

Nature and Human Kinship in Alice Munro's "In Sight of the Lake"

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Abstract

Nature is a source of human life. There cannot be any life without nature. Further, both nature and humans are inter-reliant. Beauty inspires literature and nature is one such beautiful entity which has always acted as muse, subject matter, and theme of several literary texts. There are many writers who write about nature, and one among them is the great fiction writer, Alice Ann Munro. She portrays nature through her short stories in simple words, which makes the readers to fall in love with the nature. In the short-story, "In Sight of the Lake," Alice Munro sees the beauty of nature through the eyes of the protagonist, Nancy. The proposed paper titled, "Nature and Human Kinship in Alice Munro's 'In Sight of the Lake'", is an attempt to portray the kinship between nature and human beings.

Keywords: Nature- Human Kinship, Unconsciousness

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Live close to nature and you'll never feel lonely. Don't drive those sparrows out of your veranda; they won't hack into your computer.
-Ruskin Bond

Configuration of both Environment and Literature conjoins an ideal pair, as the former helps the people to live and the latter makes the people lead their life. Nature never fails to astonish human beings, as humans are tantalized towards the beauty of the environment. Nature paves way to the eternal thoughts which gives a substantial energy to the soul of human beings. In the work *The Atharva Veda*, M. Vannucci says:

Nature is to be understood as a friend, revered as a mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it and because of this everything is sanctified, including man and the terrifying aspects of nature itself, such as glaciers, landslides, earthquakes, storms. . . (75)

The Canadian short-story writer and the Nobel prize winner, Alice Ann Munro has a concrete connectivity with small-town life and nature. Through her short stories, one can taste the essence of nature. Most of her fictions are set in her native Huron County in Southwestern Ontario. Her stories probe human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Munro's writing has substantiated her as 'One of the greatest contemporary writers of Fiction' as said by Margaret Atwood

or as Cynthia Ozick put it as "Our Chekhov". As a teenager, Munro started her writing career and she published her first story, 'The Dimensions of a Shadow', in 1950 while studying English and journalism at the University of Western Ontario under a two-year scholarship. She won many awards and some of them are listed here: Governor General's Literary Award (1968, 1978, 1986), Nobel Prize in Literature (2013), Common Wealth writers Prize, Man Booker International Prize (2009), O. Henry Award and so on. Some of her original short-story collections are: *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978).

"In Sight of the Lake" is a short story taken from the short story collection *Dear Life*, written by Alice Munro and it was published in the year 2012. This collection of short stories is considered to be the last short-story of her. Her short stories can be easily understood and are unique in themes. In this short story, "In Sight of the Lake", Munro renders the beauty of nature through the eyes of the protagonist named Nancy. In the first part, she goes to see the doctor. But the doctor is not there. She has a problem with her memory, and she is asked to consult a doctor who lives in a village called Highman. Forgetting things is common in every individual's life. But she was in the last stage of memory loss. As a result of her memory loss, she has started to live in her imaginary world. She does not take her husband with her, because he is busy watching the soccer game on television. So she decides to drive herself to the village with the help of the directions given by the girl who was in the doctor's office, "The evening is beautiful. But when she turns off the highway, driving west, she finds that the sun is just low enough to shine into her face. If she sits up quite straight, however, and lifts her chin, she can get her eyes into shadow." (219)

Nancy is a globetrotter, who loves to travel around by visiting small villages, checking whether she can lead her life there. She has a beautiful kinship with nature because whenever she is attracted towards nature it provokes her aesthetic sense. Now, this village fills all her desires. The village has a:

A decent-sized market, where you could get

fairly fresh vegetables, though they would probably not be from the fields round about, okay coffee. Then a Laundromat, and a pharmacy, which could fill your prescriptions even if they didn't stock the better class of magazines. (219)

The atmosphere and surrounding of the Highman village are felicitous for Nancy. The village looks auspicious and she thinks to spend the rest of her life in this village. After admiring the village, she starts to search for the doctors by foot, parking her car nearby. In small towns, the doctors live in a house where they use working quarters as a part of their houses, "Reddish brown bricks, and sure enough the sign, Medical/ Dental. A parking lot behind the building." (219) These houses look like some buildings which have been built during the early nineteenth century. Here, she is unable to find the doctors, so she continues to walk down the streets.

The houses in the village amaze Nancy with the way they have built. She analyses every house and comes to know that they were built in the nineteenth century. Some were made of wood and some were made of brick. She imagines how the people lived during those centuries, where people would sit on the verandas and have hours of chatting, housewives finishing up their works for the day and waiting for their husbands who come home after finishing their works. The place creates beautiful memories and she is in love with this village. Even a small place with prepossessing things could attract people, and this Highman village is the perfect example of it.

In the second part, Nancy gets inside a garden:

In between the paths, and bursting from the grass, there are flowers. She knows some of them— the dark gold and light yellow daisies for instance, pink and rosy and red-hearted white phlox— but she is no great gardener herself and here there are clumped or trailing displays of all colors that she could not name. Some of them climb trellises, some spread free. Everything artful but nothing stiff. (223)

Even Nancy is unaware of her love for nature. she has secret love and passion towards nature. As Sigmund Freud says in his work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psychic; its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs. (Np)

Freud believes that, unconscious is the real path to the imaginary world which gives immense pleasure to the soul. Though Nancy forgets things, her unconscious mind makes her to be

happy in her imaginary world.

Nancy loves nature, respects nature. Her feet take her to places where nature mesmerizes with its beauty. In the garden, she finds a bench to sit and starts to gaze upon the plants and flowers. A man comes from the garden and finds that he is the owner of the garden, a private garden. At first, he does not speak with her, but when he came and sat on the bench, he started to say about the history of this garden. Nancy finds him more comfortable and they had a good time in the garden. Nature develops good friendship and brings out good things from human beings. He helps her to find the doctor by saying her the directions:

You wouldn't have noticed if you can come in from the highway. But if you keep going out of town towards the lake you pass it. Not more than half a mile out. You go past the gravel pile on the south side of the road and it's just a little farther on, on the other side. I don't know if they have a live-in doctor there or not, but it stands to reason they might have. (227)

In the third part, Nancy reaches the place and she sees the gravel pile and notices the sign which reads Lakeview Rest Home. She is completely taken away by the beauty of the view of the pale blue lake which is along the horizon. The great poet William Wordsworth, in his poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* sings:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (Np)

Likewise, Nancy admires the beauty of the lake and feels the cool breeze around the place. She basks in its serene beauty. She walks through the grass alone as a cloud and finds the lake which reflected the sunset. Reflection of sunset in the lake can be compared to golden daffodils, as sun appeared as a huge daffodil flower in the lake. Near the lake, she finds a place with good rooms, separate compartments, little gardens to relax, a latticed fence. Her eyes start to capture every part of the alluring lake. The way she admires nature can be compared to the way how a mother is proud of her growing child. Every day, Nature surprises her with new things like a child taking new steps in his life to have a better future.

Nancy goes near a house and looks for a bell to press but the door opens by itself. Once she gets inside, the door gets closed on its own. She is fascinated by what she sees inside the house. The house looks more beautiful with silvery tiles, loftiness. She thinks of the patients sliding and slipping for pleasure which makes her to feel light-hearted. Though it is an asylum for the individuals with emotional troubles, she is able to see a silver lining. Nancy finds:

Four doors— one is the large door that lets in the light and any visitors, another is an official and private-looking door behind the desk, not that easy of access, and the other two doors, exactly alike and facing each other, would obviously take you into the long wings, to the corridors and rooms where the inmates are housed. (230)

Nancy gets in one of these rooms and gets locked inside. She is locked for her treatment. However, she able to find a distraction. Through the window, she sees the pots of flowers, cars passing by in the mild evening light. She feels suffocation, "She doesn't know if the panic has taken a long time or a short time. Her heart is pounding but she is nearly safe." (232)

In conclusion, it was all a dream with nature for Nancy because of her love towards nature. She feels transported in a different world when she is amidst nature. After all, she is given a nightie and was asked to leave for dinner. Even though she understands the reality that she is in a home where patients with emotional problems are held, Nancy still dreams about her drive with nature. William Blake in his poem, *Auguries of Innocence* sings:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour. (4)

Likewise, the protagonist Nancy feels and admires the beauty of Nature and her dream with nature gives immense pleasure to her soul. She loses herself in the serenity and beauty of her natural surroundings. Though she has mental illness, the power of her unconscious mind finds a strong bond with nature which makes her lead the rest of her life.

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