



## **Psychoanalytic Analysis of Alice Munro's *Train*: A Freudian Interpretation of Trauma and Repression**

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<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:Suhail.Solangi@hamdard.edu.pk">Suhail.Solangi@hamdard.edu.pk</a>	This research provides a psychoanalytic interpretation of Alice Munro's short story <i>Train</i> , focusing on the protagonist Jackson and employing Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as the analytical framework. The study examines how Freudian concepts of repression, defense mechanisms, and repetition compulsion manifest in Jackson's character and behavior. Through close textual analysis, this paper demonstrates how unresolved psychological conflicts stemming from childhood trauma shape Jackson's impulsive leap from the train, his years of wandering, his emotional detachment, and his perpetual avoidance of meaningful connection. Munro's use of narrative gaps and symbolic motifs reflects the fragmented logic of traumatic memory, illustrating how Jackson's behavior is governed by unconscious processes rather than conscious choice. By applying Freud's framework to this under-examined story, this research contributes to Munro scholarship and establishes <i>Train</i> as a significant examination of the psychological costs of sustained repression.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Alice Ann Munro (who was also known as Alice Laidlaw) is a Canadian who has emerged as one of the most renowned voices of literature in the nation and globally with her mastery of the short story genre. Her work is marked by a brilliant psychological acuity, a storytelling modesty, and

an unrivaled skill to expand the intricate complexity of allegedly banal lives. Fiction by Munro has always dug deeper into the depths of daily life trying to find the hidden forces of desire, memory, guilt and longing that have influenced human consciousness. The impact this has on her fiction is that her work exhibits a very deep knowledge of how people or individuals cope with the tension that exists between their social selves and their psychological reality, therefore, her fiction is especially open to a psychoanalytic reading.

First published in *The New Yorker* and later featured in Munro's last collection *Dear Life: Stories* (2012), *Train* is one of the rare examples of psychological sophistication that have become attached to her literary success. The story is based on the life of a veteran of World War II, Jackson Adams, who, after coming back to Canada, makes an unexplainable choice to jump off the train that is moving before he could go to the hometown. Instead of joining his family and living again in his life before the war, Jackson gets engaged in an unspecified affair with Belle, a lonely female in an isolated farm. In the following years, the failure to come to terms with his past and the emotional disconnection that Jackson shows are characteristic of his life as he tries many times to forget his previous identity and create new ones.

The interest in the themes of escape, displacement, memory, and the constant intervention of the unconscious makes the story a perfect sample of a text to study using the psychoanalytic perspective. The patterns of behavior exhibited by Jackson include his abrupt rejection of the bonds with his family, his nomadic way of life, his failure to establish close relationships, and his emotional numbness that could be explained in terms of Freudian ideas. The story plot, its conscious intention of gaps as well as the lack of motivation, resembles the abrupt logic of suppressed trauma, wherein the actions of Jackson are not dictated by conscious choice, but rather by the psychological pressures acting outside his consciousness.

The current research paper analyzes *Train* in terms of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory, especially focusing on such concepts as repression, defense mechanism and repetition compulsion. The analysis shows how the childhood experiences and trauma of the war become repressed memories that still have an effect on his current behavior and do not allow him to be psychologically integrated, which sends him to forever living in the world of constant flight. Shedding light on the psychoanalytic aspects of the story by Munro, this study helps us to comprehend the complexity of the thematic in the story as well as the general trends of psychological exploration that have been typical in the fiction of Munro.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

This study pursues two primary objectives:

1. To analyze the psychological contradictions, avoidance patterns, and unresolved emotional conflicts that characterize Jackson's behavior and shape his interactions with others throughout the narrative.
2. To explore the manifestation of key Freudian psychoanalytic concepts—specifically repression, repetition compulsion, and emotional detachment—within the narrative structure and character development of "Train."

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The fiction of Alice Munro has been long held to possess a psychological richness, a fascination with memory and trauma, an ability to demonstrate the emotional interest of the apparently ordinary life. The critical interest in Munro and her work has been focused on the issue of repressed emotional pasts, the use of narrative silence and the ellipsis, and the theme of the

characters whose current lives are haunted by their unresolved past. The present study bases its psychoanalytic approach to the topic of *Train* on the critical perspectives outlined in this literature review, which form the theoretical framework of a Freudian interpretation of the character of Jackson and the symbolic structure of the story.

### **Munro and the Buried Self: Repression and Hidden Histories**

Coral Ann Howells, who is generally considered one of the leading scholars on Munro, has made a consistent argument that the characters in the stories have the same thing that she claims as buried emotional histories that still haunt their adult identity in unknown but significant ways (Hermansson, 2007). Howells argues that a significant number of the protagonists in Munro are victims of unresolved childhood or early adulthood trauma that is psychologically active even though the characters completely deny it. This fateful insight is quite similar to that of Freud, in his notion of repression, when unpleasant memories, wants, or experiences are pushed out of conscious memory and placed in the unconscious, continuing to be active by indirect means (Jenkins, 2017).

Howells does not mention the word *Train* in her analysis, but the analysis that she makes on the strategies used by Munro in her narrative can be readily applied to the characterization given by Jackson. It is worth mentioning that as Howells points out, the characters in the stories by Munro usually live by absence, i.e., they are characterized more by not doing something, avoiding something, and not saying something than by direct action (Hermansson, 2007, p. 582). This would be a very accurate description of Jackson, whose abrupt jump off the train, his unwillingness to talk about his past, his habit of making sudden exits and shallow connections all point to a character that is essentially avoidant in nature. An example of such a type of person is Jackson who, according to Howells, is a frequent Munro type: those who shape their current identity by means of evasion instead of accepting the psychological trauma that still characterizes them.

### **Displacement as Narrative Structure and Psychological Defense**

The study of the scholarship on Alice Munro made by Ajay Heble helps to understand the meaning of displacement not only as a structural tool of her stories but also as a process of psychological defense mechanisms used by her characters. Heble argues that displacement in fiction by Munro works out of place; it encompasses the inner tactics of the characters to alleviate unbearable emotional pain (DeFalco, 2018). In the works of Munro, heroes often practice some physical displacement, be it a literal movement of the protagonist to a different place, an emotional displacement, or an intentional alienation of an individual and a place related to traumatic events. Such a repetitive trend can be explained by the Freudian theory of displacement when the aggression of affection previously aimed at a dangerous or painful object is redirected to a safer or more controllable alternative.

The behavior exhibited by Jackson in the course of the song *Train* is a bright example of this mechanism. His constant refusal to go back to his home, his prolonged travel, and the kind of emotional restraint that he has towards Belle, and his tendency of not having to engage in a relationship with any other people on a long-term basis all point to a collection of tricks that he uses to maintain a state of mental balance by being distant and detached. DeFalco notes that in most instances, the characters in Munro are making transitions between shifting social milieus without any real affective investment, thus suggesting that such mobility is in fact defensive instead of reflective of sincere engagement with new experiences (DeFalco, 2018, p. 94). Therefore, the restlessness of Jackson cannot be interpreted as something inexplicable and alienation or romantic desire but must be interpreted as symptom behavior regulated by

unconscious defense mechanisms aimed at maintaining emotional security by continuing to avoid possible objects of pain.

### **Guilt, Memory, and Narrative Ellipsis: The Structure of Repression**

It is a crucial aspect of the psychological investigation that Louis K. MacKendrick makes in analyzing the narrative technique of Munro: the measured use of narrative ellipsis. According to MacKendrick, it is often the case that Munro deliberately avoids the explanation of certain events and emotional instances, and as a result creates gaps and sudden changes of time that reflect the lack of continuity of human memory and the tendency of the mind to repress painful experiences (Ware, 1986). These formal gaps, put forward by MacKendrick, serve as formal equivalents of psychological repression, which allows Munro to make the functioning of the unconscious more externalized, by means of the very architecture of her narration.

In *Train*, Munro not telling necessary facts about the personal background of Jackson, specifically what exactly developed him into not wanting to go home, what exactly made him feel that way, what exactly might have happened to him as a child, is more than just good economical narrative use. Such omissions are of a semantically important nature that require readers to infer the psychological state of Jackson based on the perceptible behaviors and the symbolic values he demonstrates. According to the framework by MacKendrick, the typical silence of Jackson should be viewed as a storytelling of a silent emotional past, and not as a form of reticence (Ware, 1986, p. 337). The holes in the narrative thus also denote similar gaps in the way Jackson consciously applies to his own drives, the repressive walls between himself and full knowledge of himself.

### **Buried Motives and the Unconscious: The Opacity of Self-Understanding**

The psychoanalytic interpretations of Munro by Magdalene Redekop persist that her characters often do what cannot be defined or understood by them (Mohar, 2016). Redekop assumes that such care in handling unspoken tensions, emotional reserve of her characters, and judiciousness of her prose may all indicate that Munro is telling a story in a sort of style that can be likened to the mechanisms of the unconscious. The forces pushing characters to make decisions are usually under an opaque condition which is symbolic of Freudian revelation that consciousness only explains a small portion of the mental being and that behavior is often controlled by unconscious forces and conflicts that cannot be managed through rational self-investigation.

This principle is illustrated in the character of Jackson in a clear manner. His rash choices, seemingly unemotional attitude, and constant unwillingness to analyze the events he is undergoing all seem to indicate a protagonist, the behavior of which is controlled by something outside his conscious understanding. The argument about the dialectic between the surface and the depth, between the explainable and the unexplainable as presented by Redekop presents a constructive pattern of understanding the psychological inexplicability of Jackson (Mohar, 2016, p. 118). He cannot explain why he was run away by the train or why he experiences an unexplainable fear of going back home (Munro, 2012, p.). The Freudian assumption that the most significant motivations can be unconscious is depicted in 50).

### **Trauma and "Psychic Violence" in Munro's Fiction**

The application of the theory of trauma in the works of Munro by Martha Dvorak presents another notion, so-called psychic violence, which is not the kind of harm that can be represented physically but can be manifested in inarticulate pain and in wounds of the heart and soul, which are difficult to describe (Davis, 2025). Dvorak notes that Munro is less likely than most authors

to deal directly with the trauma, but to express psychological trauma indirectly in such forms as symbols imagery, partial memories, dream sequences, and background details of narration. Such an approach is compatible with the modern conceptualization of trauma as the experience that does not easily lend to narrative and can only be captured through the symptomatic manifestations thereof.

The analytical framework developed by Dvorak is especially enlightening in the case of *Train*, where the trauma experienced by Jackson is not actively talked about; instead, one can notice the signs of it mostly through behavioral symptoms: his silence, his ephemeral life, his lack of emotions and the symbolic value of his physical wound. The body thus becomes a site where accumulated emotional pain is materialized, and this may be echoed with psychoanalytic ideas of symptomatology and somatic conversion (Davis, 2025, p. 67). The tendency of Dvorak to fragmentation of the narratives and indirect representation of traumatic experiences provides an efficient method of interpreting the symbolic lexicon of Munro, particularly, the usage of the train as the symbol of escape, destiny, and compulsion of the unconscious.

### **Psychoanalytic Readings of Munro: Establishing the Critical Context**

Many researchers have directly utilized psychoanalytic models to the fiction of Munro, thus, paving the way to the current analysis. The analysis of "Runaway" by Fauzana Bahador in terms of Freudian ideas proves that the characters of the work and the plot of the story are organized in terms of repression and avoidance (Bahador, 2015). The methodological approach of Bahador, who pays close attention to symbolism, narrative gaps and changes in perspective as embodiment of unconscious process in the text, offers a sound framework on psychoanalytic interpretation of fiction by Munro.

Together, this literature creates an overlapping set of recurring themes of Munro criticism that directly underlie the present study: the primacy of repressed trauma in character formation, the significance of memory lapses and narrative discontinuities as formal acts of psychological defense, the repetition of flight and displacement as symptomatic behavior, and the use of symbolic detail as a way of describing a state of mind. All these critical observations come to a point where they focus on ideas that are essentially Freudian in nature repression, the unconscious, displacement and repetition compulsion.

### **Research Gap and the Present Study's Contribution**

Although psychoanalytic exegesis has strongly flourished in the body of scholarship about Munro, the short story *Train* has not been approached with much sustained critical attention, and the former has not been explicitly applied in analysing its underlying psychological foundations through a systematic application of Freudian theory. This inquiry aims to address that gap by placing the greater discourse of criticism around Munro and psychoanalytic paradigms realm in serious conversation with *Train*, hence showing how Freudian constructs can explain the psychological complexity of the persona of Jackson as well as the symbolic form of the storytelling by Munro. Placing *Train* as a historic exploration of the mental price of lifelong repression and the inevitability of the unconscious, the current study contributes to the scholarship of Munro and the psychoanalytic literary criticism as a whole.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The present paper uses the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud as the main interpretative framework, prefiguring some of the most critical concepts that make apparent the psychological processes that take place in the film, as well as in the mind of the character, Jackson.

**The Unconscious:** The main postulate of the Freudian ideology is the assumption that consciousness represents only a small part of the psychic life. The unconscious contains thoughts, memories, desires, and feelings that have been repressed or kicked out of conscious consciousness because they are too dolorous, threatening or unacceptable but that material continuously has an effect on behaviour, affective reactions as well as interpersonal relations in ways the individual cannot understand or has no power over (Freud, 2010).

**Repression:** Freud discovered the process, repression, as the main defence mechanism that helps the ego to protect itself against psychological distress. Repression involves the active rejection of painful memories, traumatic experiences or taboo urges. However, repressed material does not disappear, and it is psychic in the unconscious and manifests in symptoms, dreams, slips of the tongue, and patterned behaviour (Jenkins, 2017).

**Defence Mechanisms:** In addition to repression, Freud and his followers discovered an array of defence mechanisms - unconscious psychological maneuvers through which the ego combats anxiety and preempts any danger. These consist of denial (a lack of facing painful reality), displacement (transference of emotional energy of a threatening object to a less risky one), dissociation (leaving the overwhelming affective experience) and avoidance (evasion anxiety-provoking situations). Whereas defensive mechanisms can be a temporary relief, they are regularly used to prevent future psychological recovery and integration.

**Repetition Compulsion:** Freud observed that individuals often unconsciously repeat patterns of behavior, particularly patterns associated with unresolved trauma or conflict. Such repetition compulsion represents the psyche effort to control traumatic experience by symbolic reenactment but the repetition usually does not occur with conscious realization and is not accompanied with true resolution (Freud, 2010).

These Freudian theories provide a powerful interpretive tool to explain the behavior of Jackson in the short story, *Train*. His impulsive jumping off the locomotive, his incapacity to make home, his wandering life, his affectionate coldness, his sudden quitting of everything can be explained as the outbursts of the unconscious opposition, repression, and the defense mechanisms developed to cope with the unacceptable psychological suffering.

#### 4. Methodology

The paper is based on a psychoanalytic close-reading approach to explore the character of Jackson and the narrative structure of the story, as well as the narrator, in the *Train*. The analysis is done in the following sequential steps:

**Textual Analysis:** The theoretical foundation of the approach is a detailed and systematic close reading of the text by Munro, a focus on the narrative, behaviour of characters, dialogue, symbolic images, and structural elements that clarify the psychological dynamics. It involves identifying pertinent textual events that reveal inner struggles of Jackson, self-defensive mechanisms, and subconscious drives.

**Use of the Freudian Concepts:** This paper then uses the Freudian theoretical concept to the interpretation of the conduct, affective responses, and interpersonal relationships of Jackson after reading the text. Backing of the application is the fact that it is supported by first hand textual evidence showing the relevance of psychoanalytic interpretation of the thematic preoccupations of the story.

It is particularly the methodological design that fits best on short story *Train* since the focal concerns of the story such as affective avoiding, detachment, and saliency of the constant presence of antecedent trauma are the phenomena against which psychoanalytic theory was specifically designed to shed light. The close-reading approach allows an intense interrogation of

the way Freudian ideas are played in the story by Munro, which brings out that psychological richness that is concealed in the seemingly cold writing.

## **5. Textual Analysis: Jackson Through a Freudian Lens**

### **The Unconscious and Repression: The Leap from the Train**

The most evident instance of unconscious motivation and repression in *Train* takes place at the very beginning of the story, when Jackson decides to jump out of the locomotive that is in motion before it arrives at his hometown. This rash action, which goes to shape his further life is beyond logical explanation. Jackson is not able to describe the causative forces that led to his jump giving only the reason "he just needed more time before going home" (Munro, 2012, p. 48). However, the story hints at a more subliminal, unconscious energy at work at a deeper level of it; fears and unresolved conflicts, with which, Jackson cannot consciously identify, but has a preponderant effect on his actions.

The leaping is itself a corporeal flight of the psyche. Jackson is not just fleeing his hometown he is fleeing something in himself- memories, emotions, or elements of self that is coming to engulf him. His inability to stay on the train is what Freud would call the re-emergence of the repressed: as Jackson nears the place where his past life will be, the psychic contents he has worked so hard to repress begin to emerge into consciousness and his anxiety is so high that the only response imaginable is to flee.

The following years of Jackson are outlined in the text in the most revealing way: he said to himself, he just needed a bit more time before going home, yet the years passed and the thought about it turned into the background as he felt uneasy whenever he thought about home (Munro, 2012, p. 52). This text sheds light on the process of repression. The actual nature of his avoidance is lost to view through Jackson consciously rationalization, that he simply needs more time. The vagility of the feeling of unease is as close to bringing Jackson to conscious awareness of his inherent conflict in the mind as he can get although this awareness is still vaguely felt and not concrete enough to bring to reality his motivations.

According to the Freudian theory, the behavior of Jackson can be viewed as an excellent example of how repression works: troubling thoughts and memories are literally pushed out of the conscious mind, but still they continue to affect conduct indirectly. Jackson cannot go back to home because that would make him face the psychological contents he repressed his childhood life, his relationship with his stepmother, his love to Ileane before the war and maybe the traumatic war experience. The leap off the train is not an intentional, rational act but an unconscious act of defense that has been programmed to maintain the repressive state and the blocking of the emergence of psychologically unacceptable material.

### **Defense Mechanisms in Action: A Catalog of Avoidance**

In the course of *Train*, a variety of Freudian defense mechanisms is employed by Jackson who creates an elaborate psychological architecture of avoidance that governs his whole existence structurally.

**Avoidance and Geographic Flight:** Geographic flight is the most regular defense mechanism Jackson uses, which is avoidance, the avoidance of situations, people and memories that may cause the arousal of psychological pain. His jump off the train begins a trend that continues throughout his life: in the situations when facing the emotional proximity or the possible establishment of a real connection, Jackson invents physical distance. This basic pattern of flight is reflected in his years of living in the remote farm owned by Belle, the way he broke up with the woman and in his wandering life thereafter. The story notes that whenever he left he swore to himself that he would do things different, however, the same feeling escorted him like a shadow

that he could not shake (Munro, 2012, p. 58). This sentence reveals the hopelessness of the defensive strategy chosen by Jackson: the geographical displacement will not help to overcome the psychological conflict within the soul, but he is forced to repeat the pattern over and over again.

**Denial:** Jackson is always denying the importance of his past and underestimating the emotional impact that his avoidance has on him. The fact that he keeps saying that he just needs more time before he goes home can be considered a contradiction to the real truth of the situation, that he is unable to go home because there are psychological obstacles in his way. This rejection allows Jackson to continue a story of temporary displacement, instead of having to deal with his long-term exile out of his old existence.

**Displacement:** In the Freudian theory, displacement refers to the emotional energy about to be directed to a particular object that is threatening being redirected to a safer one. This mechanism can be seen in the relationship between Jackson and Belle. Instead of addressing his emotional state toward family, hometown, or his pre-war relationship with Illeane, Jackson puts his emotional life into the relationship with Belle which is strictly controlled and emotionally restraint. The farm is now a home displacement a sufficient substitute where Jackson can get a taste of something close to domestic security without having to activate the real domestic relationships he has forsaken.

**Dissociation:** The story depicts Jackson in frequent emotional numbness or dissociation, which is a defense mechanism where the conscious mind is unconnected with the emotional state of being as a protective measure against excessive trauma. Jackson passes through his life in an affectively two-dimensional state experiencing situations devoid of any real feelings. His love life with Belle is not genuine intimacy: he kindly treated Belle and she treated him, but there has always existed some distancing between them, a silence that neither of them could break (Munro, 2012, p. 61). This distance is the symbol of dissociative shield that Jackson surrounds himself with and keeps him vulnerable but at the same time it hinders true intimacy.

Although these defense mechanisms tend to provide temporary psychological relief, they end up being destructive. They prevent the process of psychological integration, developing meaningful relationships and the building of a coherent self-narrative in Jackson. His existence turns into a series of interim disposition and makeshift personalities, and all these are dumped when feelings are insistent in stirring his suppressed trauma.

### **Trauma and the Return of the Repressed: The Persistence of the Unconscious**

One of the main postulates of Freud is that repressions must rebound, and this has to manifest in some disguised forms. This principle is exhibited many times in Train through the experience of Jackson of a constant nameless fear that accompanies him despite his efforts to escape and be refreshed.

This phenomenon has been captured in the story accurately: he could not say what it was that he was running away because the idea of returning back scared him with the felt dread that he was unable to describe (Munro, 2012, p. 50). This text demonstrates the idea of Freud about the repressed returning. The dread that Jackson displays is symptomatic for the repressed psychological material that he is unable to access or express in a conscious manner. The emotion owns him without his awareness of how he came to be or what he was, meaning that it is unconscious. This fear being at once overpowering and unsayable indicates the veiled condition of the repressed content coming back, it appears not as explicit memory or perception but as sensation that has been dissociated with thoughts.

The repetition compulsions of Jackson provide additional support of the repressed coming back. Although he has made several attempts to leave his past and start living another life, the author cannot help but get into the same rut: Every time he moved away, he promised himself he would never do it again, but the same discomfort shadowed his existence, aura that he could not shake away (Munro, 2012, p. 58). This metaphor of the shadow is a good depiction of the unconsciousness of the psychological burden of Jackson, he carries it unconsciously and even though he tries to turn his head, it still accompanies him. The fact that he cannot get out of this shadow reveals how useless his defense mechanisms are: he is not able to face his trauma and go through it, being instead a prisoner of it.

### **Childhood Trauma: The Origins of Repression**

Munro gives the vital though elliptical information regarding the causes of the psychological problems of Jackson in the passages where she recounts the events of his childhood. These readings give light to sexual boundary-breakage experiences which define the basis of avoidance and emotional withdrawal patterns of Jackson that grow later on.

The story reveals: "When he was as young as six or seven he locked up his stepmother's fooling, what she called her fooling or her teasing when she gave him a bath. He ran out on the street after dark and she got him in but she saw there'd be some real running away if she didn't stop so she stopped" (Munro, 2012, p. 55). This text uses an indirect language and disjointed syntax to describe sexual abuse in childhood. The act of the stepmother fooling/ teasing her in the bathing process is a form of unwarranted sexual attention to a young child. The fact that Jackson runs into the street in the middle of the night shows that he is conscious of the fact that something is wrong, and that his basic form of coping with the threat posed to him psychologically is flight.

The habitual flight of Jackson can be referred to the event which occurred during his childhood. His jump off the train, his walking out of the farm of Belle and his later wanderings are all symptoms of this primitive self-defense. The traumatic event creates a blueprint that controls his behavior as an adult: whenever affected by a scenario that causes the feeling of vulnerability, exposure, or psychological intrusion, Jackson prefers to escape.

Later efforts by Jackson to justify the episode show that "It was the fault of human sex in a tragic situation. Me growing up there and Mother the way she was and Daddy, naturally, the way he would be. Not my fault nor his fault" (Munro, 2012, p. 56). This self-exoneration is still absolute and indirect euphemistic, human sex in a tragic circumstance, thus avoiding any direct statement of abuse. Also, his tendency to share the responsibility with everyone means that he is unable to emotionally work through the incident. Lastly, his defensive and explanatory tone of discourse indicates a current psychological attempt to work on unresolved content.

According to Freudian view, the sexual abuse experienced during the childhood is one of the formative traumas that Jackson has repressed but never overcame. This event also taught him that the domestic realm is not safe, that a domestic relationship is may be broken with a simmering attack, and that the only way he could protect himself against psychological damage is to flee. These lessons become subconscious principles which help organize his adult relations and choices in life. He cannot form a real intimacy with Belle, he does not want to be connected to a family, and he always wanders, that is, psychodynamic structures that can be attributed to that initial trauma.

### **The Ileane Relationship: Pre-War Trauma and Low Self-Esteem**

The story also sheds light on Jackson and his disordered affair with Ileane in pre-war America and serves as another contribution to his mental challenges. Isolation and being socially

withdrawn characterizes the relationship: Jackson and Ileane did not attend movies. They did not attend the dancing hall. They stroll, whatever the weather, and by night. There were occasions when they entered a restaurant and had coffee, yet made no attempt to be pleasant to anyone (Munro, 2012, p. 54). Such a trend is an indication of a marriage that was characterized by shame or secrecy, which lacked regular integration into the society.

The discomfort and avoidance that characterize the relations between Jackson and Ileane are interspersed with his former feelings toward the woman. He despises her very much and the affair is turning into a nightmare to him that brings about embarrassment (Munro, 2012, p. 54). His reaction is true to his character in that he does not want to face this fact and wants to avoid facing Ileane by avoiding Toronto where she lives. This avoidance suggests that the relationship provoked the emotions of shame, inadequacy, or vulnerability which Jackson is unable to process. He therefore places Ileane in a list of individuals and places he needs to maintain a distance with. This Ileane relationship therefore exposes the low self-esteem of Jackson as Munro states, probably due to the violations of boundary and emotional negligence as a child. Their relationship seems to have solidified the idea of Jackson as having an inherently flawed self-concept or unworthy of the most basic type of intimate relationship. Instead of working on these feelings, Jackson uses his typical defense: geographic avoidance by making sure that he does not see Ileane by staying out of Toronto.

### **Symbolic Architecture: The Train as Psychological Metaphor**

Freud paid much attention to the interpretation of symbols saying that unconscious desires and fears are represented indirectly in the form of symbols. The train in the story, Train, is an overdetermined symbol that is used at various levels.

Most conspicuously the train symbolizes a linear transition to home, family and re-acquisition of a pre-war identity. The fact that Jackson jumps out of the train is a violent refusal of this predestined path, an unwillingness to follow the anticipated path. In this respect, the train is an image of social expectation, conformity to certain courses of life, and the pressures of the superego- the voice of the internalized authority of parents and society.

The train symbolizes in a deeper meaning the unstopping flow of time and the irreversibility. A person cannot go back on a locomotive; he only can go on, or leave the ship altogether. The symbolic meaning of the jump by Jackson is hence his failure to reconcile his past with his present- he is not able to move on with his history in his bag pack and hence he purges the vehicle.

The train is also a transient zone; neither here nor there, but in between a departure and arrival. The fact that Jackson spends a long time on the train and only jumps can be seen as the sign of his psychological condition: being between the previous life (military service, war) and the next one (family, home, civilian identity), he is unable to exist in both states. The leap is an option of standing in permanent liminality, of being in transition between states instead of reaching any destination.

Lastly, trains are frequently used as an evocation of fate, destiny, and things that cannot be controlled by a person, but one rides but does not drive. The leap by Jackson can therefore be interpreted as frantic attempt of asserting agency over his past which is moveable by deterministic forces. But, ironically, his leap opens a still more deterministic form, the obsessive repetition of flight which controls his further life altogether.

### **Emotional Detachment and Alienation: The Cost of Defense**

In the whole course of *Train*, the love life of Jackson is characterized by a high level of emotional indifference and the failure to achieve the feeling of true intimacy. "He was kind to Belle, and she to him, but there was always a space between them, a silence that neither could cross" (Munro, 2012, p. 61). This is the space and silence which represent the defensive mechanisms that Jackson has put in place between him and other people. These bridges protect him against the possibility of vulnerability and reactivating childhood trauma, but they also condemn him to a state of deep isolation.

Freudian perspective tells us that the detachment of Jackson was a good functioning of his defense machinery: he has found his psychological safety in disconnection. This protection, however, comes at a gigantic cost, the failure to have genuine intimacy, love, or a sense of belonging. His relationships are always temporary and shallow never reaching the fortified areas of his mind where the trauma lies.

This story indicates that Jackson is not fully conscious of these boundaries. Where the silence that neither could cross is a mutually agreed limitation between Jackson and Belle, the mutual understanding of their equality establishes a boundary neither of them is prepared to cross; crossing this would require addressing the repressed content that all his defensive construction is meant to avoid.

The alienation of Jackson thus cannot be diminished to the fault of character; as it is the natural outcome of continued repression. He lives in a condition of never-ending exile not only of his native town but also of his own emotional realm, of his own past, and of the possibility of a human being relationship. His vagrant life, his affective anesthesia, are manifestations of one pathology, the psyche has been structured around avoidance, it is unable to incorporate the traumatic experience, it has been reduced to the repetitive mechanism of defense that assures safety but inhibits growth, healing, authentic life.

## CONCLUSION

The story *Train* by Alice Munro gives a deep insight into the matter of the trauma, repression, and the unconscious mind control of human behavior. Using the character of Jackson Adams, Munro clarifies the manner in which people cope with unbearable psychic agony and the price they pay these mechanisms. The impulsive act of jumping off the train, the wandering years, the lack of emotions and the habits of abandonment portrayed by Jackson is all a result of the unconscious defense mechanisms meant to prevent the re-emergence of the repressed traumatic content.

One discovers the complex psychological structure of the story by using Freudian ideas of the repression, defense mechanisms and repetition compulsion. The fact that sexual abuse occurred during his childhood as he was molested by his stepmother is the cause of the avoidance patterns in his adult life as it instills in him that domestic space is not a safe place and that flying is his only sure line of defense. His ineptitude to go back home, inability to achieve closeness with Belle, and his unceasing roaming are all related to this trauma which is unexplored. The aim of the narrative method adopted by Munro, the application of ellipsis, gaps, and symbolic detail, resembles the mechanisms of repression and unconsciousness, and the narrative gaps would be equated to the gaps in the self-consciousness of Jackson.

The psychoanalytic reading has a role to play in the Munro scholarship as it reveals how her typical narrative strategies can be deemed as formal equivalents of the psychological actions. It moves the progressive critical writing on trauma and memory in the fiction of Munro and establishes the text of *Train* as a landmark in her writing. The discussion also confirms the

timeless usefulness of psychoanalytic criticism in shedding light on characters whose actions are difficult to explain using social or moral determinism.

Finally, *Train* shows the portrait of a man who has been locked up by his psycho-defences he cannot go home, as home is the symbol of all that he repressed and cannot go forward either, as development requires him to incorporate the past that is not recognized. Using the story of Jackson, Munro sheds light on the horrible price of repression and the unconscious mind and its ability to determine human fate, thereby confirming her psychological instinct and her ability to describe the intricate workings of a traumatized psychology using a scrupulous detail and intentional omission.

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