



Tarrying with Trauma  
While Improvising  
Gender in *Who Do  
You Think You Are?*

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**ALICE MUNRO**

WHO DO YOU  
THINK YOU ARE?



“For Munro, a thing can be true, and not true, but true nonetheless.”

— Margaret Atwood, *The Guardian*.

Image: Alice Munro.

# Overview:

- Trauma and Gender Scripts
- Sadomasochism
- Halberstam's "Queer Art of Failure"
- Reconnection and Authenticity

# Trauma: Punitive Beatings and Imaginative Legacies

- Rose's father, emotional codebook of trauma
- Rose's step-mother, Flo: emotional economies
- Cultural ethic of "who do you think you are?"
- Cultural role of women as "smashed": dissociation

# Sadomasochism: *The Beggar Maid*

- Rose and Patrick's violent marriage





## “The Queer Art of Failure”: Productive Improvisations (Halberstam qtd. in Goldman 87)

- Motherhood
- Simon: Rose’s letting go

# Reconnection and Authenticity



- Flo: County Home
- Ralph Gillespie: Partner in mime and Halberstam's "fantastical failures" (qtd. in Goldman 88)

*Who Do You Think You Are?* as part  
of Kali Tal's "Literature of Trauma."

- Munro's own "major claim to shame" (Atwood 99).

Authenticity is, for “Munro’s women,”  
“an essential element, like air.”

— Margaret Atwood, *My Best Stories*.

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