



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

An Identity Dilemma Present In Alice Munro's *To Reach Japan*

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Abstract

A remarkable depiction of a female Greta's difficult battle between her damaged thoughts and her everyday life can be found in the story *To Reach Japan*. For the stunning portrayal of her inner yearning, identity quest, and desire for a profession was elucidated. Identity crises are common among women in society as they struggle with traditional roles, social expectations, and the need to define themselves. This difficulty may result from their relationships - wife, mother, and daughter - defining them more so than their own identities and goals. A woman's sense of self is shaped by her social roles, cultural standards, and personal experiences; when these factors conflict, it can result in an identity crisis. By examining Greta's condition and achieving her goal with tenacity, this piece aims to demonstrate the primary female character's quest for individuality.

Keywords: Identity crisis, aspiration, longing, domestic responsibilities

Alice Munro was a prominent Canadian literary figure who was born in Ontario, in the country's southwest, on July 10, 1931. Her ability to write short stories made her known as "the master of the contemporary short-story." She received Noble Prize for Literature in the year 2013 which gained name and fame for her. Apart from the Noble Prize, she was bestowed with several eminent literary accolades and recognized for her exceptional artistic contributions both domestically and internationally. In the year 2012, she penned *Dear Life*, which she claimed would be her final book and turned out to be yet another masterpiece. The first of the fourteen short stories was *To Reach Japan*. It was written in her usual way and consisted of ten portions. She was able to narrate the stories with ability and without being constrained by the order of events. *To Reach Japan's* protagonist was a woman, just like those in Munro's earlier works. This article emphasizes the search for true identity of the main woman protagonist.

Through the character of Greta, a woman battling with social expectations and her own goals as a poet in a pre-feminist era, Munro's short fiction *To Reach Japan* examines the issue of identity crisis. The narrative emphasizes the clash between Greta's aspirations for artistic satisfaction as a writer and her responsibilities as a wife and mother. *To Reach Japan* the title might be read as a metaphor for Greta's desire for something more than her present situation, a place of fulfillment and self-discovery that seems as far away as Japan.

The protagonist Greta was a married woman who had a daughter Katy. Her husband Peter was an innocent and ordinary man who doesn't worry about anything. He was satisfied with his life and never worries about anything. He never spent time with his family and he focused on his job and professional career. The female protagonist was suppressed by the family members as homemaker. But, she started to pen poems and that was her routine. Greta, a poet with a few published poems, was more critical and analytical. "And she would have agreed with him, thinking that it was unnatural for people who saw each other daily, constantly, to have to go through explanations of any kind." (TRJ 663)

As domestic partners, women were not allowed to study scholarly works or express their political opinions. Women apparently were not permitted to think. Greta, though, was different and she penned many poems. She did not worry about the result but writing poem gave her satisfaction. She wants her life to be independent without anyone's influence. This character struggles throughout the story to prove her identity. She went to a party and got no attention. "She thought that when she went with Peter to an engineers' party, the atmosphere was pleasant though the talk was boring. That was because everybody had their importance fixed and settled at least for the time being." (TRJ 668) This statement depicted the female leads yearning for her husband and she also wanted to be valued for her identity and individuality.

The female character Greta longs for being valued and cared by the society as a renowned writer. She works hard to reach that level. By that time, she went to a party and a famous writer did not recognize her and that created a great impact in her heart and mind. She was invited to the party by the editor of the magazine. She realized that men writers were highly respected in present society but women writers were not valued for their abilities. In *The Abyss of Culture and Self-Identity: A Study of Indian Women Novelist's Women Characters* written by Rupali M. Gaikwad dwells upon the self-identity of female characters as "Self-Identity as a term is defined by the experts as the recognition of one's potential & qualities as an individual, especially in relation to the social context." (177)

The author of this story explored the identity crisis of a woman who aspires to be a writer and had been wed to a pragmatic, business-minded man. She had conflicting feelings about the counterculture of the 1960's - averse to it due to her culture, but drawn to it by romantic ideas sparked by literature. She had failed to fulfill her motherly and domestic duties in favour of her romantic fantasies, but then feels bad about it. Munro had experienced conflicts between her domestic responsibilities and passion to write after her marriage. George Roussos, Don Peterson, and Uma Patel published a paper in journal entitled as *Mobile Identity Management: An Enacted View* in the year 2003. They asserted that "Identity encompasses all the essential characteristics that make each human unique but also all the characteristics that enable membership to a particular group or culture as well as established status within the group." (84)

In order to acquire her passion, the protagonist steps out of the house with her daughter and boards train to reach Toronto. She was dejected by the behaviour of her husband and feels warmth from a journalist Harris. He encouraged her writing skills during the party and approached her to write more. So, she decided to go to Toronto to write more and acquire a special place in the literary world. While searching for her true identity she faced many practical problems such as sexual exploitation in the train journey, domestic responsibilities as a mother and wife and family relationships. This made her to take a drastic step to move out of her family relationships but she takes her daughter with her. The narrative draws attention to the discrepancy between Greta's perceived and actual identity by contrasting her public persona as an obedient wife and mother with her hidden self as an aspiring poet. The female character revolves around the identity crisis and somehow fights against the circumstances and focused on her passion. In search of quest for her identity she started to maintain friendship with Harris. However, Greta rushed through a train compartment as the story comes to a close, implying a sense of haste and possibly a persistent quest to discover who she really is.

Identity crisis of women may lead to social isolation, relationship problems, difficulty in decision-making, life transitions, setting realistic goals and self-exploration. Women are frequently pressured by societal conventions to put family and household duties ahead of professional goals, which can make them feel inadequate or guilty about pursuing their goals. It is worth highlighting that the protagonist of the story

To Reach Japan searches for her true identity and finds hard to overwhelm all the hurdles and at last escapes from her marital life to achieve her dream.

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