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A Lacanian Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Alice Munro's Who Do You Think You Are?

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Abstract: The short story collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* by Canadian writer Alice Munro, who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 2013. It takes the heroine's pursuit of who am I as the mainline, shows the complex psychological changes and living conditions of female characters in different stages and circumstances, and reflects that the construction of female identity is a continuous process of constantly understanding, adjusting, and surpassing ego. Lacanian psychoanalysis takes the subject as the core and connects the subject, the other, and desire through the framework of the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, and the Real Order. Only through the resistance and struggle of the subject can we break the confusion of the subject's illusion in the Imaginary Order and the multiple suppression of the other and desire in the Symbolic Order, and finally find the true ego. This essay analyzes Munro's deep thinking on women's problem, which is that women should hold a positive psychology and development vision to complete identity construction and establish a harmonious and beautiful life community in modern society.

Key Words: *Who Do You Think You Are*, subject construction, Lacanian psychoanalysis

“Alice Munro is acclaimed for her finely tuned storytelling, characterized by clarity and psychological realism...”, the Nobel committee once said^[1]. Her short stories are integrated into the field of human feeling and consciousness. The works of Munro reveal the complexity and situation of humankind with fearless love for truth sharp psychological insight, which often gives people a great shock. Munro's understanding of women is an evolving process. This diachronic perspective not only makes us understand the various puzzles women encounter in reality, but also lets us feel the pain from the depths of women's hearts. Munro is good at describing the psychological activities and life experiences of ordinary women at different stages of life. Through

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exploration, she discovers and reveals their complex inner world, discusses women's self-awareness and self-worth, expresses Munro's concern about women's self-construction today, and puts forward that the effective way out for women lies in receiving education, entering society and relying on personal efforts to complete self-construction, It is the way to realize equal love, self-confidence and build a community of beautiful and harmonious life. This Munro style self-awareness of women runs through Munro's works, and has been further developed in the collection *Who Do You Think You Are?*.

The short story collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* was published in Canada in 1978, which won the Governor General's Award, the highest literary award in Canada. Alice Munro takes Rose's growing line as a thread running through the novel to show her self-construction in contemporary consumer society. This collection of 10 short stories has a common heroine Rose. Rose who is intelligent, sensible, sensitive, and delicate has a rich inner world and a strong sense of self. In the long process of growing from a girl to an economically independent professional woman, Rose, who experiences being constantly asked who she thinks she is and asking Who am I to herself repeatedly, is confused, struggling, and constantly construct identity. Munro shows us the changing process of self-construction in women's life, which is a flowing process from identification to reconstruction and then to return.

Jacques Lacan (1901–81) is arguably the most influential psychoanalyst since Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Over 50 percent of the world's analysts now employ Lacanian methods. At the same time, Lacanian theory has reached far beyond the confines of the consulting room, which is unsurpassed among modern psychoanalytic thinkers. Lacanian thought now pervades the disciplines of literary and film studies, gender and social theory, which is applied to such diverse fields as education, legal studies and international relations (Sean Homer, 2005: 1) [2]. Lacan uses the concept of linguistic semiotics to demonstrate the constructive function of language on human beings. In his view, the process of subject construction is the process of a subject entering the Symbolic Order of language. Individual subjectivity is missing, so people spend their whole life looking for their own subjects. Lacan distinguishes three major categories that organize all human experience, namely the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, as the three stages of the formation process of the subject, namely the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order and the Real Order, which echo with the Pre Mirror Stage, the Mirror Stage and the Post Mirror Stage. The characteristics of these three orders make them establish an independent and interdependent dialectical relationship rather than a linear and progressive relationship. As the existing field of the subject, the three orders operate in a synchronic way. In the Pre Mirror Stage, infants cannot distinguish themselves from others and have no self-awareness. Only in the Mirror Stage can we establish ourselves by gazing at the image in the mirror. However, this image is illusory, imaginary, alienated, and mistaken. In fact, this image in the mirror, Lacan's so-called unconscious image, is not the baby himself but actually the other opposite to himself. The invasion of the other becomes the root of the subject's division, which makes him subject to the influence of the other from the beginning. Therefore, The unconscious is the discourse of the Other; in other words, man's desire is the desire of the Other. When the subject enters the chain of signifier and the Symbolic Order from desire, under the action of the Name-of-the-Father that is the agency of the Symbolic, the illusory image

disintegrates, and the subject realizes that the confirmation of self-consciousness is an illusion. Therefore, identity and disillusionment constitute the continuous development process of the subject. Therefore, psychoanalysis can be used to explain the process of self-construction of Rose who is the heroine of *Who Do You Think You Are?*.

Since the French philosopher René Descartes put forward the famous *Cogito ergo sum*^①, western philosophy has changed from ontology to epistemology; that is, the logical starting point of philosophy is not external objective reality but internal self-consciousness. The heroine Rose spends her whole life seeking the answer to “Who am I?”.

1. LOOKING FOR WHO AM I? IN THE IMAGINARY ORDER FULL OF FANTASY NARCISSISTIC IDENTITY

Munro depicts a depressing picture of Rose's childhood in “Royal Beatings” the first story of the collection. Rose lives with her father and her stepmother, who later bore Rose's half-brother, Brian in a closed and backward rural town West Hanratty. Rose is often punished by "Royal beatings" because her language and tone of voice do not conform to the social norms recognized by Flo and her father. “Oh, don't you think you're somebody, says Flo, Who do you think you are?” (Who 2006: 20) ^[3]. The first one asked Rose to think who she is is her stepmother Flo. As Rose grows older, she realizes that she has been treated equally with her little brother, but now she is treated unfairly, for instance, she has endless housework to do, while her little brother does not; she says dirty words with him, and she is beaten by her father, while he gets away with it. Thus Rose has a preliminary understanding of the social status of men and women, and becomes aware of the inequality between men and women. Her little brother can do whatever he wants, while as a girl, she is bound by the social system. What Flo wants to say is that Rose is just a girl and warns Rose not to feel that she has ability to escape the constraints of society on girls. Once Rose refuses, she will be severely taught by the social system.

What Lacan has called the Mirror Stage is interesting is that it manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject originally identifies himself with the visual Gestalt of his own body. According to Lacan, this activity has a specific meaning up to the age of eighteen months. It reveals both a libidinal dynamism that has hitherto remained problematic and an ontological structure of the human world that fits in with his reflections on paranoid knowledge (Lacan 2006:76)^[4]. At this stage, the ego of subject is formed with the help of external language and is based on a false foundation. This is the first alienation of the subject. It is worth noting that Lacan believes that the alienation of the subject at the beginning of imaginary identity is insurmountable and irreversible, which will always play a role in the subject. From the Mirror Stage, people are always pursuing an image, identifying with this image, carrying their unified imagination or

^① *Cogito ergo sum* proposed by the French philosopher René Descartes is not only the starting point of his whole epistemological philosophy, but also the end of his universal doubt. Jacques Lacan believes that once people start thinking, it means that he has entered the Imaginary Order or the Symbolic Order. So he is not the real ego. Jacques Lacan.(2005). *Ecrits A Selection* (Routledge Classics)Routledge.Taylor & Francis e-Library, 18.

establishing their integral image; in other words, people spend a lifetime to complete a birth. So Rose spends her whole life pursuing the answer of Who am I?. When the subject gradually starts to master the language, it means that he has entered the Symbolic Order and begun his journey of self-construction. The formation of the subject referred to by Lacan is the subversion of the subject, that is, the essence of the ego is that it is a setback, also known as aggressivity, which is carried out in the direction of alienation and a road of no return.

We call ego that nucleus is given to consciousness but opaque to reflection, marked by all the ambiguities which, from self-satisfaction to 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*), structure the experience of the passions in the human subject; this 'I' who, in order to admit its facticity to existential criticism, opposes its irreducible inertia of pretences and *méconnaissances* to the concrete problematic of the realization of the subject (Lacan 2005: 12) [5].

Lacan regards the ideal ego of the subject who constructs narcissistic imagination due to identity as narcissistic identity. He points out that the subject is invaded by the threat to the ideal ego of narcissistic imagination. Therefore, aggressivity is brought from subject's self-identity. This aggressivity makes the subject neither tolerate the other who is superior to the ideal ego nor the other who regards himself as inferior to the ideal ego. To obtain perfect self-sufficiency, he can even fight at all costs. Therefore, with the enhancement of Rose's self-consciousness and the increase of knowledge, one day she suddenly finds that she has become an independent and self-conscious individual, just like a baby seeing himself in the mirror, he completes the Mirror Stage and enters the Oedipus stage which is called the Oedipus complex.

When Rose realizes that her ideal ego conflicts with her parents' social definition of a girl, Flo who symbolizes the social system, asks Rose to think who she is and warns Rose that she has to accept the alienation of herself in Symbolic Order and enter the Symbolic Order; otherwise she will receive the punishment of "Royal beating", that is, her behavior will be disciplined and educated in strict accordance with The Name-of-the-Father which is the agency of the Symbolic Order. At this time, Rose is narcissistic about the ideal ego of the Imaginary Order and is unwilling to become a girl with social significance, so she can not complete the first step of feminine self-awareness and identify with her own identity. So when her ideal ego of narcissistic imagination is threatened, it produces aggressivity. Rose gives full vent to her discontent through language and rebellious behavior such as swearing, irregular sitting posture, etc. This is a kind of resistance, that is, a specific form of aggressivity.

Rose, who is a student in Privilege, is stuck in the imagination and can not extricate herself. Before a high-grade girl Cora appears, the self-consciousness is so vague that Rose can not fully understand herself. She imagines that Cora is the ideal ego which is the narcissistic identification in the Mirror Stage. Therefore, Rose wants to be Cora, who reflects the ideal ego in Rose's heart.

Lacan points out that the formation of the ideal ego needs the recognition of the other of the

Imaginary Order. First, the other is the image of the subject who can not express himself by using language, and then the nonverbal behavior of the people around him, such as parents, relatives and friends. Slavoj Žižek explains the concept of imaginary identification clearly in his own words,

Imaginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be', and symbolic identification, identification with the very place from where we are being observed, from we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love.(Žižek 2008:116).^[6]

The subject regards the attributes that belonging to the mirror image as his own, and takes the external image as his internal features, which leads to the inconsistency between the inside and outside of the subject, which becomes the inducement of the subject's alienation.

Rose sees the difference between the other that is unified and integral in the Mirror Stage and the ego in real life, so she has narcissism and alienation to the ego in the Mirror Stage. For Rose, Cora represents the perfect ideal ego, so Cora is privileged. Rose is **completely** infatuated with the other in the Mirror Stage, and the Other that is made up of language and discourse in the Symbolic Order, is what Lacan calls Big Other. It not only refers to the others around subject, but also means the whole social symbols in which the subject is located, such as religion, politics, law, education, custom and other ideological systems and norms of conduct.. Due to the emptiness of Rose's heart caused by her lack of social experience, she makes an imaginary mirror identification with Cora. This identification is not only an ideal existence but also a misunderstanding, which will inevitably lead to the subject's extreme anxiety about alienation and inevitably go to destruction like Narcissus. Rose adores Cora so much that she can not see her shortcomings. So when Cora hands over Rose's stolen candy to Flo to "enjoys her importance and respectability and the pleasure of grown-up exchange" (Who 2006: 41), Flo's mockery breaks the ideal ego established by Rose's virtual image in the Mirror Stage. The narcissistic complex of Rose does not disappear. In the process of growing up, when she can not deal with the relationship between love and marriage, she always tries to escape the Symbolic Order, return to the Imaginary Order, and seek the integrity and unity of her ideal ego in the Mirror Stage.

2. ROOTING IN THE SYMBOLIC ORDER OF SUBMISSION AND REPRESSION, DISSIMILATION AND RESISTANCE TO EXPLORE "WHO AM I?"

The journey to find self-identity of Rose begins at an early stage. When Rose is at school, she observes everything very carefully and learns survival skills through experience. She realizes that, in most cases, poverty is the root cause of all suffering, so she decides to change her social identity. "She is wanting badly to align herself with towners, against her place of origin, to attach herself to those waffle-eating coffee-drinking aloof and knowledgeable possessors of breakfast nooks."

(Who 2006:44) . However, Rose can not completely exclude her identity as a rural girl, and she is always unable to clarify her identity. Rose can not agree that the oppression of submission is dispelled by alienation. At this time, she coexists with obedience and resistance, and painfully

takes root in the Symbolic Order.

In *Wild Swans*, Rose, who studies hard to gain self-identity, uses the prize for writing a paper to win herself a chance to travel freely. On the train, Rose does not refuse the tentative touch made by the man who appears as a United Church priest, but silently panders to his behavior. This time, Rose chooses to break through the fantasy of the ideal ego in the Imaginary Order, starting from understanding herself. Only by understanding who she is and what she wants to be can she understand the other, and then build a harmonious relationship between the other and herself. Munro puts a holy coat on the liberation of the body. The awakening of the body is the only way for girls to go to women. She compares sex to the first battlefield for women to reconstruct themselves, and metaphors the claustrophobic space of the body as feminine self-discipline. Munro tries to provide an outlet for female compatriots to get out of self-isolation by liberating biological instinct.

As the core story of this series, *The Beggar Maid* is the critical part of this collection. In the story, Rose is asked who she thinks she is. As Rose's teacher at University, Dr. Henshawe, who has the characteristics of feminism, dislikes and despises men and believes that men are reckless and easy to make mistakes. She thinks it is pathetic for Ruth to fall in love with Patrick. Therefore, Dr. Henshawe treats their love relationship with a contemptuous attitude. "It is no small triumph to attract the attention of the heir to a mercantile empire," says Dr. Henshawe, being ironic and serious at the same time (Who 2006:79). She reminds Rose that only by gaining physical and spiritual freedom can she control her destiny. If she does not follow her will, she will not find her true ego in the world. So when Rose is proud of the love relationship established with an unequal identity, Dr. Henshawe reminds Rose to think carefully about who she is.

Rose has never given up looking for self-identity and is eager to complete self-construction. In Symbolic Order, the identification formed by the subject in the exchange of language is a symbolic identification. It is noteworthy that desire and lack will never be satisfied in this order. When Rose expresses her desire through language, she is controlled by the desire of the other, and falls into the trap of alienation. Thus Rose is unwilling to become a woman bound by traditional ideas like her stepmother, and she has never thought of abandoning her female identity, which dooms her to a bumpy and tortuous road to maturity. The process of feminine self-construction is not the feminist movement in the traditional sense but a process of continuous adaptation and adjustment of personal consciousness from the Imaginary Order to the Symbolic Order.

The subject needs to communicate with others through language, which has its own rules, to enter the Symbolic Order and become a member of society. The desire of subject is still suppressed by language rules and can not be expressed at will. In order not to go to destruction and achieve a harmonious state, the subject can only abandon part of the real desires and be alienated by language rules. Through her life experience at the house of Dr. Henshawe, Rose understands that if she wants to change her social identity and get rid of the poor life of Hanratty, marrying Patrick will be the best way. Once she offers to break up with Patrick, but soon she realizes the two

consequences of breaking up, that is, she either works all her life on scholarships and bonuses, continues to worry about her life, or returns to the world of poor West Hanratty, which reminds her of her stepmother's life, full of tragic and unfortunate things. Rose is so frightened and shocked that she soon reconciles with Patrick. She takes the initiative to compromise with the Symbolic Order.

Lacan points out that on the road of alienation, the subject must constantly succumb to the other in order to meet the desire to achieve and find the real ego. In this process of searching, the subject can not really consciously feel the alienation of the other to himself. In order to be recognized, the subject can only constantly succumb to the requirements of others. Therefore, even though Rose knows that she and Patrick come from two different worlds and their marriage is not the combination of two souls, she can not resist the privilege and status she obtains after marrying him. Although she is happy that she will marry Patrick, she feels a pain inside her which is unexplainable and ultimately pours on the pages in the form of a poem: Heedless in my dark womb I bear a madman's child...And through reading one play of Yeats, Rose continues to think about who she is. "Come away, oh, human child ..." Rose reads, and her eyes fills up with tears for herself" (Who 2006:83) . In one of the plays, a young bride is lured away by the fairies from her sensible unbearable marriage. Rose compares herself to the young bride who is ready to get married. She has no due joy in her heart. Still, she endures the pain and depression bring to her by the marriage that she wants to refuse but is unwilling to refuse, which implies that Rose is unable to resist the alienation of herself by the Symbolic Order.

The jubilant assumption [*assumption*] of his specular image by the kind of being—still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence—the little man is at the *infans* stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject (Lacan 2006: 76) ^[7].

When the subject gradually begins to master the language, he has broken through the Imaginary Order and entered the Symbolic Order. Under the action of the Name-of-the-Father, the subject realizes that the ideal ego is indeed an illusion. So identification and disillusionment, that is, desire and absence, will never be satisfied in life, which will play a role with the subject all the time. The process of human growth is a process from the Imaginary Order to the Symbolic Order. In this process, the other, as an alien force, runs through the whole life. life is made up of all kinds of symbols, which are always combined with the authority that controls everything, so it is difficult for people to get rid of the domination of the Other.

Patrick brings Rose into the Symbolic Order through language. He tries to dominate Rose by changing her accent. His hopes are high. He thinks that her accent can be eliminated, her friends can be discredited and removed, and her vulgarity can be discouraged (Who 2006:85) . Even at home of Rose, Rose does not have any way that she can talk and sound natural. With Patrick there, she can not slip back into an accent closer to Flo's, Billy Pope's and Hanratty's. That accent jarred

on her ears now, anyway. It seemed to involve not just a different pronunciation but a whole different approach to talking” (Who 2006:89). Patrick not only inhibits Rose's expression, but also hinders Rose's self-construction. Patrick regards Rose as a practitioner who can realize his enjoyment. He needs Rose's affirmation, submission, and worship. Rose can only become the damsel in distress, *Beggar Maid* and *The White Goddess*, but can not obtain equal respect and love. It is difficult for Rose to identify with her identity as Patrick's girlfriend and find her ego ideal in the Symbolic Order. When Rose struggles in the gap between the Imaginary Order and the Symbolic Order, Patrick again asks Rose to think about who she is. He says, “if you know what you do want. I don't think you do. I don't think you have any idea what you want. You're just in a state” (Who 2006:94) .

As a result, Rose, who can not obtain identity, shows aggressivity under extreme depression under the mediocre image. Internally, this aggressivity is self-alienation, such as self-blame, self-mutilation and self-abuse; externally, it is the violation of language, for example, threats, intimidation, slander, abuse, etc..Rose fights with extremely abnormal behavior. During the awakening of her self-consciousness, she makes her own choice and boldly admits to Patrick that she does not love him. Rose not only escapes the male oppression of Patrick, but also moves away from the magnificent home of Dr. Henshawe. At this time, Rose realizes that since she chooses to escape, she has to draw a line from all the interfering factors that hinder the formation of self-consciousness and no longer be tempted by the outside world to construct self-identity.

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him by flesh and blood (Lacan 2005: 50) ^[8]. The Symbolic Order runs through the whole life. Although Rose temporarily overcomes the curse of imagination by learning language and entering the signifier chain, she can not escape the fate of being captured by the Symbolic Order. Rose is very resistant to the identity of a scholarship girl, which reflects that she not only refuses to enter the Symbolic Order but also infatuates with the unified and integral ideal ego in the Imaginary Order. Because of identifying with symbols and satisfying their own desires, the subject is equivalent to the Other in behavior; that is, the subject becomes the agent of the Other. The subject restricts himself by identifying with the Symbolic Order, and internalizes the desires of the Other into his ego ideal. Therefore, Rose is imprisoned by reality, and she is not able to adapt to the suppression resulted by the Other in the Symbolic Order that inevitably leads to her anxiety about alienation. In this ten-year marriage, Rose tries to get rid of the bondage of the *Beggar Maid* identity and the control of the Other and resists by giving up the matrimony that everyone admires; nevertheless, she ends up begging Patrick's forgiveness and compromising to the Symbolic Order again and again.

Rose in *Mischief* has been married for three years and has not been able to clearly identify herself; for instance, she can not fully enter the role of wife; she is worried about preparing dinner for Patrick. She is also incompetent for the role of mother, and she can not even appease her daughter's grumpy temper, let alone integrate into the middle-class life, which is always incompatible with the middle-class lifestyle. Due to her failure to obtain self-identity, Rose begins to fight against the Symbolic Order by cheating in marriage, violating the constraints of marriage

social rules. Rose has an affair with Clifford. To some extent, Clifford, as Rose's mirror image, represents Rose's ideal-ego. It is worth noting that Clifford and Rose have many similarities; for example, they come from the remote town, and they are all from the lower class. "She thought of love, to reconcile herself. She was loved, not in a dutiful, husbandly way but crazily, adulterously" (Who 2006:124). All this is to get rid of the identity of *Beggar Maid* and resist the Symbolic Order. She believes that this exciting love can resist all the pain she has suffered, fill the real nothingness and bottomless hole in her heart, and prove her place in the Symbolic Order. Clifford escapes from the Symbolic Order through his frivolous attitude towards life, which is exactly what Rose wants to do but doesn't dare to do. To some extent, Clifford who is the embodiment of Ruth's imagination, has a great impact on Rose's self-construction. The appearance of Clifford intensifies Rose's anxiety of alienation.

According to Lacanian theories, Rose has a special charm for Clifford because she is deeply attracted by the unified and integral image in the face of the threat of the Symbolic Order. The sexual relationship between Rose and Clifford symbolizes Rose's escape from her husband and reflects her narcissistic complex. Rose hopes to return to the Imaginary Order and temporarily enjoy the unified and integral ideal ego in the Mirror Stage without being alienated and split by Patrick, who represents the Symbolic Order. Lacan believes that after the subject enters the Symbolic Order, the function of the Imaginary Order still exists in the world of adults. Even if he has accepted all the conditions, commands, or rules of society, he still hopes to return to the Imaginary Order in the subconscious to regain his ideal ego. Suppose the subject in the Symbolic Order is still addicted to the ideal ego. In that case, he will feel uneasy about the ego ideal required by the Symbolic Order and fall into the anxiety of alienation. Therefore, The emergence of Clifford enables Rose's ideal ego to resist the Other's threat and bring her back to the Imaginary Order. However, The departure of Clifford breaks her stable ideal ego and shows the alienation anxiety caused by the destruction of her ideal ego with various neurotic symptoms.

Alice Munro reveals the essence of our life. On the road of striving for freedom and independence, Rose's efforts are worthy of recognition. Since Rose can not escape from real life, she can only choose to change herself and face the reality she once hated and questioned with an ordinary attitude. Therefore, through the description of repeated twists and turns in Rose's search for love, in her daily life, and in highly competitive work, Munro expresses that if women want to find themselves and obtain identity in the Symbolic Order, they must pay the price of their efforts, which is an inescapable fate.

3. REALIZING THE TRUE EGO AND COMPLETING THE JOURNEY OF SELF-CONSTRUCTION

Rose finally meets her true love Simon who can give her love and respect, but she is unable to stay with him because of Simon's death. Munro profoundly reveals that no matter who he is, he will inevitably be trapped by life and can not understand himself. Rose believes that she will have a unified and integral ego without being violated by the other, but she ignores the duality of the other. On the one hand, as the opposite of ego, we use rules and commands to restrict it. On the other hand, we restrain ourselves from preventing the destruction caused by personal expansion. In

a world without people, the subject can not understand himself. Therefore, it implies that people who exist in the world not only depend on themselves but also need those people around them. In the process of socialization, people can not really enter the Real Order and enjoy freedom.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, and the Real Order are spatial systems that work in a synchronic way. Therefore, the process of identity construction like topology is a circular and gradual process. Rose, who has grown up in a difficult life, has become strong and has the courage and ability to face difficulties independently. Through exploring and reflecting on the self identification, Rose finds the best way of self construction, that is, using the power of the Other to make herself stronger and better. She really feels the bondage of the Other to herself, realizes the futility and hopelessness of escape, and believes that she will eventually return to the Symbolic Order.

The Other does not have enough power to eliminate and alienate Rose, who has the ability to find her identity in the Symbolic Order. After years of struggle and exploration of who I am, Rose gets an answer during the revisit to her hometown. When Rose returns to her hometown West Hanratty to take care of her stepmother, she has become a successful middle-aged actress, and she recalls her past memories of childhood and adult life. In Hanratty, She remembers the neurotic behavior of Milton Homer, and comes across her classmate Ralph Gillespie. They connect Rose's past and present, and their experience gives her the opportunity to understand that the impossible Real Order exists.

Milton Homer isolates himself from reality and refuses to obey the principles and the symbolic categories it represents. His extremely theatrical persona seems to show his real ego. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Real Order can not really be expressed in language because once it is imagined or said, it will enter the realm of the Imaginary Order or the Symbolic Order. Therefore, the Real Order, which precedes language, is not an object but a field that cannot be symbolized. If the subject wants to enter the Real Order, he will have to give up what is recognized by people; that is, he will give up language. At the same time, Lacan believes that giving up language is also a manifestation of madness, and the subject can enter the Real Order through the madness. Milton Homer puts himself outside the chain of language and returns to the Real Order before the division of the subject. Milton Homer, liberated from the control of the Other, has a completely unified ego, but he rejects the Symbolic Order and the Imaginary Order, and is also excluded from the colorful life.

In addition to madness, death is also a way for the subject to enter the Real Order. The fourth term is given by the subject in his reality, foreclosed as such in the system, and entering into the play of the signifiers only in the mode of death, but becoming the true subject to the extent that this play of the signifiers will make it signify(Lacan 2005: 149)^[9].

In the view of Lacan, the Real Order, as the source of desire, is a kind of primitive ignorance and disorder, which embodies complete negativity and emptiness implied by the death drive. Lacan

points out that the real ego can occur only through the encounter with death. But since the subject can not discuss his death, he can only endure it through the death of the other. For Rose, Ralph Gillespie is a very important person, whose acting talent makes Rose realize her dream of becoming an actress. Old Ralph Gillespie is disabled, but he is neither willing to give up his dream of becoming an actor nor change his reality. This contradictory state of mind has been driving him to death. For Ralph Gillespie, death is a rebellion against the Symbolic Order. The death of Ralph Gillespie is the inevitable result of his struggle with the Symbolic Order, which shows itself in the form of excessive violence at a specific time. Ralph Gillespie is the ideal ego of Rose. His death makes Rose realize the inaccessibility of the Real Order.

Rose's English teacher Miss Hattie is the last person in the novel to remind Rose to construct self-identification. Miss Hattie says mildly enough but with finality, "You can't go thinking you are better than other people just because you can learn poems. Who do you think you are?" (Who 2006:191). She warns Rose with her own life experiences that Rose needs to restrain her ambition and pretentiousness in such a society, where Rose has to abide by social conventions as her. If Rose wants to construct self-identity, she will not narcissize the ideal ego in the Imaginary Order, but deal with the relationship between herself and the other and society. Munro skillfully depicts the conflict between the self and the other in the process of subject construction, showing a subject that is both split and contradictory. Finally, Rose has a new understanding of the life she has experienced in the past and thus has a new insight into identity construction. She realizes that she has drawn strength from the vicissitudes of the past, created a new space and unrestrained self-identity, and completed the construction of self-identity, which is the beginning of her new life.

4. CONCLUSION

Rose's spiritual crisis originates from the alienation anxiety, which is manifested in her infatuation with the Imaginary Order and her rejection of the Symbolic Order. It shows that it is impossible for ordinary people to get rid of the anxiety caused by alienation in the process of finding their ideal ego in the Imaginary Order and their ego ideal in the Symbolic Order. Human beings can not be separated from the pseudo reality composed of the Imaginary Order and the Symbolic Order, because it is only in the interconnection and mutual conflict of the three Orders that human beings can move forward continuously. Alice Munro not only describes the reality of life so vividly but also expresses the real state of psychological logic accurately, which is the greatness of Munro's works (Yu Xiaowei *et al.* 2014).^[10] Although a life full of trauma and emptiness is mysterious to us, the purpose we pursue is not to eliminate the subject but to seek independence in destruction, that is, to maintain the balance between the external environment and the internal desire. Life is just like this, so we do not have to look for the ultimate meaning of life but live a steady life, as Monroe said.

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