

Both stories share
remarkable
similarities



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Alice Munro's "Carried Away" and "A Wilderness Station" are both psychological stories in their own right. In "Carried Away," Munro delves into the complex psychology that exists in romantic relationships, whereas in "A Wilderness Station," the author deals only with the eerie psychology of Anne Herron.

Both stories share remarkable similarities on the surface, yet the use of the same motifs that run through both of them are meant to serve different ends. For "Carried Away" and "A Wilderness Station," letters serve a fundamental take off point in which to explore the underlying psychology at play.

Also, in both narratives, books and reading provoke a central question: how does the act of reading transform a person and the way they relate to society? The answers offered by Munro's works point to two different paths.

Despite the fact that the letters between Louisa and Jack seem to serve only as the story's prologue, the flurry of exchange dictates the flow and progression of the whole story. Indeed, the letters serve as a spiritual conveyor that opens Louisa to a world devoid of conventionality and restraint.

As Jim Frarey notes, "Louisa was looking better than she used to. Maybe she had started putting on rouge...She dressed with more dash too, and took more trouble to be friendly... (Munro, "Carried Away," 438)." This he observes in late 1919, several years after Louisa's platonic relationship with Jack ended. Furthermore, without the palpably emotional epistolary exchange, the link between Louisa and Arthur would never have been formed, thus extinguishing Louisa's shot at happiness.

On the other hand, in “ A Wilderness Station,” letters formed the bone and marrow of the narrative. As opposed to the spiritual vehicle it was in “ Carried Away,” here, they take on a more mundane character. Letters in this story serve to mislead, concealing and blurring the truth instead of bringing it out to light. The letters between the Reverend McBain and the clerk of the peace James Mullen are perhaps the most telling of Anne’s psychological make-up.

In the letters between the two men, Anne is painted as a shape-shifter: in one she is a conniving, lying murderer; in another, she becomes George’s accomplice; while still in another, she transforms into the unwilling victim of the Devil (Munro, “ A Wilderness Station,” 206).” Here, the letters reflect Anne’s state of mind, which further echoes the wilderness she is thrust into: inasmuch as the wilderness was filled with wild creatures, unknown dangers, and plain anarchy, so, too, is Anne’s psychological being.

For both McBain and Mullen, Anne was in a state of insanity. Even the doctor who examines her after the death of her husband Simon comes to the same conclusion.

As opposed to the minister who believes that Anne’s descent into insanity was due to her “ natural and harrowing remorse” for not submitting completely to Simon, the doctor believes that Anne’s mental state was conditioned by her reading about “ ghosts or demons.” Such works, he said, made Anne believe that she was “ possessed by the forces of evil, to have committed various and hideous crimes (Munro, 205.)”

Despite the fact that the doctor could not provide proof of Anne’s literary adventures, he steadfastly holds on to this misguided belief.

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The negative attitude towards reading and books predominant in “ A Wilderness Station” is reoriented in “ Carried Away.” Books, as portrayed in this story, serve to condition and acclimatize the reader’s mind to becoming unconventional. Jack’s readings, which include socially-oriented books by Bolshevik and Chesterton, mirrors his stand on life, calling himself “ something of a lone wolf” and saying that “[he is] a person tending to have my own ideas always (Munro, 432).”

It is this unconventionality, conditioned by reading, that endears Jack so much to Louisa – so much so that she dreams / hallucinates about Jack, who echoes what she holds deep in her heart: “ Love never dies.”

The psychological force driving these two stories is divergent, with the same motifs tying them both together leading to even more differing conclusions. And it is simply because of this that Munro’s fictions are able to probe deep into humanity.

Works Cited

Munro, Alice. “ A Wilderness Station.” *Open Secrets*. Vintage, 1995. 190-225.

--- “ Carried Away.” *Selected Stories*. New York: Knopf, 1996. 523-563.