



Ain Shams University
Faculty of Education
Department of English

Victimization of Woman in Alice Munro's Fictional World

A Dissertation

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Degree of Ph.D. in Teacher Preparation in literature
(English Language)**

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Abstract

The present study aims at defining the concept of victimization and investigating why it is closely related to woman. It highlights the self, the social and the natural dimensions of woman victimization, and how Alice Munro represent the postmodern feministic suffering and victimization of woman in her long fiction and short stories.

This study explores the connection Munro sets between woman and nature, and how far does it reflect the conception of social eco-feminism. The thematic and technical aspects that Munro utilizes to affect an impressive representation of woman victimization in her works are explored. This study presents the textual interpretations of Munro's works to investigate how the "othering" of women and nature within Western ideology serves as vantage point in Munro's stories. The social ecofeminist perspective with its association with woman victimization and nature's violation, is located within the specifically Canadian literary and cultural context of Munro's fictional world. Finally, it presents a technical analysis of Munro's body of works to indicate how she has developed her own brand of the short story art. It tackles Munro's most important accomplishments on the technical level.

Key Words: Woman Victimization, Woman Empowerment, Alice Ann Munro, Short Story Fiction, Social Ecofeminism, Munroviana, Canadianness, Realism/Magic Realism, Sustainable Development.

Preface

This study explores the concept of "victimization" with the three dimensions of the self, the social and the natural victimization of woman in the fictional works of Alice Ann Munro. Munro's main thematic concern is the complex nature of lives of girls and women in her native town Huron County in Southwestern Ontario in Canada. She focuses on the Canadian woman's inner conflict between independence and domesticity; creativity and obligation. Her short stories display various oppressive kinds of powers upon women including poverty, shame, subtleties of class distinctions, intricacies of women's sexuality, and the complex problems of the female artist.

The study falls into four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one is entitled **The Concept of Woman Victimization: Defined, Debated and Theorized**. The researcher traces definitions of the concept of woman victimization chronologically from different points of view and discusses the four theories of victimization. It is followed by debating the concept of "victim" between two opposing

theoretical trends: Victim Culturalism and Victim Rights Movement. Finally, intersections between feminist studies and victimology are examined, as it produced the prominent trends of thought that studied the woman victimization conception.

Chapter two is entitled **Eco-feminism And Canadian Literary Studies**. This chapter presents the various practical and theoretical elements of ecofeminism. The goal is to describe the social ecofeminist approach, trace its claims, explain its purpose, and how it explores the root causes of woman victimization and suggests solutions. The overall idea is to illuminate the alternative ways social ecofeminists are perceiving the reality of woman victimization as related to environmental degradation. In addition to presenting a critique of social ecofeminism, its cultural perception, and response, the vision and approach which are adopted by this dissertation declared. Included also are discussions about the Western worldview of woman and nature and how it is reflected in the Canadian literary studies that had a great impact upon Alice Munro's oeuvre.

Chapter three is entitled **Representations of Victimization of Woman in Alice Munro's Fiction**. This chapter presents the textual social ecofeminist interpretations of Munro's works to investigate how the "othering" of women and nature within Western ideology serves as vantage point in Munro's stories. The social ecofeminist perspective with its association with woman victimization and nature's violation, is located within the specifically Canadian literary and cultural context of Munro's fictional world.

Chapter four is entitled **Technical Analysis of Munro's Oeuvre**. The aim of this chapter is to present a technical analysis of Munro's body of works, and to indicate how she has developed her own brand of the short story art. It tackles Munro's most important accomplishments on the technical level like the retrospective narrative technique together with time shifting, allusion, analytical characterization, inserting gothic elements, and tricky open endings. In this study, realism, magic-realism, imagism and metafiction are considered primary tracks of Munro's narrative technique.

Chapter One

The Concept of Woman Victimization: Defined, Debated and Theorized

The aim of this study is to explore the representations of the concept of "victimization" with its three dimensions: the self, the social and the natural victimization of woman in Alice Ann Munro's long fiction and short stories. This chapter surveys definitions of the concept of woman victimization chronologically from different points of view and discusses the four theories of victimization. It is followed by debating the concept of "victim" among two opposing streams of thought: Victim Culturalism and Victim Rights Movement. Finally, intersections between feminist studies and victim studies are examined for the sake of highlighting the elaboration of the woman victimization conception.

William G. Doerner and Steven P. lab, in their book *Victimology*, state that the concept of "victimization" has two meanings: "an act that exploits someone by treating him/her in an intentionally unfair way, because of their race, sex, beliefs, etc." and "an adversity resulting from

being made a victim."(14) In discussing research on victimization, Robert Elias distinguishes between objective and subjective methods of studying victims. A subjective method interprets victimization from a moral, religious, emotional, or philosophical orientation and thus is vulnerable to power systems. This method is viewed as less scientific, and more based on descriptive than on accurate examination of the issue (5). Subjective studies of female victims inflamed people's passionate opinions about a victim's blameworthiness, regardless of the lack of supporting evidences. During the 1940s and 1950s, a more objective method of studying female victims emerged, one that employed the methods of social science to examine the dynamics, patterns, prevalence, and distribution of woman victimization.

sociologists and psychologists were in competition to identify and define precisely who a victim is. Discussions about victimization generally have taken place within periods of cultural disasters. Many trends of thought are invested in the victimization debate, exploiting the definition of "victim" to serve their purposes. Those multiple perspectives had directly influenced the public

understanding, even when the positions presented do not have the support of empirical data or any practical application to victim assistance.

Most of research on woman victimization targets women who are harmed by male rapists, batterers, stalkers, or sexual harassers. This social problem of male violence that has been committed against women is typically framed by Susan Miller, who presents two opposing ways of thinking about how woman victimization exists. The first is a "maximalist" ideology that takes the position that suffering is widespread and reaching epidemic proportions, believing that unless people and resources are mobilized, a crisis will ensue. In contrast, the "minimalist" position is more skeptical about claims that victimization is omnipresent. This ideological clash influences the ways according to which female victims' needs are evaluated and featured in commentaries about victim culture and victim empowerment. (23)

Victim Culturalism is a trend of thought which is pioneered by many psychologists and victimologists who are interested in the victim-offender dyad with a

presumption that victims are responsible for causing their own harm. In the 1930s and 1940s, the writings of the Victim Culturalists had an “anti-victim” sentiment which is reflected in their language, theories, and research agendas. The most popular terms of this era were “shared responsibility”, “victim precipitation”, “victim provocation” and “victim vulnerability”. Hans Von Hentig, who was among the first wave of Victim Culturalists, believes that,

a real mutuality frequently can be observed in the connection between the perpetrator and the victim, the killer and the killed, the duper and the dupe. The victim in many instances leads the evildoer into temptation. The predator is, by varying means, prevailed upon to advance against the prey. (303)

By the beginning of 1940s, the term “victim blaming” is coined by Victim Culturalists, which aimed at laying misconceptions among audience, as their basic argument was that female victims should be blamed because they share responsibility of their victimization. They believed that females are fragile, hysterical and exaggerating to gain

either attention or financial support. Female victims were accused of transferring some kind of “learned helplessness” from one generation to another and that mistaken female helplessness became a fashion in human societies. The female “learned helplessness” is considered by Hentig as a fabrication of victimization, as women enjoying being in the victim seat and even benefit from it (314).

The Victim Culturalists’ efforts and the examples they use to promote such stereotypical female images, trivialize victimization of woman and engage public opinion in undisguised victim blaming belief. Those diatribes were often splashy and targeted mass audience, and the messengers rewarded with media appearances on TV and radio talk shows. For instance, feminists who supported the Victim Culturalism arguments, such as Katie Roiphe and Camille Paglia, were popular on the media circuit because they were touted by Victim Culturalists as brave feminists who are honest enough to acknowledge women's shared role in victimization.

One of the earliest books in victimology is Charles Sykes's *A Nation of Victims*. Sykes resurrects the earlier notions of “victim blaming” that were popular among victim culturalists of the 1940s and 1950s, arguing that victims evade personal responsibility with their battle cry, "It's not my fault". He attributes the rise of Victim Culturalism to the increase of social excuse of victims' improper actions and the decline of self-reliance and strength of character. Unlike Victim Culturalists, Sykes was fair enough to state that it is unacceptable to engage in intelligent discussions about victims' contribution to their victimization without acknowledging defects in social, ideological and political systems (92).

Victim Culturalists believed that refusing to critique victims for not taking responsibility of their choices and behaviors allows victims to receive attention, sympathy, money, legal and government protection that is underserved. Sykes agrees saying,

the danger of having a society of resentful, competing, and self-centered individuals who have dressed their private annoyances in the garb of

“victimism” means that the legitimacy of “real” victims and a heartfelt response to them is threatened because of the skepticism that will result from the excesses of “victim politics”. Setting societies free of the victim mindset emphasizes individual-level approaches, such as rebuilding one's character to solve social problems. This personal change would result in stronger moral restraint and a greater emphasis on personal responsibility. (95)

Miller approved the same idea stressing that questions of blame, responsibility, and credibility of victims should be supported by empirical evidences:

while many victim culturalists issued the argument that being a victim should not erase or excuse all responsibility, a full accounting of victimization deserves exploration into the reality of the situation, one that is not based on a distortion of either empirical facts or the victim's gender. (36)

Although Miller's vision is accepted by later researchers, vestiges of blame continued to affect evaluation of victims, particularly female victims of male violence.