Munro Alice

As have her contemporary Mavis Gallant and her admitted models Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, Alice Munro has made a living and a reputation from her complex, wide-ranging, and riveting short stories. Her ability to view the ordinary through the prism of her writerly talent and transform it into the extraordinary is an achievement that Munro has in common with the late Carol Shields, much of whose Canada-based fiction celebrates the miraculous in the commonplace. In an auspicious beginning, her first collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), was awarded the Canadian Governor General's Award, as were *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) and *The Progress of Love* (1986). Reviewers and readers alike have praised Munro's ability to depict her native Ontario, Canada, in such fictional towns as Jubilee or West Hanratty. Indeed, numerous critics have noted the similarities between Munro's rural villages and countryside and those in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Despite her realistic depiction of her region, however, Munro insists that it serves as a backdrop for her major themes, particularly issues of identity and marginalization; the connective tissue that binds us to one another, to family, to the community; the certainty with which the past helps mold our present and future lives; and the simultaneous existence of both the real and the imagined that she ascribes to her characters. In the words of the scholar and critic Coral Ann Howells, "To read Munro's stories is to discover the delights of seeing two worlds at once: an ordinary everyday world and the shadowy map of another imaginary or secret world laid over the real one" (1).

Alice Munro was born on July 10, 1931, in Wingham, Ontario, Canada, to Robert Eric Laidlaw, a farmer, and Ann Clarke Chamney Laidlaw. After marrying James Armstrong Munro, a bookseller, in 1951, she earned her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Western Ontario. The couple divorced in 1976, and Munro married Gerald Fremlin, a geographer, that same year. By then she had already published three collections of stories, including *The Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), the one that established Munro as a major figure in contemporary fiction. Although Munro writes insightfully about both women and men, she often focuses on the difficulties that 20th- and 21st-century women must overcome. The mother of Del Jordan, protagonist of both *Dance of the Happy Shades* and *Lives of Girls and Women,* remarks to her daughter, "All women have had up till now has been their connections with men,” but change is "coming to the lives of girls and women" as long as we accept the responsibility to make that change. And change will not he swift: Del reads a New York psychiatrist's assertion that the differences between women and men may be calculated according to their different reactions to the moon: "The boy thinks of the universe, its immensity and mystery; the girl thinks, 'I must wash my hair.'"


In 2012, Munro published another well-received collection, *Dear Life,* which ended with four brief pieces of memoir that Munro described as "the first and last—and the closest—things I have to say about my own life." Francine Prose, in her review for the Toronto *Globe and Mail,* wrote, “It is the highest compliment to say these autobiographical segments seem very much like Alice Munro stories: understated, intense, resonant, nuanced and profound.”

Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize in literature in 2013.

Further Information


——. "What's in a Title: Alice Munro's 'Carried Away.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 555–564.


