

An Office of One's Own: Analysis of the Use of the Female Artist Figure in Alice Munro's Story "The Office"

Demir Alihodžić

University of Tuzla/ Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

While much of Alice Munro's artistic ability may be attributed to natural talent, the simple fact that a good number of her stories contain female artists as main characters convinces me that this matter of a fictional aesthetic warrants scrutiny. In my paper, I argue that these female artists reflect certain issues which are central to Munro's own work and to her life as a woman writer. The women in these stories concern themselves with such practical matters as the need for a woman to have a room of her own and the difficulty of balancing marriage and family with a writing career. Power and narrative authority and the tension between fiction and reality are issues which are examined by Munro's women artists. Interestingly enough, a study of the interviews and essays, in which she denies possessing a fictional aesthetic, reveals that Munro's own thoughts about writing are similar to those voiced by her characters.

I examine Munro's story "The Office," a story containing a female artist as a main character, as well as theoretical works by renowned scholars which deal directly with artistic concerns. The story harkens back to Virginia Woolf's theory that a woman needs money and a room of her own in order to write. Although Munro herself insists that she would feel paralysed if someone set her up in a study, she is extremely particular about the conditions which must exist when she sits down to write. Unfortunately, the office acquired by the main character in "The Office" results in a decrease in her writing output, largely due to the continued invasion of her privacy by the landlord. The fact that this aspiring writer felt the need to seek out an office points to the logistical difficulties which are often associated with being a woman writer.