



THE MASTER OF THE SHORT STORY-ALICE MUNRO

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Annotation

The Nobel laureate Alice Munro is not called the "Canadian Chekhov" for nothing: the Chekhov beginning is significant in her prose. The material of the early cycle of short stories "Who are you, actually?" (Who Do You Think You Are?, 1978), as well as the publication of thematic collections "Runaway" (Runaway, 2004) and "Too Much Happiness" (Too Much Happiness, 2009) shows that Chekhov's legacy was important for the Canadian writer throughout her work. The article is devoted to the disclosure of similarities and differences between the stories of Chekhov and the 2013 Nobel Prize winner of the Canadian writer Alice Munro.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Nobel Prize, Russian literature, Canadian literature, A.P.Chekhov, short story, intertextuality;

Introduction

In 2013, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded for the first time to a Canadian writer - Alice Munro (born in 1931) with the wording "for mastery in the genre of modern short stories".

What the Nobel Committee did was rehabilitate the story: previously, among the prose writers who received the Nobel, there was not one without a novel — and that's exactly what Munro is. "For years, I thought that stories were just a warm-up before a novel—" she said in an interview with *The New Yorker*. - Then I realized that they were all I was capable of, and I resigned myself. I hope my efforts to put as much as possible into the story will compensate for this."

Alice Munro was born on July 10, 1931 in the Canadian city of Wingham, Ontario, in a farmer's family. She started writing in her teens: the way to school was long, and to pass the time, she wrote stories. She was inspired by the image of a brave and resourceful Little Mermaid, capable of making the world a better place.

The older Munro got, the more often she reflected herself in the stories. At that time, the young writer did not care at all whether her works would be published. However,





she did publish her first story, "Dimensions of the Shadow" (1950), while studying at the University of Western Ontario. During this period Munro worked as a waitress. A year later, she dropped out of university, where she studied English, and married a student, James Munro. In 1963, they moved to Victoria and opened the Munro Books bookstore, which still operates today.

The couple produced four daughters, one of whom died 15 hours after birth, but the marriage soon broke up.

Shortly before that, Munro released her first collection, *The Dance of Happy Shadows* (1968), for which she received the Governor General's Award, Canada's most prestigious literary award. Later came *The Life of Girls and Women* (1971), a collection of interconnected short stories published as a novel. This is a fictitious autobiography of Del Jordan, a girl who grows up in a small town in Ontario and becomes a writer, but also includes the narratives of her mother, aunts and acquaintances. However, Munro herself later admitted that the decision to write a large-format work was wrong.

Returning to Ontario, she took up a position as a writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario. Here she married geographer Gerald Fremlin.

The collection "And who exactly are you?" (1978) brought the writer the second prize of the Governor-General. Over the next four years, Munro made public reading trips to countries such as Scandinavia, China and Australia. In 1980 She has held the position of writer-in-residence at the University of British Columbia (Canada) and the University of Queensland (Australia).

Munro's characters are the most ordinary people we can meet in a supermarket or a barber shop. Unremarkable at first glance, the characters, nevertheless, hide deep feelings in themselves. This external simplicity brings them closer to the reader, since he can see in them a reflection of himself, find common parallels. Munro's heroes are heroes who do not strive for grandiose life changes, they remain satisfied with momentary insight.

The main theme in Munro's early stories is the experiences of a girl who has reached adulthood and is trying to establish relations with her family, as well as to come to terms with the fact that she has to live in a small town. In later works, such as "Hatred, Friendship, courtship, Love, Marriage" (2001) and "The Runaway" (2004), Munro pays more attention to the problems of middle-aged women and their loneliness.

The process of working on the story takes Munro from two months to a year, and first she creates two versions of the work, writing them in notebooks, and then writes the final one, unlike the previous ones, on a computer. The writer admits that she





sometimes takes the plots for her stories from life, but more often it is a game of imagination on the topic of what could happen to her in a given situation.

It is curious that Munro refers to such Russian writers as A. Chekhov and V. Nabokov, speaking about his artistic ideal. The story "The Lady with the Dog" by Chekhov remains for the Canadian writer an unsurpassed example of short prose, in her opinion, even if Chekhov had written only this story, he would not have lived his life in vain. V. Nabokov admires Munro for her stylistic skill, but she is aware that she is not able to repeat the achievements of the Russian writer. The writer admits that some critics consider her style uncomplicated, but this is not a technique, she can't write in any other way.

The similarity of Alice Munro's stories with Chekhov's is not news and not a discovery. According to the biographer of the writer Robert Thacker, this flattering comparison was first made in the early 1950s, after the appearance of the first stories of Alice Laidlaw, the future Munro. Throughout her writing career, Munro has worked exclusively within the framework of the story, despite the fact that the psychological insight that she skillfully uses in her works, revealing the human essence and digging into its depths, gave her the opportunity to make more choices regarding the genre form. In an interview, she noted that she decided to focus on a small form simply because she needed to take care of her daughters. Nevertheless, she managed to change the usual architectonics of the story. Munro's story can begin in an unexpected place, moving back and forth in time. At the same time, she will be distinguished by moderate brevity and subtle wit. This is where the famous comparison with A.P. Chekhov pops up. After all, isn't brevity the sister of talent?

In the 1980s, the comparison of the Canadian writer with the Russian classic became commonplace, and in the 1990s it graced the covers of her collections. The most frequently quoted statement of Cynthia Ozick: "She is our Chekhov, and she will outlive most of her contemporaries"

Critics noted only certain similarities: for example, E. Munro's ability to choose one detail that will represent the entire landscape; or "Chekhov's visual acuity", in relation to the gap between the desires and capabilities of his characters. Similar qualities of the two authors included humanism devoid of the slightest ill will and subtle "democratic" psychologism (Munro and Chekhov "are engaged in interpreting the inner life of a person, even if the characters seem completely devoid of spirituality"), as well as the absence of ideological bias: "Munro's feeling towards those about whom she writes... just as pure as Chekhov's, and just as little distorted by systems of thought introduced from outside, "Most of the characters of both Chekhov and Munro are ordinary, "average" people taken in the most ordinary, easily recognizable





circumstances. In those rare cases when a Canadian writer still chooses an extraordinary person as the protagonist (for example, the main character of the 2009 novel "Too Much Happiness" is none other than Sofia Kovalevskaya), then such an exceptional hero is equated with ordinary ones: his inability to escape from the web of family and household circumstances, loss of strength, illness, despair is demonstrated. Chekhov did the same thing - it is enough to recall the "Boring Story" or the "Bishop". The characters of both authors are immersed in everyday life to such an extent that the boundary between everyday life and events is blurred. External events are obscured, have no consequences, and their place is taken by internal, mental ones. As for Chekhov, Munro is characterized by an interest in issues of human communication, first of all — in communication failures, as well as the "anti-hierarchical theme": she tirelessly monitors how people build invisible hierarchies in their relationships with each other. Both Chekhov and Munro prefer to refrain from direct judgments about what is happening, leaving the right of final ethical assessment to the "jury"-readers. In addition to these very general features, one can point to many separate "traits" of poetics - similar details and details. These include, for example, the words "perhaps", "probably" and "it seemed" that are full of color in Munro's texts, which the translator has to partially remove in order for the Russian text to become readable (Chekhov's love for the word "it seemed" was noted by lifetime criticism), etc.

The intertextuality of Alice Munro's prose is not obviously connected with Chekhov, but the central image for the writer of a woman who not only dreams of a full life and spiritual freedom, but also makes an attempt to find them, has its origins in the young heroines of "My Life", "Boring Story", "Bride".

Although Alice Munro's small prose is usually centered on a woman, the writer herself answers the question whether she considers herself a representative of feminist literature in the negative. Many women writers of our time have discovered a new world in their works: the world of a woman described through the eyes of a woman. In their works, they offered society not only new themes, but also new patterns of behavior, defended the right of a woman to make an independent choice, to an independent destiny. This phenomenon, of course, applies to the work of Alice Munro. Some of Munro's Chekhov-style stories gravitate towards the novel form and cover the entire life of her characters, who often have to experience sudden Chekhov insights about the meaning of being. However, in Munro's prose, it is not so much individual parallels that are important, as the commonality of the subject, the coverage of reality and the unsentimental-sympathetic author's view, which causes English-speaking





readers a sincere response and a desire to consider the writer "their Chekhov", asserting her comparable significance for the literatures of the USA and Canada.

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