

Resilience and Hope in Elizabeth McCracken's *The Souvenir Museum*

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Abstract:

"The Souvenir Museum" is a collection of short stories by Elizabeth McCracken which was published in 2021. The readers of this collection are presented with a domain of profound passions and mental depths that brighten the core of humanity. In one of the stories is the title piece, "The Souvenir Museum", a moving writing that observes themes of resilience, hope, and the unpredicted changes that form the individual life. Through vivid description, layered narration, and a convincing lesson, this story reflects the essence of human power in time of suffering. It is significant to mention that most previous studies about this collection tackled the clear themes concerning grief, marriage, and compassion but without dealing with the text as an individual scope to reflect the psychological development of the characters. Furthermore, the story has not yet been adequately studied through modern psychological, emotional, or trauma-informed frames, notwithstanding its deep connection with loss and existence. This lack leaves "The Souvenir Museum" underexplored as a multifaceted fictional consideration on human resilience that discusses memory, sorrow, and the moral gratitude of everyday lives.

Keywords: *Elizabeth McCracken, hope, love, resilience, The Souvenir Museum.*

الصمود والأمل في "متحف التذكارات" لإليزابيث مراكين

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الملخص:

في مجموعة القصص القصيرة "متحف التذكارات" (٢٠٢١) لإليزابيث مراكين، يُتاح للقراء عالم جديد من المشاعر وعمق فكري يكشف جوهر الإنسانية. إحدى قصص هذه المجموعة، وهي "متحف التذكارات"، قصة مؤثرة تتناول مواضيع الأمل والصمود والتغيرات المفاجئة في الحياة. من خلال شخصياتها الحيوية وأسلوبها الكتابي العميق ورسالتها القوية، تجسد هذه القصة جوهر القوة البشرية في مواجهة الصعاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية : إليزابيث مراكين، متحف التذكارات، الأمل، الصمود، الحب.

Introduction

The fiction of Elizabeth McCracken regularly imitates the silent resilience of everyday people challenging emotional doubt. In "The Souvenir Museum", the author shows moments of weakness and alteration that display the picture of how people recover love, bear loss, and seek for meaning within life's uncertain moments. Amongst the twelve stories in this collection, the title story appeared as a rich meditation on sorrow, remembrance, and regeneration. Through the character of Joanna, the writer searches the elusive ways in which individuals face emotional pain through keeping the memories of hope that help them to not only survive, but to live (Francová, 2023).

Ferry et al. (2024) stated that most stories in this collection show McCracken's large focus with depicting characters who follow the edge between sorrow and survival. Her fiction is notable through an exceptional mixture of grief and satire, engaging readers to observe both the delicacy and fortitude of human feeling. Joanna's trip from the fragments of loss after her father's death and her divorce to the reawakening of self by the sense of motherhood, travel, and reminiscence reflects a prevailing depiction of resilience: the skill to rebuild identity even though when life seems irrevocably different.

The significance of this research paper appears in McCracken's method of dealing with emotional recovery and the psychological scope of hope. Though many modern writings show sadness as an expected reply to trauma, McCracken proposes much deep understanding to the coexistence of sadness and hope. Throughout symbolic descriptions, intergenerational relations, and common flashes, the story of "The Souvenir Museum" exemplifies resilience not as rejection but as reception of life's randomness. This research aims to scrutinize how the writer signifies hope as a transformative energy and how her writing structure echoes the slow development of emotional healing.

Literature Review

Flanagan (2002) article entitled as "ELIZABETH MCCRACKEN (1966-) in *Contemporary American Women Fiction Writers Journal* tackles Elizabeth McCracken's characters, and claimed that the ordinary lives of any character in her stories developed to be more convincing through her close style of narration. The common themes of family, exile, travel, and emotional conflict is heavily there throughout the collection. Repeated characters, particularly Jack and Sadie, provide the collection consistency though every story sustains individuality.

Additionally, in another article by Latiolais (2004) under the title of "The World of Elizabeth McCracken" highlights McCracken's deep narration, noticing her combination of British humour and American openness, the transit goes fluidly across the prose, and her frequent imagery of water, and displacement.

While on the other hand, J. M. Kushner's (1997) "Elizabeth McCracken: Perspectives on Romance and Loss" focused on McCracken's way of depicting sadness and love with stylistic skill. Unlike Seligson (2014) who highpoints the emotional complexity of her stories, formed in part by her knowledge with private misfortune.

Despite the breadth of scholarship on McCracken, very few studies address the title story itself, leaving a critical gap that this paper aims to fill. Since hope in this context functions as a conceptual rather than theoretical element, the analysis focuses on its narrative and emotional manifestations within the story.

Conceptual Framework: Understanding Hope

The study deals with the concept of 'hope' as the essential concern. Although this study does not rely on a heavy theoretical system, a brief conceptual framework clarifies how "hope" functions within the story.

In psychology, hope is usually defined as a forward-looking passionate state that enables individuals to envision better possibilities despite present hardship (Lear, 2006). According to C.R. Snyder's (2002) well-known perspective, hope consists of two elements:

1. **Agency**: the internal conviction that one can move to an aim.
2. **Pathways** : the intellectual capability to imagine ways or options to reach that aim.

Hope is therefore not an abstract demand but a cognitive emotive capability that aids a person tolerate doubt, loss, or expressive clash. Scholars of resilience (e.g., Bonanno, 2004) also claim that hope shows a role in helping characters rebuild meaning after life distractions.

In McCracken's writing, hope does not seem as an outstanding or dramatic change. Instead, it works softly through reminiscence, small sentimental changes, efforts a connection, and the inclination to challenge the past. Joanna's journey exemplifies what psychologists call "everyday hope," a delicate drive that permits individuals to step forward even when they do not fully comprehend what they are pursuing. This framework supports the following analysis.

Discussion

Set in a unassertive seashore city, the story of "The Souvenir Museum" presents characters whose lives interconnect in unpredicted and emotionally deep means. The heroin, Joanna, stances at a crossing after the death of her father and her divorce, both of which have damaged her sense of belonging and identity. Overcome by doubt and yearning for something that bear a resemblance to simplicity, she takes an impulsive journey to Denmark with Leo, her nine-year-old son. This journey develops more than a holiday; it is an inner and spiritual trip to healing, rediscovery, and memory.

The author intertwines a story that shows the difficulty of sorrow and the slow, rough way of emotional rebuilding. Joanna's confusion is proof as she recalls her first love, Aksel, and challenges the uncertainties that have accrued throughout her maturity. Her sense of the lost love loss and family forms all her life. As she mirrors the past and trying to repeat it; "Perhaps she should have known that she would find her lost love" (McCracken, 2021, p. 52). These words clarify that Joanna's journey is driven by an uncertain hope of the past that perhaps provides her with steadiness through her present disintegration.

Joanna's trip to Denmark was in the shallow term due to her son's infatuation with Viking culture and the game of Lego. Leo's enthusiasm to visit the "real Lego land" carries the innocent, simple delight of childhood, yet for Joanna the trip conveys emotional burden.

It is a way of escaping, a pursuit for clearness, and a chance to reconstruct her association with her son after a hard year. McCracken highlights this duality of aim; Leo wants an adventure, whereas Joanna pursues a sense of identity.

As the heroin searches Denmark's unacquainted nature, her psychological conflict deepens. She started to ask herself many questions and wondering. She disputes whether finding her lost love (Aksel) the same or he became a different man after all these years. Is she going to recognize in him the same boy she was in love once?. Her emotional indecision is seen by McCracken's indirect metaphors and images. Joanna, the girl who once assumed that she can "sense" Aksel's company with spontaneous easiness, now recognized that the relation has gone; "Now she detected nothing" (p. 15). The loss of this innate sensation echoes the destruction of her past sense of faith of herself and the love in general.

This loss of the identity exposed the delicate nature of emotional ties and how they change throughout the years. Psychologically speaking, the first love usually holds a influential reminiscence, but the memory turns to be unpredictable when deal with the pressure of sorrow, separation, and the fatigue of parenthood. Joanna's craving to feel alive again is a proof that she needs her past to be repeated because in that time love was everything to her; "flammable, sinkable, rickety... and she thought it now too" (p. 20). The writer metaphor of love here shows that love as both exciting and weakening, a passionate risk that the character of Joanna desires and fears.

As it is expected, when Joanna reunited with Aksel, she behaved not with astonishment but with a multifaceted blend of appreciation and melancholy. McCracken described Aksel simply but emotionally; "He was beautiful, a beauty" (p. 21). The understanding led to easiness and at the same time showed the uncertain emotions, confusing Joanna's efforts to get over him. Their reconciliation was silent and almost simple, but carried the distance of the years. By Joanna's way of speech, the author transfers how the past can feel instantaneously aloof and vividly present.

After all, this short story highlights how all human relations whether love, family, or even friendship can serve as bases of belonging for meaning and identity. Joanna watches her son interrelating with strange people, observing how he shapes friends more easily than she did. In this time, she reproduces the idea that "children always assumed the world was ready for them" (p. 24), opposing to Leo's honesty with her own care. This thought becomes an indirect note on resilience in which hope comes in a natural way to children, but the grown-ups must relearn it.

McCracken's story finally exposes the determination of human yearning. In spite of her doubts and fears, Joanna remains a woman who search for association with others, along with a sense of comfort, and emotional foundation. She knew, even unwillingly, that her trip is not just about Aksel but about her way to rebuild a life after loss. This is proof when she said that "she wanted something to lift her, even if just a little" (p. 28). This can be explained as to be the main them in the story that reflects the idea that hope does not constantly come in dramatic process; but occasionally it seems as a tiny, doubtful wish to keep living.

By the end, the story left everything uncertain to all the characters. This depends on the readers interpretation of hope or misery. Joanna's passionate change is elusive but

important. She did not resolve all her issues, nor has the author presented a romantic reunion. Instead, Joanna increases the resilience to admit her unhappiness while acceptance the likelihood of regeneration. Her understanding demonstrates a worldwide fact in which people nevertheless of age or condition keep searching for love, accepting, and association as crucial basics of their being.

Throughout the heroin's trip, McCracken depicts relations as foundations of relief, identity, and connotation, but also as delicate and changeable. Hope, in this short story is not victorious; it is soundless, careful, and profoundly human. Moreover, depending on the framework of this study, hope according to the heroine is both agency and pathways. Hope turned to be an internal convection that she needs to hold on in order to go on living. In addition, hope is also 'pathways' which means that she had the ability to find ways to get the hope. This appeared in her decision to travel and even trying to find her lost love. Therefore, Joanna's life remains a witness to the determination of emotional and intellectual resilience in the face of indecision.

Conclusion

To sum up the findings, Elizabeth McCracken's short story "The Souvenir Museum" shows a complicated revelation of how people deal with loss and revive hope in time of emotional disintegration. Throughout Joanna's bodily and emotional/intellectual journey, the story reveals that resilience appears through reception and the silent inclination to move forward. Hope in the story is not rapid or melodramatic but seems as a calm energy an internal perseverance that leads people throughout indecision. By this way, hope can be an inner belief that the heroine needs and also it is her only way to survive and that's why she armed herself with certain behaviors to try to get the hope at the end. This behavior was reflected in her leaving the country and go to Denmark. Here, McCracken's portrayal of normal behaviors of bravery, memory, and love keeps readers that even in moments of gloom, life lasts to present chances for regeneration.

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