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## Beauty and Neutrality in Alice Munro's Selected Works: A Socio-Philosophical Reading of Lacanian Ethics

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### ABSTRACT

Lacanian Beauty in his ethics is encapsulated as making decisions and “act[ing] in conformity with one’s desires”. This idea is thought while reading Munro’s short stories to argue humans reconfigure their life through decision, transgression, act and love. Munro’s characters are confined in the condition that contextualizes them through one limited interpretation, detaching them from their individuality. To get out of this condition they detach from the Other via acting on their Real desire. So the Real opens the space for the decision that postulates the possibility for transgression. Thus, it is claimed making decisions leads to transgression that necessitates act whereby love is experienced. This study through analyzing decision, transgression, act, love and their relation introduces *neutrality* as a novel idea about a stance in which Beauty in Lacanian ethics is founded. It demonstrates neutrality is a pure communication area not polluted by Symbolic Order, a singularity, a power stance, a varietal stance in which love is the law. In this neutral singularity, humans succeed in living a life in its full. Lacanian ethics and sociology are interconnected to demonstrate the new context of life human can live so as to bring forth new outlooks on ethics including Beauty.

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## Introduction

Jacques Lacan and his theories have always been of interest in the field of psychology, but this article emphasizes Lacan's view as a full-fledged philosopher and considers him first and foremost an ethicist. Lacan's concept of Beauty in his ethics is encapsulated as making decision and "act[ing] in conformity with one's desires" (Lacan, 1992, 311). The present study is an attempt to analyze and develop Lacan's ideas about ethics including Beauty through Munro's short stories. It is the simultaneous development of both Lacan and Munro. To do so the situation of society in Munro's fictions is illustrated and it is represented how the characters move outside symbolic order and succeed in reconfiguration of their life and live it in its full through decision, transgression, act and love.

Lacanian ethics represents Lacan as a social and philosophical critic; it exhorts us to resist the hegemonic sociality and the Other's desire and not be a victim of the Other's desire by following our own Real desires. For Lacan desire is different from need and demand, desire is shaped beyond need or demand. Desire is not desire for an object. What Lacan means by desire are not the desires that are interiorized into one's unconscious by the superego and desires of the Other. Real desire is not misled by the Good, it is rather the individualistic Real desire that belongs to each person. It is a truth that can't be evaluated through external criteria rather it is something that hides within the subject. The Real desire is different from the utilitarian desire of the Other. Real desires arise because of "a good object", "an object of love" (Lacan, 2005, 243), the Thing, not because something is forbidden. Real desire arises for the object that has the echo of the Thing; hence, it helps us to be closer to the Thing.

Lacanian ethics belongs to the realm of the Real since it is a realm that is not polluted by norms and conventions of the Symbolic Order since it is where one can have access to his Real desires regardless of the desires that are imposed on him and even registered on his unconscious as his own by the Other. Lacanian ethics is nothing but recognizing one's Real desire, the desire that has an aura of the Thing and acting on that.

Lacanian ethics doesn't infer one is free to do anything he wishes; it doesn't follow the doctrines of hedonism. It doesn't support anarchy, it is ethical because it is an act committed, a choice made by the person who is victimized in a way or two. Lacan wants human beings to be aware that the Other's desire is different from one's own Real desires. Lacanian ethics encourages human beings not to relinquish their own desires and instead be loyal to their desires and persist in them. Lacan announces ignoring one's desire is a kind of treachery to oneself. It exhorts the individual to dare and not to be restricted to the norms and conventions of the Symbolic Order that defines things as good or bad, as ethical or unethical. Lacanian ethics seeks to rupture the subject's over-compliance with the Other's desire and that is the beauty of the individual's choice. Lacanian ethics leads to essential personal and social transformations; it reminds us we are able to live a different life, a life different from what we used to know as the only way of life due to social and cultural order.

Alice Munro as revealed in her fiction more than anything is in search of “a more abundant life” (Bloom, 2009, 3) in which one has an active role in shaping his life rather than being passive and living a life till death without being able to embrace what life is indeed about. A life in which, one feels free, happy and self-satisfied. A life one can live freely and courageously for oneself relieved of societies or others’ expectations, limitations and prohibitions so as to get some good out of life not a victimized life filled with regret. Munro gets the material of her stories from the life she sees around herself and real experiences. Munro’s short stories are “a sustained interrogation of realism...it is “real life” mingled with social world “that necessitates constant revision of codes and conventions” (Kroller, 2004, 272), in order to be completely detached from social ideologies. Alice Munro is well aware of the dilemmas human beings confronted with in the contemporary area and through the characters of her fiction meticulously reveals the human condition in a world that is surrounded by society’s conventions and its suffocating power over individuals’ way of life.

The present research explores and addresses selected stories from four collections of the 2013 Nobel Prize winner Alice Munro. “Heirs of the Living Body” from the collection of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971); and “Floating Bridge” from the collection of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001). The sections of this essay will discuss how Munro’s characters in the chosen fictions succeed in reconfiguring and living their life in full through decisions, transgression, acts and love in order to prove neutrality is a stance in which Lacanian Beauty is founded. First, the bad condition the characters trapped into will be represented. Then, the decisions the characters make will be comprehensively argued. After that this essay will consider the acts the characters commit regarding their decisions and it will be represented that decisions lead to transgression. Next, love and its role in Lacanian Beauty will be examined. Finally, Lacanian Beauty and neutrality will be considered.

### **1. Bad Condition**

In these fictions Munro’s characters are trapped into bad conditions, conditions that are not neutral and are fed up. They are surrounded by society’s pre-defined roles and rules and are supposed to live in accordance with the norms of their social system, its expectation and what it imposes as the proper way of life. They are confined in the condition which contextualizes them through one limited interpretation detaching them from their individuality by which they may live in their own full desire.

This contextualized condition understood as the other practices its power over their life and takes their lives and actions under control in order to follow its desire and doesn’t let them live a life they truly want. It tries to shape their life, decline their autonomy, individuality and independency through prohibition and ignorance; it tries to reinforce some belief on individuals’ mind and shape their life through normalizing certain thoughts and values; through designating specific way of life, imposing its own desire as the only possible existing truth and erasing the

possibility of other desires and other ways of life except what it defines. It does not give them enough space to decide and exclude them easily if they don't follow its desire.

Because of the penetration of the hegemonic Other's desire into the individuals' mind, they are deceived by the Other and are affected by what it prescribes as the only way of life. That's how unknowingly they strengthen the Other's desire. They're surrounded by destructive social patterns and expectations that are nonsense and, in some cases, turns into business. They are living in a world that social position defines their values. Munro's characters are marginalized because of the arbitrary social classification.

The individuals for getting the approval of society must wear masks instead of being who they truly are and doing what they truly want to do. The Other desires passive individuals with victim mentality trapped into past because these people would never act on their desires so they are harmless. The Other tries its best to prevent the characters from acting on their desire; therefore, on the one hand, it suppresses ambitiousness and advocates sacrificing one's own desire and on the other hand, it conveys feeling of guilt and ominous as the result of acting in conformity with one's desire instead of following society's desire. It respects those who choose not to take action on their desire. They are tired of the demanding Other that follows the "morality of power" (Lacan, 1992, 315) that deep inside has only one plan: to preserve "the services of goods, to keep the social working and, thus, to sublimate desire" (Neill, 2011, 238); they never live for themselves. They suffer living a life that turns into jail because of their over-compliance with the Other's desire and wearing the garment of a victim who in silence tolerates the condition. They feel devastated.

They couldn't be relieved from distressed moments via momentary distractions provided by the Symbolic Order. Because of the distractions that prevail in society humans forget their priority is to recognize and act on their desire. Their responsibility is to take action; not be passive and indifferent towards their desire because of "social compliance" (Žižek, 2000, 50), social obedience. Everyone is responsible for his own desire and "fidelity to one's desire" (153) is to be emphasized since desire "does not have the character of a universal law" it is particular for each individual (Lacan, 1992, 24). They must not be a victim of the Other's desire.

## **2. Decision**

### **2.1. Stay in Comfort Zone and Never Live for Oneself in "Heirs of the Living Body"**

In "Heirs of the Living Body" there are some characters who could've lived a different prosperous life if they "act in conformity with [their] desires" (Lacan, 1992, 311) but they choose to repress their ambitions and not to take action on their desire. One of these characters is Ruth McQueen, Del's cousin, who "had won a scholarship to go to college, for she was very clever, but she thought it over and turned it down, she decided to stay home" (Munro, 2009, 41) and not to follow her ambition because she is afraid of failure. She is "afraid to stick her head out of her own burrow" (42) since coming out of her comfort zone is a risky path that can lead to failure and she doesn't want to make a fool of herself and be laughed at by others while having access to one's desires and

making a decision with regard to that requires putting aside fears (Lacan, 1992, 320) so it is the society that molds her life in spite of the fact that she is clever enough to mold her own life by following her ambitions.

Similarly, though Uncle Craig is “one of the smartest... and could have been in the Cabinet, if he'd wanted...he never ran” (Munro, 2009, 41), because he also is afraid of failure. For the same reason he never published thousands of pages he had written about the history of the county for years. Also, Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace choose to stay the same (60), they never have any ambition, believing there is no other way of life except doing house chores (36) since Symbolic Order “prohibits every broad, positive vision of possibilities” (Badiou, 2001, 14). They “nourish and admire” (60) men of the family. They never live for themselves and relinquishing their desire for the sake of others is a sort of “betrayal” to themselves (Lacan, 1992, 321). Hence, they never reconfigure their lives and stay the same. Since they don't “think they're somebody” (Munro, 2009, 41), and have no desire of their own to follow. They are “ordinary man” not the “hero” of their lives (Lacan, 1992, 321).

Also “Aunt Elspeth could play the piano by ear” (Munro, 2009, 40) which requires a great talent but when Del's mother “offered to teach her to read music” so she can “play really good things” (40), she doesn't accept with an “unnatural laugh” (40) as if she offers something farfetched since she doesn't even imagine she deserves to have ambition and she can live for herself doing something she is talented in and enjoying. As a result, their life is spoiled by staying in their comfort zone and never living in accordance with their Real desire since being trapped in the Symbolic Order doesn't let them have a glimpse of the Thing (Kesel, 2009, 56).

## **2.2. Be Rebellion and Live for Oneself in “Heirs of the Living Body”**

Del is an ambitious, curious girl so when she heard that Uncle Craig passed away her mind filled with so many questions about death that irritates her mother since she supposes she can protect herself by knowing about it. (Munro, 2009, 48) She is shocked and confused by the suddenness of death; by human mortality and the fact that it is powerful enough to take one's life at any moment. Munro's stories illustrate “the impossibility of taking anything in life...for granted” (Heble, 1994, ix). Picturing Uncle Craig's death Munro demonstrates that the characters would live differently if they recognized they were mortal beings. As Del declares Uncle Craig “really believed in the world of public events, of politics” (Munro, 2009, 35) so he busies himself with the history of the country and compiling a family tree while “These were not what mattered; it was daily life that mattered” (36), enjoying every bit of daily life and live it in its full is what matters, instead of ignoring it and wasting it by doing something that might bring social admiration for him; therefore, his life is wasted since he doesn't act on her desire and instead acted in conformity with what society desires. Hence, referring to human mortality, one needs to make the best of his life by living it in its full, acting on his desire and “confront the relation between his actions and his desire in the immediacy of the present” (Evans, 2006, 57) and act on his desire without hesitation.

Del facing the sudden death of Uncle Craig realizes the human mortality and her own. So she decides to be rebellious and to live for herself. She “challenges the authoritarian and totalitarian structure of the substantial order” (Karimi & Binandeh, 2021, 248). She decides to live in conformity with her desire and doesn’t let others make her have to do what she doesn’t like. Actual confrontation with one’s desire is “a moment of irrationally driven rebellion” (Kesel, 2009, 260). She believes they can’t put her outside. she is so resistant that she doesn’t allow them to exclude her or treat her as a “borderline case” (Munro, 2009, 57) since “ambition for undifferentiated totality” is to be rebuked (Sbriglia & Žižek, 2020, 180), so Del knows she is different and is ok with that since being different from what the Other announces as normal is not wrong. Society can’t repress her individuality by labeling her. She is an ambitious girl with her singular desires and thoughts.

### **2.3. Enjoy the Time Given and Challenge the Other’s Power over one’s Life in “Floating Bridge”**

The hope of having the chance of still living is a turning point for Jinny to live the life she desires instead of wasting her life merely living and passing time. For many years she awaits death, these are the times that though she was alive she didn’t live. Therefore, in the time given, she challenges being under the power of Neal or anybody else anymore; it is Neal who decides for her life, but now she decides to decide for her life; every moment of that. She resists the “morality of the power” (Lacan, 1992, 315) through taking control of her life on her own hand instead of living based on society’s expectation of a sick wife. Jinny seeks to rupture being overly compliant with the Other’s desire since by closing her eyes on her desires and acting in conformity with Neal’s desire she only intensifies Neal’s power over her life. She decides not to cede her desire to his power, to be the captain of the ship of her life and think for herself instead of being the obedient passive observer of a life that is passing and awaits death.

Ricky’s caring behavior reminds Jinny she is still alive. Ricky is compassionate and thoughtful “He seemed to understand things, though. He seemed to understand that she was exhausted and in some kind of muddle” (Munro, 2001, 76). Therefore, when he sees Jinny does not feel well he offers to give her a ride home, and on the way he takes her to a beautiful place “not so many people even know this road” exists to provide some peace for her. She stands on a floating bridge Where she hears “a different sound... Water in the reeds, lapping water,” that is called “Tannin”. Ricky talks to her about different things except her sickness. He shows her something she has “never seen before” (80).

The act “happens to the subject that he performs an act, whether he wants to or not” (Zupančič, 2000, 100); therefore, after being in a route she never was before and experiencing the things, she never did, the Jinny returns from the road was not the “same one” (Munro, 2001, 81). It gives her the power to make the best of “the time given” and live her life in its full.



The little incident on the bridge works as a revelation for her when she truly “break[ed] down” (Ruti, 2012, 78). This beautiful improvised moment gives her the awareness that as long as she is alive, she can enjoy the time given otherwise she will be regretful. As Lacan discusses “the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire” (Lacan, 1992, 319); therefore, she decides to enjoy the time given and embrace the present moment and live it in its full instead of worrying about future. She understands that each little moment of life counts.

### **3. Act**

#### **3.1. Speak Out One’s Desire and its Effect in “Heirs of the Living Body”**

In Uncle Craig’s funeral her malicious cousin tries to force her to see Uncle Craig, in an attempt to escape she bites her as hard as she can (Munro, 2009, 56), she tries to free herself from all the pressures that want her to do something she doesn’t want.

Her act is decisive. Nobody should “dare” (56) to ask her to do anything she doesn’t want to do. The Other can’t decide for her and can’t make her have to do what she doesn’t like; she doesn’t have to follow the social conventions. She “dare[s]” (Žižek, 2000, 392) to disrupt the Other’s desire even if all hates her, she prefers this hatred since it gives her “gift of wings” (Munro, 2009, 56) to be free from the Other’s desire; she commits a radical act, she “step[s] out of the symbolic in a “suicidal” gesture of a radical act” (Žižek, 2005, 140).

“But no; freedom is not so easily come by” (Munro, 2009, 56). Ignoring the Other’s desire and being defiant has some consequences. Aunt Moira clenches her shoulders and shakes her “Mad dog!” (56). The Other blames, insults and locks up those who act freely on their desire. But despite all the consequences Del doesn’t do what she doesn’t want to do; she doesn’t go to the funeral and resists against the “barbaric” decision taken regarding the social codes, a decision that subjects a “too highly strung” child to a funeral. (57)

When Del in an act of startling bravery reacts to what she doesn’t want to do, when she speaks out her desire to a society that prefers to have her locked up and shut up, the wrongness of social conventions is bold; Symbolic Order is not a consistent structure without any lack, it is not flawless (Žižek, 1989, 137) since it is not a predetermined law that’s why Munro believes “real life”...necessitates constant revision of codes and conventions” (Redekop, 2004, 272). Therefore, because she speaks out, her desire is respected, she “was surrounded and taken care of” and she was directed to another room and “put on the sofa, blanketed...given the cake and the tea” (Munro, 2009, 57). Everyone tries to silence Del and makes her have to do what is supposed to be socially accepted but she, nonetheless, speaks out and acts in conformity with her desire.

On the other hand, when she speaks out others start to sympathize and enlarge it. Those who experience the same thing but don’t dare to resist it and blindly submit to it and keep silent start to talk about their experience “I passed out at a funeral myself, one time before I was married” (57) said one of the ladies. So, her speaking out helps others to know they are not the only persons who

don't like to participate in funerals and they shouldn't feel ashamed or guilty. They are not obliged to do what bothers them and what they don't like merely because it is socially expected.

"The radical character of the act ... would be that which would fundamentally redefine what might be considered as good" (Neill, 2011, 222). In other words, decisions might lead to a social transformation by destroying the established symbolic order and bringing about some space for a new way of living and seeing the world. Thus, Del's act is transformative and progressive; social conventions are changeable and they will change only when the individual speaks out her desire and doesn't surrender in silence to whatever society affirms. Accordingly, the personal reconfiguration of the character's life ultimately leads to social reconfiguration.

### **3.2. Come Out of Comfort Zone in "Floating Bridge"**

The lack of attention to her and her decision makes her so angry that she runs away from home hoping Neal would worry about her and in this way, she can attract his attention. Feeling insecure, unable to make the proper decision for her life and afraid of being alone because of being affected by what people write on the walls, she returns to the same route she came from. (Munro, 2001, 53) The fear of loneliness is the reason for her decision to come back home and not act on her desire which is freedom from a loveless life with a husband who doesn't care about her decisions and desires.

One of the most courageous decisions is releasing something that hurts you and your emotions. Feeling suffocated Jinny transgresses the expectation of the social norms from a sick wife and instead of "*abdication*" (Carrington, 1989, 12), wears the garment of a victim who in silence tolerates her husband's flirting with another woman and waiting for death, accepts Ricky's drive and by doing so she transgresses Neal's power over her life and tries to experience a new way of life. She resists the power that "blocks other possible worlds, as a blockage that makes possibles impossible, such that possibles are lost before they can be lived, experienced, or imagined" (Ahmed, 2010, 165), realizing another way of life is possible.

She learns as far as "she wanted everything familiar and stable" and fear of change involves her decision she won't be free. In order to challenge the Other's power in her life, enjoy the time given and live her life in its full she comes out of her comfort zone by going to a new road, on a floating bridge and doing as Ricky suggests "Walk out on it,...Go on" (Munro, 2001, 81). Something she wouldn't do before this awakening out of fear "If this was happening back in her old, normal life, it was possible that she might now begin to be frightened. If she was back in her old, normal life she would not be here at all" (80). She is a hero because she refuses to "cede on" her desire though she knows it is a "risky path" and nothing can be taken for granted (Lacan, 1992, 323) in the floating bridge of life.

Jinny transgresses the usual route and tries to experience another route instead of returning to "the common path" thinking to herself that she isn't "worth that much" (Lacan, 1992, 321). She comes out of her comfort zone and does and sees what she has never done or seen before. It is a



vital act. Her choice “brings to light the essential *power* of being human” (Shepherdson, 2008, 76) and her power of making decisions that is in conformity with what she really desires relieves her of the tricks of the Symbolic Order. In order to live a life in its full and released from being imprisoned under the Other’s power one should come out of her comfort zone; go to routes, see things and do things she never done before.

#### **4. Love**

##### **4.1. Love Overcomes Fear in “Heirs of the Living Body”**

Del is a young girl who is afraid of seeing Uncle Craig when he passes away because she is afraid of seeing a dead person. No matter how hard others try to force her to visit Uncle Craig for the last time she refuses. Finally, they realize her fear and send her to another room to rest. Del feels ashamed “Being forgiven creates a peculiar shame” (Munro, 2009, 58) the horrible, voluptuous feeling of exposure, impotence and self-betrayal, since shame “arises as a sign of what is missing...shame engenders the feeling of nihilation” (Prudente, 2016, 728) and suffocation, “I felt held close, stifled, as if it was not air” (Munro, 2009, 58), said Del. The Other creates a feeling of shame in her by forgiving her as if she makes a mistake and misses something and this causes her to feel a thick burden on her shoulders that makes her feel suffocated in a world she lives.

“The entire phenomenology of shame” and “fear” produced by the Other (Lacan, 1991, 215). The Other creates the feeling of shame in her because of her fear. That is to say, her fear leads to her shame; therefore, shame can “be conceived as an effect of the social bond and discourse” (Prudente, 2016, 730) because she is not what they expect and desire. Shame is the result of the reluctance “to mimic the norm” (Goldman, 2007, 813). Therefore, Del is excluded because of her fear and this creates a feeling of shame in her.

When Del stays in a distant room alone and in peace with some cakes and tea, she suddenly becomes herself again. When far from the Other and the pressures it puts on her she calms down in a separate room, she succeeds in having access to another realm, the realm of the Real; a neutral stance without any fear, a realm of love. Del is in “that zone where nothing can touch her now, or make her hesitate for an instant” (Shepherdson, 2008, 66), she goes to see him.

Uncle Craig was a man who was “restful to be with” (Munro, 2009, 34), Del loves Uncle Craig and love is a power that has nothing to do with the law of the Symbolic Order that obliges people to see the dead man for the last time as a duty, as a ritual, as a must, since “The more love is rendered obligatory, a duty, whether religious, moral, or otherwise, the more it shrivels up and dies like a plant cultivated under the wrong conditions” (Fink, 2016, 161)

Therefore, the power of Real love gives Del enough strength to willingly go and see Uncle Craig for the last time. Love provides her with the power to do something she never imagined she could do, something that surprises herself and her mother who was “biting her lips, and looking preposterously hopeful” (Munro, 2009, 59). Accordingly having access to one’s desires and

making decisions with regard to that requires putting aside fears. (Lacan, 1992, 320) and love gives her the power to face and overcome her fear and make “a radical decision” (Neill, 2011, 117).

Hence, fear works as a deterrent and obstacle to act on one’s desire but the power of love lets her overcome fear and visit Uncle Craig. When Del overcomes her fear and visits him because of the power love gives her no obligation to others, she feels “relieved” (Munro, 2009, 59), power of love frees her from “shame” and “helplessness” (58) provided by the Other. Love is relieving. Her love helps her to be close to the Thing and be in the realm of the Real; in this realm love overcomes fear.

#### **4.2. Love the Unique Value of One’s Being in “Floating Bridge”**

Love plays a significant role in Jinny’s life. On the one hand, Jinny lives in a loveless circumstance and is apathetic about her aloofness and her feelings. She is trapped in a loveless life with Neal. Living a loveless life, in other words, lack of love and the fact that nobody cares about her feelings bothers her and might be the reason for her sickness in the first place. “Where there is a deadlock in a love relationship – some kind of unsaid problem or quiet discontent – this will be expressed through the body instead of being expressed directly” (Hewitson, 2016, 12). Lacan argues about it as *L’amour* which “is what appears in the form of bizarre signs on the body” (Lacan, 1998, 4)

On the other hand, Ricky’s love for Jinny is a kind of love in the realm of the Real. His love for her is because of “the unique value of her being” (Lacan, 1992, 279) not because of some qualities she has, not because of some benefits; his love is detached from “narcissism and rivalry” (Shepherdson, 2008, 204). It is unaccountable. He cares about her regardless of the meaningless Symbolic Order; she is a married woman and it is none of his business to care about her condition. Ricky loves her because of her being, because of what she is since Ricky’s “love transcends the imaginary order” (Chiesa, 2007, 23) and is “no longer conceived of as a passion but as an active gift, is always directed, beyond imaginary captivity, towards the being of the loved subject” (Lacan, 1991, 276).

Ricky does his best to encourage her to be herself, behave the way she likes and act on her desire. “True love involves an act of absolute freedom” (Tarpey, 2013, 8), he separates her from the symbolic world and brings her to a space where she can be absolutely free from all social norms and breathe in the realm of the Real in order to have access to her desire and live it in its full. Unlike Neal’s narcissistic controlling love, Ricky’s Real love paves the way for her to recognize her Real desire and be bold enough to act in conformity with it. That’s why he doesn’t decide for her and instead asks her questions to know what she desires “You getting tired? You want to go home? You want me to go in and tell your husband you want to go home?” And when she says: “No. Don’t do that,” he accepts it unquestionably “Okay. Okay. I won’t.” (Munro, 2001, 77) “So—you want me to drive you home or what?” (78) Ricky asks, and he gives her a ride only because she wants.

Ricky is in the realm of the Real. He is a boy who loves not only Jinny but even a porcupine merely because of the value of its being (Munro, 2001, 80) Ricky is close to the Thing, he values things whether human or not for their beings and cares about their feelings and desires. He well-recognizes that the porcupine is scared to death just like Jinny who is “exhausted” to death (Munro, 2001, 76) and he helps them both to escape from the “muddle” (76) they are in and be free by his love. Ricky’s love gives Jinny the power to come back to life, recognize her desire, act on it and live a life in its full. Hence, Real love is the power that gives courage and freedom whereas love outside the realm of the Real weakens and imprisons.

#### **4.3. Love Brings Being Face to Face with Itself in “Floating Bridge”**

The love Jinny receives from Ricky reconfigures her life. It is because of this unexpected love that Jinny releases from the ugly symbolic world and enters the Lacanian world of Beauty and revives. Love has the power to let her experience “freedom” (Santner, 2001, 87), unbelievable happiness and revive. Therefore, on the floating bridge, she could hear the “Tannin,” (Munro, 2001, 81) of love. This Tannin is new for her, it is something she never heard and experienced before.

Munro’s stories are about the “stimulating force that love can exert on people’s lives” (Nath, 2020, 1). Thus, the power of love enables Jinny to make choices that would seem impossible according to the Other because of her health issue. That is to say, regardless of her faintness she goes on a new road and experiences new things whereby she gets her passion back. More than her sickness, the loveless life with Neal is killing her and making her live as if she is dead.

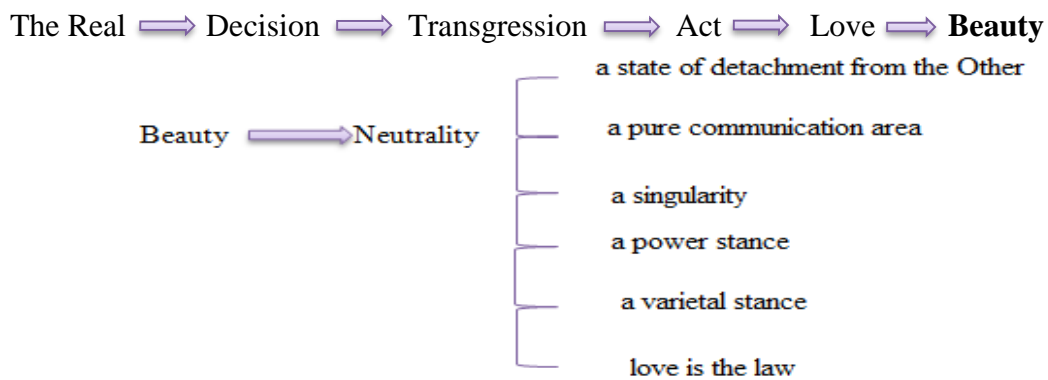
Lacan emphasizes “the function of love in the truth-process” (Badiou, 2006, 8), that is to say, “love...is what brings being face to face with itself” (10) and let Jinny to have access to her Real self and her Real desire the one that is closest to the Thing but was hidden and suppressed by the Other, the one that forgets she is alive and can enjoy her life. Love brings her face to face with herself whereby it enables her to make decisions with regard to what is Real and regardless of reality of the Symbolic Order and its expectation of a sick wife. As a result, Munro emphasizes the power of love enables Jinny to reconfigure her life and live it in its full, it enables her to experience a life she has never had, it enables her to come out of her comfort zone and does and see what she has never done or seen before because this is her Real self, not the one that is shaped by the Other.

#### **5. Methodology**

This study used the argumentative method through the theoretical analytical design to discuss neutrality as a stance in which Beauty in Lacanian ethics is founded. Lacan’s concept of Beauty in his ethics is encapsulated as making decisions and “act[ing] in conformity with one’s desires” (Lacan, 1992, 311). This idea is to be thought in order to prove human beings can reconfigure their life and live it in its full through what will be developed as decision, transgression, act and love.

## 6. Results

The findings of the present study through analyzing decision, transgression, act, love and their relation introduced *neutrality* as a novel idea about a stance in which Beauty in Lacanian ethics is founded. This neutrality is demonstrated to be a state of detachment from the Other, it is a pure communication area, a singularity, a power stance and a varietal stance in which Real love rules. In this neutral stance, human beings succeed in the reconfiguration of their life and living their life in full through decisions, transgression, acts and love. That is to say, the Real opens the space for the decision that postulates the possibility for transgression. That being so it is claimed that making decisions leads to transgression which necessitates act, whereby love is experienced. Lacanian ethics and sociology were interconnected in order to demonstrate the new context of life humans can live and brought about new perspectives on ethics including Beauty.



### Conclusion: Beauty and Neutrality

Munro's characters are confined in the bad condition which contextualizes them through one limited interpretation detaching them from their individuality by which they may live in their own full desire. In order to get out of this condition instead of staying in comfort zone they decide to be rebellion, live for themselves, enjoy the time given and challenge the Other's power over their life. Their decision leads to transgression. Therefore, they speak out their desire and come out of their comfort zone whereby they experience a sort of love that overcomes fear; loves the unique value of one's being and brings them face to face with themselves.

Accordingly, reading Lacan through Munro leads to the idea of neutrality as a novel idea about a singular state of life that removes the border between the social and ethical area. This state of life enacts pure communication not polluted with all other existing social and ethical theories; it brings the social and ethical state into one space in a neutral stance. In this neutral singularity, the individual is different from every moment and each individual is a particular being, different from the other one. This singular state is to respect differences whereby a varietal stance is experienced

in which no one exercises power over others so it leads to freedom and living in a world one desires to live in. It is in this space one can live his/her life in this full.

This neutrality is a state of detachment from the Other so it gives power to the individual; it is a stance in which love rules. It is filled with de-normalization, un-conditionality and unrestrictedness whereby diversity, difference and singularity which is the prerequisite of novel possibilities prevails; this stance is related with an unconditional and insistent desire. When the individuals act in conformity with their desire, they portray humans' power of taking action on their desire regardless of the Other's desire; so, they are in a power stance. The Other can't prevent them from acting on their desire. When they do what they must do and decide is the moment they feel free and powerful. They are in a power stance since they can reconfigure their life. So Lacanian Beauty illustrates not only a neutral stance but also a power stance. Decision, transgression, act and love create Beauty.

Lacanian ethics and sociology are interconnected in order to bring forth new outlooks on decision, transgression, act and love so as to demonstrate the new context of life humans can live and bring about new perspectives on ethics including Beauty.

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