

Displaced Selves and Quiet Disillusionment: Space, Memory, and Female Identity in Selected Stories of Alice Munro

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Abstract—Alice Munro’s fiction repeatedly places women on roads, in railway carriages, at domestic thresholds, and inside unfamiliar rooms. These movements rarely deliver the complete freedom that the characters imagine. Instead, they expose the emotional habits, gendered expectations, class anxieties, and unresolved losses that travel with them. This paper examines displacement as both a material and psychological condition in four stories drawn from different stages of Munro’s career: “Boys and Girls,” “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage,” “Dimensions,” and “To Reach Japan.” Combining close textual analysis with a limited psychoanalytical framework drawn from Freud, Jung, and Lacan, the discussion argues that Munro turns physical movement into a crisis of recognition. Her female characters leave assigned spaces or attempt new identities, but arrival does not produce a unified self. The girl in “Boys and Girls” discovers that gender has already mapped her future; Johanna converts deceptive letters into an unexpectedly habitable life; Doree’s repeated prison journeys show trauma binding mobility to the source of violence; and Greta’s train journey reveals the conflict between creative desire and maternal responsibility. Across these stories, disillusionment is not simple defeat. It is the painful recognition that home, romance, escape, and autonomy cannot be separated from relations of care, power, memory, and social judgement. Munro’s achievement lies in presenting displacement as unstable knowledge: it enlarges perception while preserving uncertainty, and it allows women to revise inherited identities without pretending that the past can be left behind.

Index Terms—Alice Munro; displacement; female identity; disillusionment; psychoanalysis; space and place; memory

I. INTRODUCTION

Alice Munro’s women are often encountered in motion. They walk beyond the limits of a farm, take trains towards uncertain futures, leave one household for another, travel repeatedly towards a prison or hospital, and return in memory to rooms whose emotional force has outlived their practical use. Movement in these stories is rarely decorative. It changes the relation between the character and the identity that family, class, gender, or marriage has prepared for her. Yet Munro does not write conventional narratives of escape in which departure naturally becomes freedom. A new place may offer privacy, work, love, or anonymity, but it also exposes the habits of judgement and desire that the traveller carries with her. The past remains active through memory, bodily response, guilt, and the continued need to be recognised by people from whom separation appeared necessary.

This tension makes displacement central to Munro’s portrayal of female disillusionment. Disillusionment in her fiction is quieter than a dramatic collapse. It emerges when an inherited expectation can no longer explain experience: home is not wholly safe, marriage does not guarantee belonging, education does not erase class shame, and physical departure does not automatically produce an independent self. The character may continue to perform the same role after recognising its limits, or she may move towards another identity without knowing whether it will be more truthful. Munro’s stories remain attentive to this interval. They are less interested in the triumphant moment of liberation than in the difficult period

when an old arrangement has lost authority and a new one has not yet become secure.

Critical work on Munro has long recognised the importance of gender, domestic space, memory, and narrative indeterminacy. Marlene Goldman demonstrates how spatial divisions in “Boys and Girls” participate in the construction of gendered subjects (62). Magdalene Redekop reads Munro’s family worlds through masks, maternal authority, and the unstable relation between storytelling and identity (38). Katherine Mayberry argues that narrative allows Munro’s women to understand and sometimes resist the object positions produced within domestic relations (57). More recent spatial criticism has treated houses, landscapes, roads, trains, and remembered places as active forms within Munro’s fiction rather than as neutral settings. Ailsa Cox, for example, shows how the stories in *Dear Life* connect external space with absence, repression, and memory, while Coral Ann Howells continues to emphasise Munro’s mapping of women’s experience through unstable perspectives and incomplete knowledge. Robert Thacker’s reading of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* likewise stresses the collection’s verbal precision and its continuing investment in the difficult connections among apparently ordinary lives (187).

These approaches provide a strong foundation, but displacement is often treated either as geographical movement, as a feature of narrative form, or as one element within broader discussions of gender and memory. The present paper brings these dimensions together. It asks how material movement becomes psychic conflict and how displacement produces disillusionment without simply destroying agency. The argument is developed through four stories published across more than four decades: “Boys and Girls” from *Dance of the Happy Shades*, the title story of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, “Dimensions” from *Too Much Happiness*, and “To Reach Japan” from *Dear Life*. The selection is deliberately limited. Rather than surveying a large number of stories, the paper follows a recurring pattern across childhood, adulthood, trauma, and motherhood. Each protagonist crosses a boundary, but the meaning of the crossing changes according to age, class, work, violence, and responsibility.

The paper argues that Munro presents displacement as a crisis of recognition. Her characters do not move

only towards another location; they move towards an imagined gaze that will confirm them as capable, desirable, cultured, autonomous, or properly loved. Disillusionment follows when the desired recognition is withheld, fabricated, controlling, or morally compromised. At the same time, movement can create the distance needed for insight. The girl in “Boys and Girls” cannot prevent her placement within a gendered order, but the adult narration exposes how that order was produced. Johanna in “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage” acts on deceptive signs, yet her labour and practical intelligence convert an illusion into an unforeseen form of belonging. Doree in “Dimensions” travels while remaining psychically bound to the man who destroyed her family, until an emergency briefly redirects her agency towards the living. Greta in “To Reach Japan” experiments with a self beyond domestic routine, but her child’s fear reveals the relational cost of treating movement as private freedom. Across these differences, Munro refuses both the sentimental homecoming and the uncomplicated escape.

Munro’s fiction has frequently been described through paradox: intimacy and distance, realism and mystery, domestic ordinariness and moral shock. These oppositions are especially useful when considering place. Her houses, farms, stations, hotels, and roads appear concretely rendered, yet they rarely possess a single stable meaning. A kitchen may be a place of female labour, surveillance, nourishment, and quiet authority at the same time. A railway carriage may create temporary freedom while carrying the traveller towards a new dependence. A road can connect a child with knowledge that enlarges her world, but it can also become the repetitive route through which trauma retains control. Spatial movement is therefore inseparable from the social and psychological meanings attached to a place.

Goldman’s account of “Boys and Girls” remains important because it explains how space produces gender before the child fully accepts the ideology governing it. The barn and fox pens are associated with valued labour, competence, danger, and the father’s approval, while the kitchen marks the future of service expected by the mother and the wider community (62). The girl is not persuaded through a formal argument; she is gradually moved. Munro

shows ideology entering consciousness through tasks, routes, names, and the unequal value given to work. The final judgement, “She’s only a girl,” does not merely describe the narrator. It reorganises the meaning of her actions within a category that others treat as complete (Munro, “Boys and Girls” 127).

Redekop’s emphasis on masks and family performance extends this insight. In Munro, a public identity often protects the subject while limiting what can be acknowledged. The respectable mother, cheerful salesman, dutiful wife, plain housekeeper, bereaved patient, or creative mother may appear coherent from outside, but the stories reveal desires and injuries that the role cannot contain. Redekop’s observation that the mother makes clothes while the father teaches the daughter a mask highlights the different forms through which families adapt to social shame (38). Clothing and performance are not superficial details; they are practical techniques for surviving a loss of status and preserving a story about the self.

Mayberry’s focus on narrative liberation is equally relevant because many of Munro’s displaced women become visible only through retrospective telling. The adult voice can expose the rules that the younger character experienced without understanding, and it can recover emotions dismissed by the community. Yet narration does not guarantee innocence. “Family Furnishings” and “Fiction,” among other stories, reveal that the narrator’s freedom to tell may depend on turning another person’s life into material. Distance makes interpretation possible, but it also creates the temptation to simplify those who remain. This ethical difficulty is central to the present argument: displacement produces knowledge, but the knowledge remains partial and interested.

Studies of memory and ageing have further demonstrated that place in Munro is often organised by absence. Begoña Simal notes that the weakening of memory in stories such as “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” and “In Sight of the Lake” destabilises both selfhood and the reader’s confidence in a reliable map (62). Cox’s work on *Dear Life* similarly identifies external spaces as registers of what is unseen, repressed, or placed at the edge of consciousness. These readings illuminate Munro’s later fiction, but the same relation between space and incomplete knowledge is already present in the early stories. The difference lies in degree. Childhood

displacement begins when the world becomes socially divided; later displacement involves the loss of orientation, the failure of return, or the recognition that narration cannot repair an absence.

The research gap addressed here is therefore not the absence of scholarship on space, gender, or memory. It is the need for a focused account of how displacement connects these concerns through the experience of disillusionment. The term is used in two related senses. First, it refers to physical or social movement away from an assigned place. Second, following Freud, it describes the transfer of emotional intensity from an intolerable conflict to an object, route, room, or substitute relation that can be approached more safely. Reading these meanings together clarifies why Munro’s material details carry such psychological force. A gate, a shipment of furniture, a bus journey, or a train compartment becomes significant because it holds a conflict that cannot yet be directly named.

The four selected stories also make it possible to distinguish among forms of movement that can be blurred in a broad thematic survey. The girl’s crossing of gendered boundaries in “Boys and Girls” is not equivalent to Johanna’s economically prepared journey, Doree’s trauma-bound travel, or Greta’s temporary escape from maternal routine. Each movement is shaped by different constraints and ethical demands. The comparative value of the stories lies not in claiming that all women are displaced in the same way, but in showing how Munro revises the meaning of mobility across the life course. The early story concentrates on classification; the middle-period story on desire, labour, and improbable agency; the later story on trauma and repetition; and the final collection on the fragile relation between creative selfhood and care.

The paper follows a qualitative method based on close textual analysis. It pays attention to setting, objects, dialogue, narrative perspective, temporal shifts, and the relation between a character’s movement and the social identity available to her. The four stories are read comparatively, but each retains its historical and narrative specificity. Psychoanalytical concepts are used only where they clarify patterns already visible in the language of the story. The aim is not to diagnose fictional characters or reduce social inequality to private psychology. Munro’s women experience inward conflict through

material conditions: work, money, marriage, motherhood, violence, illness, and the permission to occupy particular spaces.

Freud's account of displacement provides the first conceptual tool. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he describes a "transference and displacement of the psychic intensities" through which an apparently minor element receives the force attached to a more threatening idea (305). Munro's stories are not dreams, but their objects and routes often perform a comparable function. Flora's escape carries the girl's unspoken fear of enclosure; Johanna's furniture carries an imagined future; Doree's journey to prison keeps unbearable grief within a repeatable routine; and Greta's train compartment contains desires that cannot be comfortably housed within marriage. The displaced object is not arbitrary. Its emotional value arises from its place in the character's material world. Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia also helps explain why physical departure does not end attachment. In mourning, "the world has become poor and empty," while melancholia internalises the impoverishment within the ego (Freud, "Mourning" 246). Munro repeatedly complicates this distinction. Doree's world has been emptied by the murder of her children, yet her continued relation with Lloyd also diminishes her capacity to imagine herself outside his explanation. Greta's journey is not a response to bereavement, but it reveals a different kind of loss: the creative and erotic self she fears marriage has made unavailable. The stories do not present these experiences as clinical cases. The theoretical distinction clarifies how an absent or threatened relation can continue to organise movement.

Jung's idea of the persona provides a second lens. He calls the persona "a kind of mask" produced in the relation between individual and society (192). Munro's female characters often move towards new public identities: competent helper, wife, traveller, poet, survivor. These roles may provide protection or social recognition, but they exclude desires and fears that return under pressure. The narrator of "Boys and Girls" wants to be recognised through the work she performs with her father, yet the social persona of "girl" gradually overrides that competence. Johanna's plain servant identity conceals practical authority and a capacity for decisive action. Greta's identity as wife and mother does not erase the poet or desiring

woman, but the train journey shows that no single role can be abandoned without consequence.

Lacan's account of recognition and desire adds a relational emphasis. His proposition that desire is "the desire of the Other" suggests that people do not simply want objects; they want confirmation within another person's symbolic world (690). Munro's travellers move towards such confirmation. The girl wants her father's recognition, Johanna believes herself desired through letters, Doree seeks an explanation from Lloyd that can organise the loss of her children, and Greta wants to be seen outside domestic categories. In each case, the desired gaze fails or becomes compromised. Recognition is reduced to gender, fabricated by pranksters, controlled by an abuser, or obtained at a cost to someone dependent on the traveller.

These concepts are brought into conversation with feminist spatial criticism. Gendered spaces are not merely reflections of identity; they help produce it. The distinction between barn and kitchen, employer's house and self-directed home, prison route and roadside emergency, marital compartment and transitional train makes social power tangible. This method therefore moves between the symbolic and the material. It asks how a place is used, who controls it, what labour sustains it, which body is watched within it, and how later narration changes its meaning. The resulting interpretation treats displacement as an interaction among psychic transfer, social classification, embodied movement, and narrative revision.

"Boys and Girls" begins in a world the narrator believes she understands through work. The fox farm offers a set of practical relations: animals must be fed, pens maintained, and seasonal tasks completed. The girl associates her father's outdoor labour with competence and consequence, while the house contains repetitive duties performed by her mother. Munro does not initially present this division through open conflict. Its force lies in repetition. The narrator moves with her father, invents stories in which she performs courage, and imagines herself as a useful participant in the farm. The social future assigned to her has not yet fully entered her self-understanding.

Goldman argues that the story's spatial divisions construct gendered subjectivity by making the unequal arrangement appear ordinary (62). The barn, yard, and pens are not naturally masculine, nor is the

kitchen naturally feminine. Their meaning is produced through who works there, whose work is valued, and how the child's future is spoken. The narrator's mother wants help in the house, but the girl's resistance is more than dislike of domestic labour. She senses that entry into the kitchen will narrow the range of identities available to her. The mother's world appears endless and repetitive, whereas the father's work seems connected with danger, animals, weather, and decision. The girl's attachment to outdoor space is therefore an attachment to recognition.

The story's decisive displacement occurs gradually. The younger brother becomes more capable of helping the father, relatives comment on what girls should do, and the narrator's body becomes increasingly legible through gender. She is moved from one sphere of value to another before she accepts the explanation for the move. This is why the father's final sentence is so powerful: "She's only a girl" (Munro, "Boys and Girls" 127). The word "only" does not merely identify sex; it reduces motive, complexity, and moral action to a social category. The narrator has released Flora, but the adults do not need to ask whether the act arose from compassion, identification, rebellion, fear, or a sudden refusal of death. "Girl" is treated as a sufficient interpretation.

Lacan's account of recognition clarifies the injury. The narrator wants to be seen by the father through her competence, but his judgement recognises her through a category that cancels the meaning she gives to her action. The desired gaze does not disappear; it is reorganised against her. She is not simply excluded from masculine work. She is taught that the authority to interpret her belongs to others. The story's adult narrator, however, creates a second perspective. By returning to the event, she exposes how the category was produced and how the child was gradually displaced from the identity she had imagined. Retrospective narration cannot undo the judgement, but it refuses its completeness.

Flora's escape carries the girl's conflict in displaced form. The horse runs from the route towards slaughter, and the narrator opens the gate. The action is practical, immediate, and unsuccessful. Flora is recaptured, and the farm's economic order continues. Yet the moment makes visible a connection the girl cannot directly state. Her own movement is being

restricted; the animal's flight offers a bodily image of refusal. Freud's concept of displacement is useful here because the intensity attached to the girl's threatened future is transferred to Flora's endangered body. The horse becomes the object through which an unspoken fear can briefly become action. Munro does not romanticise the gesture. Escape does not secure freedom, and identification with the animal does not give the child power over the adults who own and kill it.

The failure of Flora's escape also complicates the common reading of movement as resistance. The gate opens, the horse runs, and the girl acts against expectation, but the result strengthens the gendered judgement imposed upon her. Her rebellion becomes evidence that she is irrational in the way a "girl" is presumed to be irrational. Social power absorbs the act and gives it another meaning. Displacement here is therefore double: the girl is moved towards domestic femininity, and the meaning of her resistance is displaced from ethical choice into gender stereotype.

Jung's persona helps explain the narrator's later position. The child wants the public identity of the brave, useful worker, but the community offers the persona of the girl whose future belongs indoors. The adult narration does not claim that one identity was entirely authentic and the other entirely false. It shows how the socially acceptable mask is enforced and how the excluded self survives in memory. The narrator's later understanding contains both the child's desire for the father's approval and the adult's recognition of the system that made such approval conditional.

Disillusionment in "Boys and Girls" is therefore the discovery that merit does not determine belonging. The narrator believes that work, courage, and proximity to the father can preserve her place, but gender has already mapped a different future. The ending is painful because the father's sentence is casual. No elaborate punishment is required. The social order speaks through ordinary language, and the narrator recognises that the space she valued was never fully available to her. Yet the story itself becomes a form of critical return. By narrating the farm from temporal distance, the adult voice re-enters the place without accepting the finality of the label imposed there.

The title story of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* begins at a railway station, where Johanna Parry asks about sending household furniture west. Munro's description is deliberately plain: Johanna "inquired about shipping furniture" (Munro, "Hateship" 1). The practical verb seems emotionally neutral, yet the entire story is contained within it. Furniture that once belonged to another household becomes cargo for a future Johanna believes is waiting. Domestic objects are detached from one home and projected into another, carrying her labour, savings, desire, and misreading of the letters she has received.

Johanna's journey is initiated by deception. Two girls imitate a man's voice in letters and create a courtship because they assume that a plain, socially awkward housekeeper is a safe object of ridicule. Their prank depends on a hierarchy of desirability. Johanna is imagined as someone whose longing can be manipulated precisely because no socially plausible romance appears available to her. Lacan's emphasis on the Other's recognition is especially relevant: Johanna acts because the letters seem to place her within another person's desire. She does not merely want Ken Boudreau; she wants the identity produced by being wanted—correspondent, future wife, woman expected in another place.

Yet Munro refuses to make Johanna a simple victim of illusion. Her movement is grounded in economic competence. She saves money, resigns from work, buys suitable clothes, arranges transport, and sends furniture ahead. The pranksters author the letters, but Johanna authors the journey. This distinction matters because it separates belief from passivity. The signs are false, but her practical response creates material conditions that the deceivers did not foresee. The furniture becomes a displaced object in Freud's sense: it carries the emotional intensity of the desired home, but it also possesses practical value. When the imagined destination proves ruined and Ken is ill, the goods and the skills behind them make another future possible.

The western hotel is not the home promised by the correspondence. It is disordered, economically damaged, and occupied by a man who cannot embody the confident lover created in the letters. Arrival therefore produces immediate disillusionment. Johanna discovers that recognition was fabricated and that the destination lacks the

stability she had imagined. A conventional plot might punish her credulity by ending the journey in humiliation. Munro instead asks what a woman can make after the illusion breaks. Johanna reads the situation, recognises practical need, and begins to restore the household. The same domestic labour that made her socially invisible as an employee becomes a form of authority when she can direct it.

This shift complicates feminist accounts of housework. The story does not suggest that domestic labour is naturally fulfilling, nor does it treat every household task as pure submission. Meaning changes according to ownership, recognition, and agency. In the employer's house, Johanna's competence supports another family's order and confirms her servant status. In the hotel, labour gives her a claim upon the future she is building. She becomes not merely the person who maintains a home but one of the people who define it. Displacement changes the social value of the same skills.

Jung's persona clarifies why the transformation is surprising to the other characters. Johanna's public identity is plainness: practical, unfashionable, emotionally negligible. The pranksters assume that this persona contains the whole person. Movement reveals what the assigned role concealed—decisiveness, erotic desire, economic planning, and the willingness to accept reality without surrendering to it. The new identity is not invented from nothing. It develops from capacities already present but unrecognised within the servant role. Munro's irony is directed less at Johanna than at those who mistake social appearance for psychological limitation.

The story also revises the relation between illusion and truth. Johanna's journey is founded on forged letters, yet the resulting marriage becomes real. This does not mean that deception is harmless or that fantasy possesses magical power. The prank causes genuine risk and humiliation. What it shows is that signs do not control their consequences. Edith and Sabitha create a fiction in order to fix Johanna within ridicule, but the fiction leaves their hands. Johanna's labour, Ken's need, and the material circumstances of the hotel transform the invented courtship into a different relation. The girls' version of reality proves less durable than the life they accidentally set in motion.

Disillusionment therefore functions differently here than in "Boys and Girls." The girl on

the farm learns that a social category will limit her movement despite her competence. Johanna discovers that a desired recognition was false, but her competence allows her to survive that discovery and construct a form of belonging. The collapse of the romantic illusion does not restore her to the old place. It becomes the condition under which another identity emerges. Munro avoids triumphal language because the future remains ordinary, compromised, and dependent on work. Nevertheless, Johanna crosses from being interpreted by others to participating in the interpretation of her own life.

Thacker's account of the collection's "evocative and luminous phrases" is useful because Munro's transformation of Johanna occurs through restrained detail rather than proclamation (187). A ticket, a new outfit, furniture, an ill-kept hotel, and the practical management of a household carry the argument. The story's emotional force depends on the distance between the girls' game and the adult life produced beyond their knowledge. Displacement becomes an opening through which social judgement fails to predict a woman's future.

"Dimensions" begins after an event so violent that ordinary language seems inadequate. Doree's husband, Lloyd, has murdered their children. She changes her name, moves, takes work, attends counselling, and attempts to construct a daily life outside the destroyed household. These changes suggest geographical and social distance, but her repeated journeys to the prison reveal that trauma has reorganised movement around the person responsible for the loss. She travels away from the former home while continuing to move towards Lloyd.

The visits are difficult to understand if displacement is treated as progressive escape. Doree has left the house and changed the visible signs of identity, yet the prison route returns her to the emotional structure of the marriage. Lloyd remains the person who possesses direct knowledge of the children's deaths and the person who offers an explanation capable of containing them. His claim that they continue in another "dimension" gives Doree an image through which unbearable absence can be imagined (Munro, *Too Much Happiness* 29). The idea is consoling and dangerous. It preserves the children in language, but it also preserves Lloyd's authority over what their deaths mean.

Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia helps illuminate this attachment. Doree's world has become empty, but the loss also enters the organisation of the self. The children cannot be mourned apart from the man who killed them, because Lloyd has violently joined grief, guilt, memory, and explanation. The prison journey becomes a ritual in which the destroyed family remains psychically present. It does not lead towards a destination; it repeats a relation. Physical mobility therefore conceals psychic immobility.

Repetition in the story should not be reduced to weakness. Doree's visits show the mind attempting to approach what it cannot integrate. The route gives trauma a schedule, a vehicle, and a sequence of actions. The unbearable event is translated into something that can be travelled towards and away from. Freud's displacement is again useful: emotional intensity attaches to the journey because the original loss cannot be made manageable. The bus, prison, waiting, and conversation provide a structure where no adequate explanation exists.

Lloyd's language also demonstrates the coercive potential of recognition. Doree wants access to a meaning that will confirm her continued relation with the children, but the only person offering such recognition is the abuser. Lacan's account of desire helps explain why the relation persists. Doree is not simply seeking Lloyd's affection. She is seeking a place within a symbolic world where the children have not been reduced to absence and where her identity as mother can still be addressed. Lloyd exploits that need by presenting himself as the mediator of another dimension. The desired recognition is therefore inseparable from control.

Munro does not present counselling, work, or relocation as false. They provide necessary forms of survival. Yet the story shows that external change cannot simply remove a traumatic bond. Doree's altered name and routine form a protective persona, but the excluded grief continues to organise her journeys. Jung's concept of the mask is relevant because the socially functional survivor and the mother still attached to the destroyed family coexist without integration. The prison visit is the place where the hidden relation becomes active.

The roadside emergency changes the direction of the story. While travelling, Doree encounters a young man in immediate physical danger and responds. The

road that had been defined by movement towards Lloyd becomes the scene of care not organised by him. This action does not symbolically replace the children, erase trauma, or complete recovery. Munro resists such therapeutic neatness. Its importance lies in redirecting attention from Lloyd's metaphysical account to a vulnerable living body. The emergency demands practical action in the present, and Doree discovers a capacity not entirely governed by the destroyed household.

The contrast between "dimension" and roadside body is crucial. Lloyd's word removes the children from material absence into an unverifiable realm that only he can interpret. The injured stranger returns Doree to breath, blood, movement, and responsibility. Agency is relocated from listening to Lloyd towards acting for someone whose need is independent of him. The scene does not close the prison route, but it interrupts its monopoly over meaning.

Disillusionment in "Dimensions" is therefore gradual and incomplete. Doree must recognise that Lloyd's explanation is connected with the same authority that structured the violent marriage. The language that keeps the children imaginable also keeps her dependent. Unlike Johanna, she cannot convert the illusion into a stable home. Her movement towards another life begins when attention becomes capable of leaving Lloyd's symbolic world, even briefly. Munro's refusal of full resolution respects the scale of the loss. The story offers a redirection of agency, not a declaration that trauma has ended.

The story also deepens the paper's central claim that displacement produces unstable knowledge. Doree knows what Lloyd has done, yet knowledge of the event does not free her from the relation. She changes places without changing the emotional centre of her movement. Only when the road acquires another demand does a different self become visible. Munro locates possibility not in forgetting but in the temporary capacity to respond outside the abuser's narrative.

"To Reach Japan" places Greta on a train with her young daughter, Katy. The journey appears to open a space beyond the social identities of wife and mother. Greta is also a poet, but creative ambition has no secure place within the domestic arrangement she inhabits. The story's historical setting matters because the available language for judging women is narrow. Munro remarks that it would later be difficult

to explain "just what was okay" for a woman in that period (Munro, *Dear Life* 6). The phrase does not remove ethical responsibility; it identifies the social uncertainty within which Greta attempts to imagine another self.

The train is a transitional space. It belongs neither to the marital home nor to the destination, and its movement creates anonymity. Greta can drink, converse with strangers, remember another man, and experience herself as desirable outside domestic routine. The carriage loosens the ordinary gaze under which her actions are interpreted. In Lacanian terms, she enters another field of recognition. She is no longer seen only as Peter's wife or Katy's mother; she can be addressed as poet, woman, traveller, and possible lover.

Yet Katy's presence prevents the journey from becoming private freedom. The child carries the domestic relation into the transitional space. Greta may move between identities, but Katy depends on continuity, attention, and safety. The train therefore stages a conflict between autonomy and care rather than a simple opposition between repression and liberation. Greta's desire is neither dismissed as selfish fantasy nor celebrated as self-realisation. Munro asks what happens when one person's attempt at expansion changes the emotional ground beneath another person.

Jung's persona clarifies Greta's division. The maternal and marital identity is socially recognised but does not contain her creative and erotic life. The poet and desiring woman have not disappeared; they have become difficult to integrate into the public role. The train allows the excluded self to surface, but the experiment reveals that identities cannot be exchanged like clothing. Greta remains mother while acting as though the journey has suspended motherhood. The child's fear makes the excluded relation suddenly visible.

Freudian displacement also operates through the journey. Greta's dissatisfaction with the limitations of marriage and creative isolation is attached to movement, strangers, and the imagined destination. The train carries the hope that another place will permit another self. Yet the emotional conflict is not solved by distance because it arises from relations that travel with her. The moving carriage becomes a container for desires that the home could not

comfortably hold, but it cannot protect those desires from consequence.

The ending concentrates the ethical cost of this experiment. Katy turns towards the arriving man while pulling away from her mother. The gesture is small, but it reverses Greta's imagined movement towards recognition. Greta has sought to be seen beyond motherhood, and the child now seeks safety beyond the mother. The moment does not condemn Greta as an unnatural woman. It shows that care is relational and that temporary absence can be experienced differently by the person who depends on it. Displacement enlarges Greta's awareness of self while exposing the fragility of the identity she believed secure.

Lacan's concept of desire becomes especially useful here because Greta's journey is organised by imagined recognition. She wants a world in which the poet and woman are visible, and the possibility of another man seems to confirm that world. Yet recognition from the lover cannot provide a complete identity. It leaves the maternal relation unresolved, and the child's response reveals the limit of an adult gaze as the source of selfhood. The subject remains divided because no single Other can confirm every part of her experience.

The story differs from "Boys and Girls" in the form of constraint it presents. The girl on the farm is displaced into a role against her will; Greta tests movement beyond a role she has already inhabited. She possesses greater mobility, but also greater responsibility. Munro's later fiction complicates the language of female freedom by showing that autonomy is never purely individual when children, illness, or care are involved. This does not restore the moral authority of domestic confinement. It makes liberation more demanding than departure.

Disillusionment in "To Reach Japan" occurs when the train ceases to function as a protected interval. Greta's imagined escape cannot remain separate from Katy's experience. The journey reveals the creative and erotic self that domestic life has restricted, but it also reveals the mother's capacity to misread the emotional cost of pursuing recognition elsewhere. The result is not a return to a stable identity. Greta arrives with a more divided knowledge: the home was insufficient, but movement has not produced an innocent alternative.

Cox's analysis of *Dear Life* emphasises the collection's use of trains, empty spaces, absence, and fractured perception. "To Reach Japan" exemplifies this pattern by making transit both physical and psychological. The train opens possibility because it suspends ordinary arrangements, yet that suspension remains temporary. Munro uses the journey to show that a self may exceed domestic roles without escaping the relations through which those roles acquire ethical meaning.

Read together, the four stories show that displacement changes form across a woman's life while retaining a common structure. In childhood, movement is controlled through gendered classification. In adulthood, it may become an economically planned attempt to inhabit desire, a trauma-bound repetition, or a temporary experiment with an excluded self. None of these forms can be adequately described through a simple opposition between home and freedom. Home may provide continuity while enforcing limitation; departure may produce agency while exposing vulnerability or responsibility.

The first comparative pattern concerns the relation between movement and recognition. The narrator of "Boys and Girls" wants her competence to be recognised by her father, but she is finally seen through the category "girl." Johanna moves because forged letters appear to recognise her as desired. Doree travels towards the only person who offers a language in which her identity as mother remains imaginable. Greta enters the train's temporary social world because she wants recognition beyond wifehood and motherhood. In every story, the traveller seeks a changed relation to the Other's gaze. The forms of failed recognition differ. The girl's recognition is reductive; Johanna's is fabricated; Doree's is coercive; Greta's is incomplete. This difference matters because disillusionment does not produce the same outcome. The girl gains retrospective critical knowledge but loses an imagined place beside the father. Johanna discovers deception but builds a life through labour and adaptability. Doree remains bound to loss until another person's immediate need redirects her action. Greta discovers that the gaze confirming her as poet or desired woman cannot remove the child's claim upon her. Munro therefore treats disillusionment as a process rather than a final emotional state.

A second pattern concerns the material object or route that carries psychic intensity. Flora's body and the open gate contain the girl's unspoken fear of confinement. Johanna's furniture carries the imagined home westward. Doree's prison journey translates unbearable trauma into a repeatable path. Greta's train compartment holds the desire for a self beyond domestic routine. These objects and routes are not symbolic decorations placed above social reality. Their meaning arises from ownership, labour, danger, money, and bodily dependence.

Freud's concept of displacement helps explain this concentration of feeling, but Munro's realism prevents the concept from becoming abstract. The psychic transfer always has a social history. Flora is owned within an economic system; the girl's identification with her occurs within gendered labour. Johanna's furniture has been acquired through service and savings. Doree's route is structured by imprisonment, counselling, and the social aftermath of domestic violence. Greta's train journey is made possible by travel but constrained by motherhood and historical expectations. The unconscious does not replace material conditions; it becomes visible through them.

A third pattern is the conflict between persona and excluded self. The narrator of "Boys and Girls" imagines the persona of a useful farm worker, but society imposes the mask of the girl whose place is indoors. Johanna's servant persona hides capacities that become visible after departure. Doree's functional identity under a changed name coexists with the mother still psychically attached to the destroyed family. Greta's maternal persona excludes the poet and desiring woman, yet the journey shows that these selves cannot simply exchange places. Jung's framework clarifies why movement reveals contradiction instead of producing a pure identity.

The stories also differ in their treatment of agency. The girl's action fails materially but survives as critical memory. Johanna's action succeeds in an unanticipated form because practical competence outlives romantic illusion. Doree's agency emerges as interruption rather than full recovery. Greta's agency is real, but it is ethically compromised by the child's dependence. Munro refuses to measure freedom only by whether a woman leaves. She asks whether movement changes control over labour,

language, attention, and the right to define what the journey means.

This is where narrative form becomes important. Each story withholds complete judgement. The adult narrator of "Boys and Girls" understands more than the child but does not erase the child's need for approval. The title story's irony moves from Johanna towards the pranksters, but it does not romanticise the deception that initiates her journey. "Dimensions" avoids explaining Doree through a diagnostic label or a clean recovery plot. "To Reach Japan" places Greta's desire and Katy's vulnerability in the same frame without converting either into a simple moral lesson. Munro's humanism lies in preserving incompatible truths long enough for the reader to feel their pressure.

The comparative reading also reveals a movement in Munro's career from social classification towards more complex forms of relational responsibility. The early story exposes how gender assigns space and meaning. The middle-period story allows a socially marginal woman to turn misrecognition into an unforeseen life. The later stories ask what freedom can mean after extreme violence or within motherhood. The increasing moral complexity does not weaken the feminist critique. It shows that opposing gendered confinement does not require pretending that all departures are harmless.

Quiet disillusionment is therefore the most accurate description of the shared emotional movement. None of the stories depends on a single dramatic revelation that solves the character's life. Recognition arrives through an ordinary sentence, the condition of a hotel, a repeated route, or a child's gesture. The illusion breaks, but the character must continue living within relations altered by that knowledge. Munro's displaced women do not reach a final home in the psychological sense. They gain partial freedom, painful insight, or a new field of action, while carrying forward what movement could not resolve.

II. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that displacement in Alice Munro's fiction is both material movement and a disturbance in the relation among place, memory, recognition, and identity. In "Boys and Girls," the girl's movement is restricted by a gendered order that reinterprets competence and rebellion through the

word “girl.” In “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage,” Johanna acts on fabricated recognition, yet her labour and practical intelligence convert the collapse of romantic illusion into an improvised form of belonging. In “Dimensions,” physical relocation remains bound to trauma until a roadside emergency briefly redirects Doree’s agency away from the man who controls the meaning of her loss. In “To Reach Japan,” a transitional journey releases Greta’s creative and erotic self while exposing the cost of treating maternal identity as temporarily suspended.

The psychoanalytical framework clarifies the inward pressure of these movements without replacing their social contexts. Freud’s displacement explains why a gate, furniture, a route, or a railway carriage carries disproportionate emotional force. Jung’s persona shows how socially recognised identities exclude capacities and desires that return during movement. Lacan’s account of recognition explains why the destination so often disappoints: the character seeks a gaze that will confirm a complete self, but recognition is reductive, false, coercive, or partial. Munro’s most important contribution is her refusal of easy spatial metaphors. Home is not simply imprisonment, and travel is not automatically liberation. A person can remain displaced inside a familiar house or carry an old structure of dependence into a new place. Conversely, staying may contain unrecognised forms of agency, while an apparently mistaken journey may open an unforeseen life. These complexities do not neutralise gendered inequality. They show how inequality becomes intimate—through work, language, care, bodily vulnerability, and the ordinary permission to move.

Disillusionment is therefore not presented as the end of hope. It is the moment when an inherited or desired picture of life loses its explanatory power. Munro’s women may not become unified after that moment, but they see more clearly the conditions under which their identities have been formed. Displacement enlarges knowledge while preserving uncertainty. It allows a character to revise her place in a family or social order, even when no destination can finally free her from memory, responsibility, or the need for recognition.

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