alice Munro's works based on their own personal experience and saw and heard, no grand historical narrative, instead of the background of daily life in remote areas of Canada, with all kinds of details about ordinary women in family life and struggle; draw the outline of elegas if women exist around us [1]. In a small ordinary thing, she will be the female heart of the ups and downs of the psychological activities described lifelike. In the seemingly unchanging remote rural life of Canada like stagnant water, these ordinary women are not willing to continue to escape numb, or rise up against the shackles of tradition, break all kinds of invisible chains, and bravely pursue independence and freedom. These vivid female images are the charm of Alice Monroe's works, and their fate makes readers and one of the reasons why she is favored by the judges of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

2. The Development Process of Ecological Feminism

The concept of ecological feminism (Eco-feminism) originated in the 1970s and was a combination of feminism and ecoism proposed by E. (Erancis d'Eaubonne) [2]. In the

continuous improvement of self-development and progress, the core of ecological feminist theory has developed from the emphasis on the correspondence between women and natural experience to the analysis of the relationship between women and nature, and slowly stepped onto the historical stage of literary criticism, and began to form in people's analytical vision. Ecological feminism is characterized by pluralism: on the one hand, it is a branch of feminism, so it is committed to the deconstruction of patriarchal centrism; on the other hand, it inherits the essence of ecofeminism, namely to liberate life, oppose the destruction of science and technology to nature, and pursue the complete thought. Eco-feminism also rewritten the concept of "anthropocentrism" (anthropocentrism), believing that its essence comes from "male centrism" (androcentrism), which means that human oppression of nature essentially stems from the oppression of nature in patriarchal society. Ecological feminism calls for a reconstruction of human society from a feminist perspective. In eco-feminist literature, the works tell the story centered on women, women are ecological and ecology is feminine.

Ecological feminism believes that nature has many similarities with women. For example, at the physiological level, the ecological cycle of nature is often compared to the production process of women, and even the theory that the earth mother gives birth to their children is also related to women. Therefore, nature has close ties with women. Monroe's works often show the fate of women and nature by expressing the bond between women and nature, so as to give dual attention to both nature and women.

3. Overview of Alice Monroe's short Story Collection, *Dear Life*

Dear Live Dear Life is a collection of short stories by Alice Monroe, published in 2012. A total of fourteen articles is a collection of short stories written by Alice Monroe in the late World War II, living in a remote Canadian town as the stage and featuring a woman. The book is divided into two parts, where the first ten are short stories and the last four are mainly the author's personal memoirs. Top ten short stories independent of each other, on the plot and characters, but all in the remote town in Ontario, Canada, with all kinds of female image as the leading role, describes them in trivial

daily depression of life struggle, after four articles mainly by the author personal experience, actual description, the author reflects the octogenarian memory of former life, also from the side reflects the influence of the author's personal experience on its literary creation. "Dear Life" won the Canadian Cui Lin Literature Prize in 2013, the highest-ranking literary award in Ontario, Canada, aiming to encourage and promote the development of native Canadian literature. In the same year, Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the 13th female writer in the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature, and also the first Canadian writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Alice Munro specializes in describing married life and sexual relationships, and often incorporates her own personal experiences in her characters and storylines. In the collection of short stories, *Dear Life*, she gives a calm look at the women who are oppressed by marriage and family life in the monotonous small-town life. For example, in *The Drift to Japan*, the poetess Greta escapes her breathless marriage because her husband did not understand her artistic pursuits and always suppressed her poetic creation. The novel is hardly one not to think of Alice Munro's own experience. Alice Munro's first marriage ended in failure, also because her first husband was busy running a bookstore, allowing Alice Munro to support her family affairs alone, ignoring her spiritual needs and squeezing her room for literary creation. In the end, Alice Munro left her first husband, exactly to Greta's decision.

The Gravel, the fourth novel in *Dear Life*, mainly tells the story of a middle-aged mother of two children who escapes her former life, divorced her ex-husband, and then starts a new life with her new boyfriend. The story is narrated in the first-person perspective, and the narrator, as the mother's second child, is only five years old. Shortly after her nine-year-old sister Carlo moved with her dog Briz to Neil (the mother's new boyfriend), tragedy happened: Carlo and Briz drowned in the water, bringing shock and remorse to the young "I", so that they did not emerge from the shadow of the tragedy many years later. This paper explores the perspective of ecological feminist criticism in the gravel women and the ecological relationship between nature, men, the self, explore their struggle and get rid of the dilemma of patriarchal center approach, and reveal the ideal of ecological feminism.

4. Struggle to Get Out, Find the Way in

4.1. Men and nature: an ecological destination

Ecological feminism believes that nature has many similarities with women. For example, at the physiological level, the ecological cycle of nature is often compared to the production process of women, and even the theory that the earth mother gives birth to their children is also related to women. Therefore, nature has close ties with women. Munro's works often show the fate of women and nature by expressing the bond between women and nature, so as to give dual attention to both nature and women. Women are natural friends, and nature is the destination of women. The first natural image in the novel is the pet dog Briz. At the beginning of the novel, the mother and two children first took Briz to the trailer. Puppies clearly prefer spacious lawns and tall houses to the crowded, narrow streets in the town. It is worth noting that the title of puppy Briz in *Gravel* has been used she instead of it, which shows that they regard it as the family in their hearts. Every time Carlo came back from

school, Bliz always waited for her by the roadside; every time he went to the roadside mailbox, Bliz followed his master closely. When Neil didn't want to have a dog, Caro told him, "I'm not going to disappear. I'll always take care of her. "Visible out of the dog as a symbol of nature and female harmony, even Monroe will be the fate of Caro and the dog Briz closely together, Briz in the relationship with Caro has gone beyond their own biological attributes. Monroe's description of female relations with animals is mostly about non-anthropocentrism, and gives women a unique humanistic care. The novel shows that all life in the world is equal, including those species that look lower than humans. Dogs are the most emotional species of all domestic animals, and Monroe's description of dogs highlights the friendly relationship between people and dogs, and emphasizes the innate symbiotic relationship between women and animals represented by Carlo.

Another natural image also often runs through the full text- sand and gravel. As the title of the novel, "gravel" is like the beacon of plot development, always pushing the plot forward step by step [3]. Here, "gravel" refers to a deserted gravel pit near the home, which has been abandoned because it is too shallow to build a house. The novel's description of the gravel pit is also to convey the emotional tone of the next plot. For example, the novel describes that "the snow miraculously shrinks, the trees are still bare and without leaves" and "under the clear sky, the lake is calm and sparkling". Although it seems to be just the gravel pit, every step of the change indicates the next plot development. The melting of snow and ice in the gravel pit in late winter has turned into a gravel lake, which describes its "calm and sparkling lake", but behind the calm of the lake foresees the tragedy that soon happened here.

Ecological feminist critics often use metaphorical relationships to view the relationship between women and nature [4]. Munro is also good at applying this metaphorical relationship in his works, and using its concepts to emphasize the closeness of the connection between the two. Therefore, by describing the enthusiasm of women for nature, the work also shows that nature is the destination of human beings, but also the destination of women.

4.2. The helpless situation attached to men

"Dear life" the main social background is the remote areas of Canada late world war ii, the women here even have their own work and recipient before marriage, most after marriage will give up work as a housewife, they do not have independent economic status, have to attach to men and life, this is the root of the tragic ending. "Amenson" in the young female teacher Vivian was married by the doctor Alister, the whole process Vivian did not have any doubt and resistance, selfish and ruthless Allister afraid of the marriage affect him, even asked her to leave the train originally life and work of the city, away from their own life circle. As a typical representative of women in that era, Vivian was attached to men for a long time, had no self-spirit in ideology, passively accepted the unreasonable demands of men, and even imagined that Allister could change his mind at the train station. In the short story of *Leaving Mavery*, Alice Munro portrays several people living in isolated towns,

Due to a variety of reasons attached to male female characters, long bed English teacher, originally Isabel is a cheerful and lively in the local middle school professor of English language and literature teacher, loved by students,

sick, she had to helplessly left the teaching position, recuperate at home, she not only economically depends on her husband, but also have to rely on her husband in life daily life, but also because can't give birth to a child for her husband and very remorse. Apart from Isabel, there was the girl, Leah, and whose mother were completely attached to Leah's father, without any personal freedom, and without her father's permission. Father did not even allow Leah to see the movies. Aunt Dawn in "Shelter" always looks at her husband's face. Everything in the family has to get the permission of her husband, and even the selfish husband does not want to have children because she had children that distract her care and care."Colly" in the rich woman Colly was unmarried because she was disabled, but she did not have the courage to live alone, so she committed to a married man, even in knowing that the man cheated his money, still rely on him, did not tell the truth. These women, who are attached to the men, live helplessly in the invisible wall, slowly lose themselves, and live in the pain day after day in [5].

5. Analysis

5.1. The helpless situation attached to men

"Dear life" the main social background is the remote areas of Canada late world war ii, the women here even have their own work and recipient before marriage, most after marriage will give up work as a housewife, they do not have independent economic status, have to attach to men and life, this is the root of the tragic ending."Amenson" in the young female teacher Vivian was married by the doctor Alister, the whole process Vivian did not have any doubt and resistance, selfish and ruthless Allister afraid of the marriage affect him, even asked her to leave the train originally life and work of the city, away from their own life circle. As a typical representative of women in that era, Vivian was attached to men for a long time, had no self-spirit in ideology, passively accepted the unreasonable demands of men, and even imagined that Allister could change his mind at the train station. In the short story of Leaving Mavery, Alice Munro portrays several people living in isolated towns,

Due to a variety of reasons attached to male female characters, long bed English teacher, originally Isabel is a cheerful and lively in the local middle school professor of English language and literature teacher, loved by students, sick, she had to helplessly left the teaching position, recuperate at home, she not only economically depends on her husband, but also have to rely on her husband in life daily life, but also because can't give birth to a child for her husband and very remorse. Apart from Isabel, there was the girl, Leah, and whose mother were completely attached to Leah's father, without any personal freedom, and without her father's permission. Father did not even allow Leah to see the movies. Aunt Dawn in "Shelter" always looks at her husband's face. Everything in the family has to get the permission of her husband, and even the selfish husband does not want to have children because she had children that distract her care and care."Colly" in the rich woman Colly was unmarried because she was disabled, but she did not have the courage to live alone, so she committed to a married man, even in knowing that the man cheated his money, still rely on him, did not tell the truth. These women, who are attached to the men, live helplessly in the invisible wall, slowly lose themselves, and live in the pain day after day in.

5.2. Germination of female independent consciousness

Dear Life takes the small town life as the main stage, and performs the joys and sorrows of ordinary people. In this vivid scene of life, the female characters with distinct personalities gradually sprout their own sense of independence. In Drift to Japan, Greta gradually realizes after getting married and having children that in addition to her housewife and mother, another important identity is a poetess. The identity of a poetess was highly valued and cherished by Greta, and was not accepted by the society at that time,

This reflects the germination of Greta's independent consciousness. Aunt Dawn in "Shelter" had everything around her husband, but she did not get her respect [6]. She even cooked new dishes for her husband at dinner, but attracted her husband scolded. Even when Aunt Dawn invited her neighbor and her husband's sister to the house, he made no secret of his dislike of the guests and made no affection for her. Finally, at her husband's funeral, Aunt Dawn realized that she could not care about her husband's emotions and realized that she was an individual. The independent girl in "Eyes" doesn't care about the town people pointing at her, and people talk about her without a boyfriend but go to dance alone, she said: "Go alone, go alone, and go for yourself. Although she lives in a traditional closed town, her heart has a sense of independence. In a closed remote town in Canada where unmarried girls stay at home, Sady seems to be a different color. She also hosts programs and performs songs on the town's radio stations, which seemingly unconventional local behavior highlights the germination of women's sense of independence. This budding of a sense of female independence reflects Alice Monroe's own experience. As living in the fifties and sixties of the remote Canadian town girl, Alice Monroe only 20 years of college, and her first husband married, in Canada at the time, girls generally no longer work and study, after marriage, become a full-time wife, while Alice Monroe is still writing, continue his writing career, pursue their independence in spirit and literary creation.

Female consciousness refers to the conscious consciousness of the status, role and value of women in the objective world [7]. It is the internal motivation to stimulate women to pursue independence and autonomy, and give full play to initiative and creativity. Specifically speaking, female consciousness means that women can consciously realize and fulfill their historical missions, social responsibilities and life obligations, and clearly know their own characteristics, participate in social life in a unique way, and affirm and realize their social values and life needs. Female consciousness unifies "person" and "woman", reflecting the pursuit of value including gender and surpassing sex. In a patriarchal society, political, economic and religious things can only be done by men, while women, imprisoned in the family, have no place to display their talents except to be a "good wife and good mother". We call this orientation of women a "female role". Female roles exist before female consciousness, and before women establish their female consciousness, they habitually appear as the female social role given to her by the society. Female role is cultivated by social education and social customs, which is the restriction and disrespect of female consciousness, which can only emerge from these restrictions. Before the feminist movement, people did not see men rule over women as clearly as they are

today, nor did they realize that this rule was accepted and recognized by the whole society, and men and women voluntarily accepted the order. Since women are raised in such circumstances, they "learn much less than men in caring for themselves, their wishes, purposes and needs". In the long history of patriarchal human civilization, the development of female self-consciousness was in a chaotic state for a long time [8]. For a woman to accept to the men, "They must think and act as they do, or they will treat you like a monster, and loneliness will be your fate."

5.2.1. Household image: a woman herself is a house

In the process of interpretation of Alice Monroe's novel, it is not hard to find the description of the family environment is very fixed, mainly reflected in the edge of the quiet town, or at the end of the road is a surface calm and peaceful, the actual undercurrent of small family, there is a busy mother in the home and seemingly silent but great power father, the relationship between parents is not close at the same time, plus a stamp character "I". Munro's description of the family environment is usually in a seemingly complete and peaceful position, which some researchers call the family environment.

For the "food edge family". We mean the complete family can see between family members, family members can appear in common time, but the so-called key family is that we can only see the indifference and alienation between family members, no affection show, just calm self sustaining and restraint, but also in different periods mixed with certain gunpowder. The basic bond to maintain family members in a feeding family is not traditional love and responsibility, but an instinct for survival and inheritance, just a family gathered together for diet. Monroe's description of household women as " the house

The angel ", who is busy in the" unfathomable cave "and imprisoned in the family and" house ", is a female cultivation history term described from the perspective of feminism.

5.2.2. Independent woman image: different if you were a man

Alice Monroe also experienced job hunting and worked between work and children, so she became an independent woman in her novels as a reflection of her work period. They include a wide range of women, such as traditional European girls, female doctors in higher education, and successful women in the workplace. They are the representative of masculine women, is the representative of women with a very high level of knowledge, but also represent the basic characteristics of women, independent, aloof and aloof. Monroe's independent female images usually have a fixed occupation, including: writer, nurses, presenters, and so on [9]. Munro has a deep choice of career types, including nurses who can face the vulnerability of life every day, a host who suffers but performs perfectly, a columnist who is alone in a big city, and a professional manager who is more capable than men. They are displaced alone in the busy era, and will inevitably encounter some resistance in a society with prevailing traditional ideas, and eventually their essential independence will gradually become isolated. From Monroe's works, it is not difficult to see whether the female intellectuals can do ideological emancipation work through their own efforts, opinions, because they also have many problems and contradictions. For example, in daily life, they usually face the public as a savior, thinking that their thoughts can be above ordinary people, but they have no ability to change those women who are bound by traditional consciousness.

5.2.3. Women on the edge: We are each other's demons

The description of women on the edge of society in his work may be Monroe's portrayal of his despair on the edge of life. A woman's life goes through three doors, that is, the relationship between parents and herself, her husband and her, and the relationship between children and herself. If a woman leaves her parents, husband, children and herself, what will be the true meaning of existence? In Monroe's writing, women often wander between their qualified selves and their true selves. Whether they accept the responsibility of society or put all their eggs to follow themselves, and constantly explore the true identity of women. At the same time, these women will also have a certain psychological gap and confusion in the face of the great social unrest, and these psychological changes are shown one by one through Monroe's description. In "escape" Kara encouraged by female professor to break through the bondage of society for their own but was forced to halfway back: "office" in the "I" also under the influence of Virginia Woolf, want to have their own a room, but found in the actual implementation process to realize the idea.

The mother-daughter relationship has always been a very important part of Monroe's mind, and the generation developed from the mother-daughter relationship has always brought different degrees of trouble to Monroe's female characters. Monroe in a very limited space for us to describe a very typical female family history, grandma messed in the mother control the control of the self, for the final tragedy, at the same time, it will impose the tragedy in the third generation, but due to the lack of father education management, the girl may has a strong idea to change their own fate. At the same time as the modern consumption concept of the traditional society, times in constantly changing, make the overall structure of the family has changed dramatically, self-become the main body of action is constantly amplified, in the contact collapse at the same time the individual is thrown out of history and family tradition. The description of the female generations in the work is Monroe's revelation of the hidden female pains [10].

Through its unique narrative techniques and concise words, the short story Dear Life shows readers the survival struggle of women in a family in a male power society and their ultimate destiny. Munro gives the novel a shock to a seemingly calm narrative. From the perspective of eco-feminism, readers can more clearly understand the efforts of eco-feminists to deconstruct masculine centrism from the ecological relations between women and nature, women and men, and women and self-spirit. Of course, as a new theory that is still progressing, ecological feminism indeed needs to be developed. For example, some scholars believe that ecological feminism praises femininity freely and does not have certain objectivity. However, it is undeniable that ecological feminism, as a new method of literary criticism, indeed provides a new method and a new way for the study of texts and the establishment of correct women's values, making people more focus on the relationship between women and ecology, and make necessary contributions to the diversified development of feminism.

6. Conclusion

Understanding dilemmas is getting out of them. Alice Monroe in her novel presents a series of women's dilemmas, but the purpose is not just to blame the patriarchal society and make women complain about themselves, but to let women

learn from it and find a better way out for themselves. Therefore, the author believes that if women want to get out of the dilemma, they should first be psychologically independent. According to Beauvoir, many women are both mentally and physically independent. In *The Dear Life*, women are also not mentally and physically independent. In Monroe's other novels, for example, the women in "Escape" are influenced by traditional culture, always dependent on men, instinctively seeing themselves as "others", passive and vulnerable. They have lost their sense and confidence, just like Carla. However, aware of the problem, Carla did not try to solve the problem, but ignored the problem, 'the old son day by day. She resisted the temptation to do that ". Until the end of the story, Carla did not pursue the independence and self she sought at the beginning of the story. Of course, Carla, like others, may eventually find an opportunity to seek the truth and free herself through self-awareness and self-sufficiency.

The interpretation of Alice Monroe's works shows that the description of different female images is the thinking on the establishment of the new female concept brought by Monroe. Since ancient, with the change of times, the overall image of women has been people through different ways to shape, misunderstanding, is in the problem of women should use their own methods to respond to the society, society, family and responsibility, reveal the true value of self. Alice Monroe is committed to guiding women to create a happier life, so in her later novels, it mainly expresses women's sense of self-actualization. Women's self-pursuit consciousness can only make women have the idea of insisting on the pursuit, while women's self-realization consciousness can help women realize their own pursuit, which is a kind of deep cognition and the sublimation of thought. This change of thought is closely related to the change of social environment.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by Social Science Project No. 189305: A Study of Alice Monroe's Works from the Perspective of feminist and Scientific Research of Guangxi University of Science and Technology.

References

- [1] Simone Debovoir. secondary [M]. Zheng KZheng, translated. falling-rising tone Hai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2011.
- [2] Fiona Tolan.To Leave and To Return: Frustrated Departures and Female Quest in Afice Munro's Runaway [J]. *Contemporary Women' s Writing*, 2010, 4(3).
- [3] Alice Monroe. flee [M]. Li Wenjun, the translation. Beijing: Beijing October Literature and Art Publishing House, 2009.
- [4] Li Yan. Escape: The Self-redemption of Western feminism [J]. *Journal of Lanzhou University of Education*, 2014 (1): 5-6.
- [5] Lu Ning, Zhang Hongyan. Escape or not escape, the woman's dilemma: on the door The survival literature theme in Luo's Escape [J]. *Journal of Hubei Second Normal University*, 2016, 33 (7): 17-20.
- [6] Judith Butler. Gender trouble: feminism and the body part of the subversion [M]. Song Sufeng, in translation. Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 2009:8.
- [7] The Canadian sex studies of Alice Monroe's short stories [D]. Zhou Yi. Shanghai International Studies University, 2013.
- [8] The undercurrent world under the peaceful life: Monroe & It; escape & gt; female psychoanalysis [D]. He Kexin. East China Normal University, 2015.
- [9] Feminist interpretation of Dear Life [D]. Zhao Youyi Yan. Hebei Normal University, 2014.
- [10] A thematic study of Alice Monroe [D]. In the bright moon. Harbin Institute of Technology, 2014.