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## THE INTERACTION AND DYNAMICS OF INTERMENTAL AND INTRAMENTAL THINKING IN SHORT STORIES BY ALICE MUNRO

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This article examines the interplay between intermental and intramental thought processes of female characters in selected short stories by renowned Canadian writer Alice Munro. Set in a post-war Canadian town near Lake Huron, the stories explore themes of women's desires and self-fulfillment, often at odds with societal norms.

Employing A. Palmer's methodology, which emphasizes reconstructing character minds to understand narrative, the analysis combines stylistic, narratological, and general scientific methods. The stories, such as "My Mother's Dream", "To Reach Japan", "Haven" "Chance", and "Soon" feature female protagonists pursuing personal aspirations within societal expectations. The hypothesis considers the town to be a collective "social mind", reflecting prevalent attitudes of 1950–1970's in Canada regarding gender roles and social conventions. Through A. Palmer's perspective, the text is viewed as a socially distributed cognitive system, depicting various intermental units within the community. Narrative techniques illustrate the complex relationship between individual and communal thought, as seen in an unnamed narrator in "Haven", characters like young mother in "My Mother's Dream", aunt Dawn in "Haven", Greta in "To reach Japan", and Juliet in "Chance" and "Soon".

The analysis explores single and multiple focalization techniques, homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration, intermental and intramental mind, revealing contrasting viewpoints on gender, societal norms, and personal identity. The versatility of A. Munro's narrative techniques illuminate the tension between individual autonomy and societal conformity. The stories deal with the themes of religion, adherence to social rituals, and the struggle for personal expression against the expectations of the local community.

Through detailed character portrayal and narrative techniques, A. Munro creates the dynamic interplay between individual and communal consciousness in the post-war Canadian provincial town, which is the object of the study of this paper.

## ВЗАЄМОДІЯ ТА ДИНАМІКА ІНТЕРМЕНТАЛЬНОГО Й ІНТРАМЕНТАЛЬНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ В ОПОВІДАННЯХ ЕЛІС МАНРО

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### Ключові слова:

інтерментальне мислення,  
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техніки, одинарна та  
множинна фокалізація.

У статті досліджується взаємодія між інтерментальними й інтраментальними процесами мислення персонажів у низці коротких оповідань відомої канадської письменниці Еліс Манро. Події, що розгортаються в цих оповіданнях, відбуваються в післявоєнному канадському містечку поблизу озера Гурон. Вони розкривають важливу тему самореалізації жінки, а також умов її існування в тогочасному суспільстві кінця 40-х – початку 70-х років ХХ століття, керованому традиційними соціальними нормами.

Застосована методологія Е. Палмера, що передбачає реконструкцію мислення персонажів для розуміння наративу, вимагає поєднання наратологічних і загальнонаукових методів. Робочою гіпотезою є припущення про існування колективного «соціального мислення», типового для жителів провінційного канадського містечка. Текст розглядається як соціально розподілена когнітивна система (за Е. Палмером), що знаходить відображення в різних інтерментальних та інтраментальних одиницях. Наративні техніки ілюструють складні відносини між індивідуальним і загальним мисленням, як це можна бачити на прикладі безіменної дівчинки-підлітка, нараторки оповідання «Гавань», а також персонажів, як-от молода мати у «Мрії моєї матері», тітки Дон у «Гавані», Грета в «Дістатися до Японії», Джуліет в оповіданнях «Шанс» і «Скоро».

Предметом аналізу є техніки одинарної та множинної фокалізації, поєднання гомодієгетичного та гетеродієгетичного типів нарації, інтерментального й інтраментального мислення, що розкривають протилежні думки щодо формування власної ідентичності під впливом соціальних норм того часу, особистої професійної реалізації за умов сталого розподілу гендерних ролей. За допомогою оповідних технік Е. Манро розкриває напруженість між індивідуальною автономією та соціальною відповідальністю. Оповідання розглядають теми релігії, дотримання соціальних ритуалів і боротьбу за особисту реалізацію всупереч соціальним очікуванням.

Через детальне портретування персонажів шляхом застосування різноманітних наративних технік Е. Манро створює динамічну взаємодію між індивідуальною та загальною свідомістю у своїх оповіданнях.

**Introduction.** The article means to analyze the relationships between the intermental and intramental thought of the main female characters in a few short stories by a renowned Canadian short story writer Alice Munro. All of them are set in a small Canadian town near Lake Huron, well known to the writer from her personal life. The chosen stories, as many others, are set in the post-war Canada. They tackle

the issues of women inner wishes and desires, self-fulfillment that sometimes, very much like the author's, contradict the established social worldview of the local town community.

It seems fruitful to study the intermental, or in other words, shared thought in contrast with the characters' intramental, individual, cognitive processes, using the methodology suggested by A. Palmer [1; 2] to

see how these two worldviews contradict, intersect and sometimes complement each other. From this perspective understanding a narrative involves the reconstruction of the character's mental functioning, which enables us to make sense of actions and events. The character minds have become the object of the study in the works of D. Cohn [3], X. Yang [4]. Such approach involves the usage of narratological analysis in terms of G. Genette's [5], M. Fludernik [6], as well as general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction.

Although various aspects of Alice Munro's short stories have been extensively analyzed in Western literary criticism, narratology, and pedagogy, notable contributions have been made by scholars such as J. Carscallen, I. Duncan, and R. Thacker [7–12]. However, in Ukraine, there remains a scarcity of papers that illuminate Munro's writings [13–16]. Consequently, exploring the interplay between social and individual minds in a selection of A. Munro's stories represents a novel research endeavor. The short stories are taken from different collections, but all of them relate to the issues of a woman pursuing her vocation be it poetry or music, a woman searching for her personal happiness and self-expression: "My Mother's Dream", "To Reach Japan", "Haven", "Chance", "Soon".

**The objective** of the article is to identify the complexity of relationships between narrative techniques rendering the intermental (social) thought and intramental (individual) thought of the female characters in the given short stories by A. Munro.

The hypothesis consists in the fact that a small post-war Canadian town has a mind of its own, this "social mind" is exposed in a number of selected short stories bearing traces of all the attitudes and reservations typical for the late 1940's – early 70's provincial Canada, concerning the distribution of gender roles, religion, married life, as well as social rituals of those days. The relationships between this social mind, a number of smaller minds and a character's individual mind are **the object of analysis** in this article. **The subject of analysis** is the range of narrative techniques used by the author in depiction of these controversial relationships.

**Discussion and results.** It is possible to identify a number of several minds within the mind of a small-town community. It stems from the idea that "fictional minds form part of the storyworld or diegetic universe of the novel" [2, p. 85]. While there are female characters who find themselves inside the large intermental units and act as spokespeople for their views (e.g. aunt Dawn in "Haven", Ailsa in "My mother's dream"); it is also possible to identify the individuals who find themselves outside these units and become the object of their intermental judgements: Juliet and her parents in "Chance" and

"Soon", a young mother-protagonist and Mrs. Shantz in "My Mother's Dream", Greta in "To reach Japan", an unnamed teenage girl-narrator in "Haven".

According to A. Palmer these various intramental/intermental relationships have a substantial impact on the plot of the novel. An act as well as an utterance may be considered a trigger for inferencing certain position of an individual. A. Palmer's methodology [1, p. 130–133] is applicable to all types of narratives, not only highly introspective ones, but also behaviorist. The text of a novel may represent "a group mind", "socially distributed, situated, or extended cognition" [2, p. 83], likewise the text of a number of short stories set in the same place, a small provincial Canadian town situated not far from the lake Huron on the East coast of Canada at a certain span of time (from late 40's until early 70's) may illustrate the same phenomenon. Surprisingly, in such typical small town communities social attitudes change very little over a few decades concerning topics like gender role distribution, woman's personal fulfillment, adhering to the social etiquette and set standards of behaviour.

The dynamics of the interaction between a personal woman self and a social self of the local town community will be analyzed according to the following axes of focalization suggested by A. Palmer: intramental versus intermental, single versus multiple; homogeneous versus heterogeneous [2, p. 93]. The statements exposing intermental thinking may be introduced by the wide range of lexico-grammatical constructions ranging from the most impersonal to the most individualized expression uttered by spokespeople for a certain social sub-group.

The first-person homodiegetic narration in "Haven" offers access to the point of view of a thirteen-year-old girl-narrator, a temporary guest at her aunt and uncle's house during her parents' absence on a mission in Africa. A close study of "Haven" reveals that the attitude of the local small-town community is referred to as "an atmosphere" and addressed via impersonal construction: "*The boys' hair was longer than it had been, but not straggling down their backs, and there didn't seem to be an unusual amount of liberation or defiance in the air*" [17].

In "To reach Japan" a third-person heterodiegetic narrator refers to the general worldview using impersonal "it" and "you-constructions", though the passage is focalized through the main character, Greta: "*It would become hard to explain, later on in her life, just what was okay in that time and what was not. <...> Then you would get all tied up saying that having any serious idea, let alone ambition, or maybe even reading a real book, could be seen as suspect, having something to do with your child's getting pneumonia, and a political remark at an office party might have cost your husband his promotion. It would*

*not have mattered which political party either. It was a woman's shooting off her mouth that did it*" [18].

Sometimes Alice Munro uses the technique of multiple focalization in order to show alternative models of behaviour in the same situation. For instance, gender expectations are included into the narrative of her short story "Haven", with contrasts drawn between the assertiveness of the girl's mother and the deference exhibited by the aunt towards her husband. The girls' family, in which freedom of expression was a usual thing, is opposed to her aunt's family, where it was not typical for a wife to openly disagree with her husband or contradict him: *"She was used to holding back until she was sure that my uncle had said all that he meant to say. Even if I spoke to her directly, she would wait, looking at him to see if he wanted to do the answering"* [17]. The narrating self (a teenage girl) reflects upon her upbringing and familial environment, juxtaposing her unconventional, rather frivolous upbringing and the small-town social norms: *"My mother would talk right over my father if she had something she really wanted to say, and that was often the case"* [17]. The conventional intermental thinking may be ascribed to media (e.g. housekeeping magazines). The societal messages from such magazines are rendered in free indirect thought: *"Haven" was the word. "A woman's most important job is making a haven for her man". "Did Aunt Dawn actually say that? I don't think so. She shied away from statements. I probably read it in one of the housekeeping magazines I found in the house. Such as would have made my mother puke"* [17]. It is noticeable, that there is a dissimilarity between the sisters, while one of them finds the advice useful, another one feels revolted by it. Thus, at least three voices are heard in the above mentioned passage, they are contradicting one another: the aunt's attitude which resonates with the conventional outlook, and the narrator's mother's as well as the narrator herself, which represent non-conformist position.

As the narrative of the short story progresses, the teenage narrator gradually becomes doubtful about her views, absolutely hostile to her aunt and uncle's relationship at the beginning of her stay: *"It was only in the first month, anyway, that I had sent my parents letters full of sarcastic descriptions and complaints. Now everything had become much too complicated to explain"* [17].

The tension between a woman's individual identity and the expectations society imposes on her are the matter of depiction in "Chance" by A. Munro. While the protagonist, Juliet, excels academically and finds fulfillment in her studies of ancient languages, societal norms dictate that her success is limited or defined by her gender. Her professors, although pleased with her academic achievements, express concern about her future prospects as a woman, suggesting that marriage

would diminish her potential and career opportunities. The spokespeople for the conventional public opinion are professors at college and parents. Although non-conformists themselves in terms of religion and social attitude, Juliet's parents put pressure onto her *"to fit in"* with a view to make her life easier. Later in "Soon" Juliet doubts, whether they are so broad-minded as she considered them to be before.

Not *"fitting in"* meant unacceptance at the least, social ostracism and isolation at the most: Juliet's father was not offered a promotion and finally was forced to resign from his teaching position, because of disagreement with the school's headteacher, also because *"things were said"* about his daughter Juliet, her choice to live with her daughter's father without being married: *"I got into an argument. There were things said". "You don't realize. You don't realize just how stupid this is and what a disgusting place this is to live in, where people say that kind of thing"* [20].

It was a matter of pride for Juliet not to be married to her child's father. When Juliet returned to see her parents to her home town, she talks to her classmate, who, in fact, acts as a mouthpiece for the younger generation of the town community: *"He had appraised her covertly – perhaps he saw her now as a woman displaying the fruits of a boldly sexual life. Juliet, of all people. The gawk, the scholar"* [20].

Another instance of controversy may be observed in the case of her parents' attitude to her daughter: *"It occurred even to her mother and father, who were nevertheless proud of her. Her mother had wanted her to be popular, and to that end had urged her to learn to skate and to play the piano. Juliet did neither willingly, or well. Her father just wanted her to fit in. "You have to fit in," he told her. "Otherwise people will make your life hell"* [19]. Parents' voices resonate with the other ones in town. Here they act as spokespeople for the local social community, they represent "the town mind". In fact, Juliet felt she had found her own niche: *"I do, Juliet said, once she got away to college. In the classics department, I fit in. I am extremely O.K."* [19]. But now here came the same message, from her teachers, who had seemed to value and rejoice in her. Juliet's desire to pursue her academic passion clashes with the societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Intermental thinking (the social mind) is often introduced in the discourse of Alice Munro's stories with a help of passive constructions, a general reference like "people" is used interchangeably: *"In the town where she had grown up, her sort of intelligence was often put in the same category as a limp or an extra thumb, and people had been quick to point out the expected, accompanying drawbacks – her inability to run a sewing machine, or wrap a parcel neatly, or notice that her slip was showing. What would become of her was always the question"* [19].



College professors gave her a controversial advice to take the teaching position: *"It'll be good for you. Get out into the world a bit. See some real life"* [19].

Another example of using multiple focalization in order to show two contradicting attitudes to the same subject can be found in "My Mother's Dream". A strong stance taken by the local people to classical music and musicians was non-acceptance. This attitude is shared by George, Gill's late husband, his family members, their neighbours and the rest of the town community. Uncle Jasper from "Haven" is one more character who speaks on the part of common people, who do not understand newly converted classic music-lovers.

The passage from "My mother's dream" is focalized through the experiencing I" (a grown-up daughter, a baby at the time narrated). She explains her father's attitude in the following way: *"My father and my father's family had no real interest in music. They didn't quite know this. They thought that the intolerance or even hostility they felt towards a certain type of music (this showed even in the way they pronounced the word "classical") was based on a simple strength of character, an integrity and a determination not to be fooled. As if music that departed from a simple tune was trying to put something over on you, and everybody knew this, deep down, but some people – out of pretentiousness, from want of simplicity and honesty – would never admit that it was so. And out of this artificiality and spineless tolerance came the whole world of symphony orchestras, opera, and ballet, concerts that put people to sleep"* [21, p. 316–317]. The next passage is focalized through Jill: *"Most of the people in this town felt the same way. But because she hadn't grown up here Jill did not understand the depth of this feeling, the taken-for-granted extent of it"* [21, p. 317].

Her father's choice of a wife is interpreted by "the experiencing I" as an act of rebellion against social opinion, as well as against his family and, specifically, against his elder sister Ailsa: *"My father had never made a parade of it, or a virtue of it, because he didn't go in for virtues. He had liked the idea of Jill's being a musician – not because of the music, but because it made her an odd choice, as did her clothes and her way of living and her wild hair"* [21, p. 317]. The following lines are focalized through the narrator's late father George who died a few months prior to her birth: *"Choosing her, he showed people what he thought of them. Showed those girls who had hoped to get their hooks in him. Showed Ailsa"* [21, p. 317].

This non-acceptance appears again in "Haven", where uncle Jasper refuses to accept his elder sister's choice of profession (a violinist), while also keeping a piano in his house living room: *"every house of a certain style and period used to have one"* [17]. The

uncle Jasper's attitude is rendered in direct speech, questions directed at the narrator, a teenage girl. He searches for allies, even in the niece's parents, trying to justify his own attitude: *"Now, tell me", <...> "tell me, do your parents go in for this sort of thing? What I mean is, this kind of music? Concerts and the like? They ever pay money to sit down for a couple of hours and wear their bottoms out listening to something they wouldn't recognize half a day later? Pay money simply to perpetrate a fraud? You ever know them to do that?"*

*I said no, and it was the truth. I had never known them to go to a concert, though they were in favor of concerts in general"* [17]. The narrator's answer is rendered in indirect speech. By expressing his own attitude Uncle Jasper joins the girls' parents in his confrontation with the classic music, thus choosing a position which is different from a part of the local community, the one that seeks reconciliation with this form of art.

The narrator navigates between her parents' views, she adhered to being at home, and some of the attitudes she finds new at her aunt's family. Gradually, she reconciles with them: *"Some of my ideas had changed during the time I had been living with my aunt and uncle. For instance, I was no longer so uncritical about people like Mona. Or about Mona herself, and her music and her career. I did not believe that she was – or had been – a freak, but I could understand how some people might think so. It wasn't just her big bones and her big white nose, and the violin and the somewhat silly way you had to hold it – it was the music itself and her devotion to it. Devotion to anything, if you were female, could make you ridiculous"*.

Another example of intermental thinking concerns patriotic feelings, making sacrifices in the times of war for the sake of homeland. It could be seen in the following example. The opinion of the local people is expressed by reference "people" and "impersonal you" construction: *"She has known for some time about me and she also knew that George Kirkham might be killed. He was in the air force, after all. (And around her in the Kirkhams' house this afternoon people are saying – though not to her, his widow, or to his sisters – that he was just the sort you always knew would be killed. They mean because he was good-looking and high-spirited and the pride of his family, the one on whom all the hopes had been pinned)"* [12, p. 297–298].

Maneuvering between Ailsa, George's elder sister personal point of view and accepted standards of social behaviour, juxtaposing the attitudes of opposing social groups: "some people" and "others"; "younger people" and "older people" the author manages to represent the polyphonous voices of the local town community, which actually testifies to the fact that

this “social mind” is not so homogenous as it may seem at first glance: *“AILSA smiles all the time. She says, “Well of course I am proud. I am. But I’m not the only one to lose somebody. He did what he had to do”. Some people find her briskness a bit shocking. But others say, “Poor Ailsa”. All that concentrating on George, and saving to send him to law school, and then he flouted her – he signed up; he went off and got himself killed. He couldn’t wait.*

*His sisters sacrificed their own schooling. Even getting their teeth straightened – they sacrificed that. Iona did go to nursing school, but as it turned out getting her teeth fixed would have served her better. Now she and Ailsa have ended up with a hero. Everybody grants it – a hero. The younger people present think it’s something to have a hero in the family. They think the importance of this moment will last, that it will stay with Ailsa and Iona forever. “O Valiant Hearts” will soar around them forever. Older people, those who remember the previous war, know that all they’ve ended up with is a name on the cenotaph. Because the widow, the girl feeding her face, will get the pension”* [21, p. 301–302].

A scene may be shown by means of single focalisation. This scene at a memorial service, in particular, is shown through Ailsa’s perspective, a representative of a certain social circle trying to respect social formalities: *“Ailsa is in a hectic mood partly because she has been up two nights in a row, cleaning. Not that the house wasn’t decently clean before”* [21, p. 302].

*“Now she’s hot under her rouge, twitchy in her dark-blue lace-collared crepe dress. She can’t stay still. She refills the serving plates and passes them around, deplores the fact Ailsa is aware that her voice is too high and that she is smiling too much and that she has poured out tea for people who said they didn’t want any more. In the kitchen, while warming the teapot, she says, “I don’t know what’s the matter with me. I’m all wound up”* [21, p. 302].

In “Haven” no matter how meek and obedient aunt Dawn was, she was absolutely determined to follow the social conventions, even if it meant going against her husband’s will: *“Now she was in a quandary. She understood that when people had invited you to their house and you had gone you were supposed to ask them back. Drinks for drinks, coffee for coffee. No need for a meal. But even what little was required she did not know how to do. My uncle had found no fault with the neighbors – he simply did not like having people in his house, on any account”* [17]. The passage is focalized through aunt Dawn and bears signs of free indirect speech, apart from the last sentence which illustrates the narrator’s perspective. While Aunt Dawn may have personal reservations about the situation asking the neighbours and uncle Jasper’s estranged sister Mona to her house in the

absence of her husband, her social self compels her to observe the social etiquette and maintain relationships within her community, even if it means taking risks or concealing certain truths from her husband.

For the same reason, the main character of the short story “Chance”, Juliet, makes efforts to be nice to a stranger, in order not to be considered “odd” and a bit “strange”: *“Be available, be friendly (especially if you are not popular) – that was what you learned in a small town and also in a girls’ dormitory. Be accommodating to all those who want to suck you dry, even if they know nothing about who you are”* [19]. Her opinion of herself is structured by the common view and rendered in free indirect thought. Juliet also mentions that she majored in Greek and Latin just to be different: *“Then she told him what she had always known she should never tell any man or boy, lest he lose interest immediately”* [19]. She briefly mentions, she does this, because she loves doing it: *“And because I love it. I love all this stuff. I really do”* [19].

Rejection of the social code of conduct resulted in “curious but not unhappy isolation” from the local community as in case of Juliet’s parents in “Soon”: *“They were cut off partly by her mother Sara’s heart trouble but also by the fact that they subscribed to magazines that nobody around them read, listened to programs on the national radio network that nobody around them listened to”* [20].

Another cause for social ostracism may be an unconventional age difference between spouses. The social attitude in this case is expressed by impersonal passive constructions: *“Dr. Shantz is twenty or twenty-five years younger than she is – a thickset, fresh, and amiable-looking man with a high smooth forehead and fair curly hair. They have no children. It is believed that she has some, from a first marriage, but they don’t come to visit her. In fact the story is that Dr. Shantz was her son’s friend, brought home from college, and that he fell in love with his friend’s mother, she fell in love with her son’s friend, there was a divorce, and here they are married, living in luxurious, closemouthed exile”* [21, p. 307–308].

What concerns religion in “Soon”, Juliet’s parents, Sara and Sam, avoid open confrontation with the town community which may be triggered by the fact that they never belonged to any church. Therefore, they choose to compromise instead by saying they are Druids: *“Word had gone around that they belonged to a church not represented in town, and that information had moved them up a notch from having no religion at all”* [20]. Meanwhile, their daughter, Juliet, decides to openly confront the minister (priest) visiting her mother by declaring herself and her husband to be atheists: *“Smiling, Juliet shook her head. “There is no church of our sort. We don’t believe in God””* [20]. Whereas in the

case of older members of town community, Juliet's parents, this dissimilarity is hidden, latent, their daughter exposes it on purpose.

**Conclusions.** Overall, this range of short stories by Alice Munro illustrates complex interplay between the social self and the individual self, intermental mind of an individual and intramental mind of the small-town community of a certain period of time. The spectrum of authorial devices introducing intermental thinking include hedging constructions of various kinds, like “*word have gone around that*”, “*in fact the story is that*”, “*it is believed that*”, “*there seemed to be*”; impersonal “*it*” and “*you*” constructions, as well as the usage of passive voice. In quite a few cases the intermental thinking is addressed by reference to “*people*”, “*a small town*”, quite often their spectrum is extended to generalizations like “*the whole world*”, “*most people*”. Some parts of this local community are referred to as “*some/other people*”, “*older/younger people*”, “*some women*”, “*girls' dormitory*”, “*family*”. In most cases cognitive verbs like “*know*”, “*think*”, “*feel*”, “*consider*”, “*believe*”, expressions like “*put in the same category*” “*be critical of somebody*”, are used to refer to socially distributed cognition. It could be noticed that often a character shares the ideological position of the social group and becomes a spokesperson for the whole intermental unit. The intermental units may hardly ever be regarded as homogenous, but rather polyphonous in expressing the spectrum of different, often conflicting attitudes.

The relationship between intermental and intramental thinking may be discussed in terms of confrontation (either overt or covert) and conformity. Apart from this, they are not static, but rather dynamic, as it may be observed in the case of homodiegetic narrator in “*Haven*” and Juliet's parents in “*Chance*” and “*Soon*”. While the former gradually takes more agreeable stance towards conventional views, the latter choose to openly discard social niceties in certain aspects of their life, and therefore live in “*curious, but not unhappy isolation*”.

Thus, it appears that the methodology used in the paper proved to be efficient in achieving our objective – explaining the nature of the relationship between intermental and intramental mind in the text of short stories by Alice Munro.

The application of the narratological approach, discussed here, may prove to be fruitful to investigate how the dynamics of intermental and intramental thought evolves over time within Alice Munro's short stories. Given the time span of late 1940's and early 1970's considered in this paper, a further study could involve analyzing A. Munro's later works to see, if there are shifts in the representation of intermental and intramental thought under the influence of historical, cultural and political changes in Canada.

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