

The Nobel Prize Winner Who Failed Her Daughter with the Help of Many Others

Even powerful celebrities, such as 'Gothic Feminist' writer
Alice Munro,
are not immune from the prejudices of the day.

By Phyllis Chesler

Many Media Mavens were shocked – shocked! – when they learned of acclaimed short story writer Alice Munro's cruel abandonment of her daughter, Andrea, and her undying love for her husband, Gerald Fremlin, the man who began sexually assaulting Alice's biological daughter and his stepdaughter when she was only nine years old.

Such a shocked reaction betrays an enormous ignorance about the nature of incest families and about sexual violence in general.



Many feminist trauma-related researchers and clinicians have long noted that the mothers who are married to pedophiles, including biological fathers and stepfathers who prey on pre-adolescent girls, (or boys), invariably choose the predator over their own daughters; deny that such abuse ever happened; claim that the victims are lying;

and if they concede sexual acts did occur, blame it on the child herself, who is portrayed as a seductive “homewrecker,” a Lolita, even if they are under 10 years old. (READ MORE from Phyllis Chesler: [Hitler Absolutely Plundered Europe](#))

Such mothers also view themselves as the real victims; resent being forced to choose between a husband whom they love and/or between a husband’s much needed paycheck and the needs of a troublesome daughter. If anything, such mothers also tend to ostracize or even exile the reporting child if she insists on continuing to talk about it or if she demands that the mother protect her.

Many incest victims in therapy are far more wounded by their mother’s betrayal than they are by their father, stepfather, or older brother’s sexual abuse. They continue to suffer this maternal failure-to-protect even more than the sexual violence itself. In part, this is also due to our society’s holding mothers to much higher expectations and punishing them for failing even a little, not to mention a lot – as well as to

our complicated discomfort about and fear of being re-victimized by police or judges when we dare accuse a male of intimate of sexual violence.

[Munro](#) was a typical mother in all the ways listed above. By the time Andrea truly confronted her, it was too late in the day and Alice “[still loved](#) (her husband) too much ... (she insisted that) our misogynistic culture is to blame, and if (Andrea wanted me) to deny (my) own needs, sacrifice for (my) children and make up for the failings of men” – she would not do so. When Retired Ontario Provincial Police Detective, Sam Lazarevich, came to arrest Fremlin, who confessed, and was found guilty in court, the [arresting police officer](#) was “disturbed by the writer’s reaction ... a very angry Munro accused her daughter of lying.”

“That’s your daughter, aren’t you going to defend your daughter?” he recalls.

Lazarevich said he has “no idea why the arrest didn’t receive media coverage back then and that the prosecutor at the time should be asked that.”

Munro’s genius did not save her from common, vulgar prejudices. Why should we expect her to rise above a pervasive preference for men and/or an even greater prejudice against other women, especially younger women, even daughters? The fact that she was also a much revered, Nobel Prize-winning short story writer does not mean that she would personally, privately, act against the patriarchal grain. Or against her own perceived interests.

Please understand: I do not think that we should cancel Alice Munro’s work based on her human imperfections. Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound were all Jew-haters and yet I would never support eliminating their work from the canon of great literature. Should we avoid reading Oscar Wilde because, in his time, he was jailed as a criminal for having

had sex with another, younger man?

I must note that Alice Munro was not the only “shockingly” guilty party. The problem is far bigger than just one person.

Munro had many collaborators and bystanders right by her side. In Andrea Robin Skinner’s case, née Munro, neither her stepmother Carole, her biological father Jim, or her stepbrother, Andrew, sided with her when she revealed what had happened. They chose not to tell Alice anything. They all kept silent, all kept the “peace.”

It’s even bigger than the family, with whom Andrea has since reconciled. Media coverage of Fremlin’s guilty verdict was very muted in Canada and elsewhere. Various Munro biographers refused to include these facts in their work, including in the revised editions.

What happened to Andrea? Immediately after the first sexual assault, her life changed for the worse. She did not feel safe at home. She did not think that anyone who mattered would believe her.

Andrea [writes](#) that she “developed bulimia, insomnia, and migraines,” which she “attributed to the abuse.” She writes that her “private pain was taking a toll. In university, my grades plummeted and bulimia took over my life. I dropped out of an international development program and gave up my dream of working abroad. [By the time](#) I was 25, I couldn’t picture a future for myself.”

When Andrea herself became a mother, she [told](#) Alice that “she would not allow Fremlin near *her* children.” Alice, who could not drive, still insisted on having Fremlin drive the adult Andrea and her young daughter to the airport. She refused to visit Andrea without Fremlin. That’s when Andrea cut off all contact with her mother.

Thus, for a long while, Andrea felt betrayed by her immediate

family – and then she lost the only mother she would ever have. They never reconciled.

The #MeToo movement exposed many men of power for having sexually assaulted or for having demanded sexual favors from vulnerable or ambitious female employees. Each such powerhouse was also protected by countless enablers, conspirators, collaborators, and bystanders. This Munro-Fremlin-Skinner story is but one example among thousands, maybe millions of other relatively “unimportant,” or at least unknown men (union bosses, shop stewards, foremen, small businessmen), and how they fare after committing such crimes. (*READ MORE: [Immigration of Cultures Hostile to the West Must End](#)*)

Survivors of violence, even atrocities, say they are haunted by those who heard their screams but turned their backs, closed their doors, remained neutral, and refused to take any stand other than an opportunistic one. One cannot remain a bystander without becoming complicit.