



Alice Munro



Place and year of birth: Wingham (Canada), 1931

- Alice Munro is considered to be one of the best English-language authors still working. Throughout her career she has received numerous awards, including the prestigious Man Booker International Prize, awarded in 2009 for "the great contribution of her work to the world literary scene". In 2013 she received the Nobel Prize in Literature for "her mastery of the art of storytelling".
- Many of Alice Munro's short stories are set in Huron County, Ontario. The regional approach and her personal vision of the human condition are two

characteristics of her short fiction.

- A recurrent theme in her most recent works is that of old age. The protagonists of her short stories are usually elderly people who represent the complexity of ageing. Munro alludes to both the positive and negative aspects of the ageing process. The writer portrays old age from a realistic point of view that includes the two opposite faces of the last years of the life cycle.
- The identity of elderly people evolves throughout their ageing process and is strongly conditioned by the following factors: retirement, internment in geriatric care centres and the development of cognitive diseases such as dementia.

QUOTES FROM MUNRO'S NARRATIVES:

■ Love and sexuality in old age:

"They had usually prepared supper together. One of them made the drinks and the other the fire, and they talked about his work [...] and about whatever Fiona was reading and what they had been thinking during their close but separate day. This was their time of liveliest intimacy, though there was also, of course, the five or ten minutes of physical sweetness just after they got into bed— something that did not often end up in sex but reassured them that sex was not over yet" ("The Bear Came over the Mountain" from *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*: 284).

■ Passage of time and frailty in old age:

"Even though he's just in from the cold, he's white. Put a candle behind his face, it'd shine through as if he were wax or thin china" ("Pictures of the Ice" from *Friend of my Youth*: 154).

"This was Ralph Gillespie. If Rose had met him on the street she would not have recognized him, he would have been a stranger to her, but after she had looked at him for a moment he seemed quite unchanged to her, unchanged from himself at seventeen or fifteen, his gray hair which had been light brown still falling over his forehead, his face still pale and calm and rather large for his body, the same diffident, watchful, withholding look. But his body was thinner and his shoulders seemed to have shrunk together. He wore a short-sleeved sweater with a little collar and three ornamental buttons; it was light blue with beige and yellow stripes. This sweater seemed to Rose to speak of aging jauntiness, a kind of petrified adolescence. She noticed that his arms were old and skinny and that his hands shook so badly that he used both of them to raise the glass of beer to his mouth" ("Who Do You Think You Are?" from *Who Do You Think You Are?*: 207-208).



■ Identity

“-‘You can’t go thinking you are better than other people just because you can learn poems. Who do you think you are?’

This was not the first time in her life Rose had been asked who she thought she was; in fact the question had often struck her like a monotonous gong and she paid no attention to it.” (“Who Do You Think You Are?” from *Who Do You Think You Are?* 200).

■ Care homes

“Now I’m ready for to go,” Flo said.

“Go where?”

“Out there,” said Flo, jerking her head. “Out to the whattayacallit.

The Poorhouse.”

“The Home,” said Rose. “You don’t have to go today.”

“They hired you to take me, now you get a move on and take me,”

Flo said.

“I’m not hired. I’m Rose. I’ll make you a cup of tea.”

“You can make it. I won’t drink it”. (“Spelling” from *Who Do You Think You Are*: 189).

She said to him, at suppertime on the day of the wandering-off at the supermarket, “You know what you’re going to have to do with me, don’t you? You’re going to have to put me in that place. Shallowlake?”

Grant said, “Meadowlake. We ‘re not at that stage yet.”

“Shallowlake, Shillylake,” she said, as if they were engaged in a playful competition. “Sillylake. Sillylake it is” (“The Bear Came Over the Mountain” from *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*: 181).

Conference paper:

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