

The Bear Came Over the Mountain



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALICE MUNRO

Alice Munro was born Alice Laidlaw in Huron County, Ontario. She started writing and publishing while studying English literature at the University of Western Ontario, though she left the program to marry her first husband, James Munro. Munro remained married to James, with whom she has four children, until 1972; she then returned to the University of Western Ontario as a writer in residence. Munro married Gerald Fremlin in 1976, and the two remained married until his death in 2013. Munro wrote throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and her stories were both published in Canadian periodicals and broadcast on the CBC. Munro published her first short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in 1968. She has published fourteen original short story collections, and is largely considered to be a contemporary master of the short story form. Munro has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Paris Review*, among others; she won the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Munro's stories are frequently based on her personal life experiences. Her first marriage was traditional for the postwar Northern American time period, with Munro tending to the home and children while her husband worked. This marriage fell apart during the 1960s, and Munro was more sympathetic to the changing social values and increasing liberalism of the time than was her husband. Munro's sensitivity to this shifting cultural landscape can be seen in Grant's reflections on his university career in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain." The 1971 publication of her interwoven collection *The Lives of Girls and Women* cemented Munro, like Margaret Atwood, as part of a Canadian feminist writing tradition that acknowledged and represented the realities of female experience during the mid-twentieth century. Munro increased her political involvement during the 1970s, as campaigns emerged with the intention of censoring works featured in high school literature course curricula. Munro's public defense of censored works led to some negative responses, though her increasingly lauded reputation cemented her as a formidable opponent on the matters of literary politics with which she chose to engage.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"The Bear Came Over the Mountain," like much of Munro's writing, is set in her home region of Huron County, Ontario.

Munro, along with Margaret Atwood (*Cat's Eye*), Jane Urquhart (*The Whirlpool*), and James Reaney (*Poems*), among others, is considered to be a part of the Southern Ontario Gothic tradition. This term was coined in 1972, highlighting the similarities between aspects of the Gothic novel and the dark realism in these authors' works; it also plays on generic connections between these Canadian authors and the Southern Gothic of Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty. "The Bear Came Over the Mountain," like many of Munro's other short stories, uses a simple writing style and subtle observations to examine the intimate details of human relationships while continually moving between present events and past reflections. The collection within which it was published, *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, is composed of short stories that exemplify the complexities of married relationships. As she has done with other stories, Munro intensely revised "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"; its variations can be seen between the original 1999 publication in *The New Yorker* and the 2013 version in the same magazine.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"
- **Where Written:** Ontario, Canada
- **When Published:** 1999 (*The New Yorker*), 2001 (*Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*), and 2013 (*The New Yorker*), republished as a tribute after Munro's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature.
- **Genre:** Short story, Realism, Southern Ontario Gothic
- **Setting:** Ontario, Canada
- **Antagonist:** Aging, dementia
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited; Grant's perspective

EXTRA CREDIT

On Screen. "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" was adapted into an independent film called *Away From Her* by Canadian writer and director Sarah Polley. The film premiered in 2006 and received widespread critical acclaim.

Featured in Collection. *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead: Great Love Stories, From Chekhov to Munro*, edited by author Jeffrey Eugenides, includes "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" as the final piece in the collection.

The Night The Bear Came Off The Mountain

Marco Cascella



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