Munro Alice

The Canadian fiction writer and teacher Alice Laidlaw Munro allows her intellectual curiosity to range over the lives of female characters. Born in Wingham in rural Ontario, she grew up on a poultry and silver fox farm and began writing during World War II. After selling short works to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, she earned a scholarship to the University of Western Ontario. She established a home in Victoria, British Columbia, where she and her husband operated a bookshop. Munro honed her literary style from readings of the southern writers Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty and submitted stories to the Atlantic, New Yorker, and Paris Review. In 1968 Munro published Dance of the Happy Shades, which received the Governor-General's Award. Serious critical attention focused on Lives of Girls and Women (1971), her survey of rural women's aspirations and compromises. After the publication of Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You (1974) she accepted the Canada-Australia Prize. In 1986 The Progress of Love won Munro a second Governor General's Award and the Marian Engel Prize. Four years later Munro added the Canada Molson Prize for Friend of My Youth (1990). She also won the National Book Critics Circle award for The Love of Good Woman (1998) and the Giller Prize for Runaway (2004).

Compared to Anton Chekhov for the clarity of her characterization, Munro recognizes the chanciness of women's choices as they search for happiness and outlets for self-expression. In much of her fiction there is no lasting joy in sexual relations. In Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage (2001), an Editor's Choice of the New York Times Book Review, she dazzles with sharp imagery, as with her description of a woman's teeth that "crowded to the front of her mouth as if they were ready for an argument" (Munro, 3). In 2004 she published Runaway, a moody, atmospheric collection set on home territory in Canada. Rich in memory and realistic social ordering the stories build tension between arresting images of the settled life and the search of fugitives and renegades for havens. One character, the teacher Juliet, dominates three stories with her rebellion against parents and the heartbreak of her daughter's disappearance. Overall Munro's characters mature and adapt to uprooting and risk taking as members of professions and wives in long-shot marriages.

Shortly after winning the Man Booker International Prize for her body of work, Munro published her story collection Too Much Happiness (2009). In 2012, she 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.
