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**MIROŚŁAWA BUCHHOLTZ AND EUGENIA
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Mirosława Buchholtz and Eugenia Sojka's edited collection *Alice Munro: Reminiscence, Interpretation, Adaptation and Comparison* (2015) addresses the phenomenon of Alice Munro's fiction and her recently acquired status as a Nobel Prize winner. Despite being the "mother" of Canadian short story cycles, Munro had not always been given the critical acclaim that she deserved before she won the Prize in 2013. This new publication explores Munro both as a person and as a writer, offering a wide-ranging and in-depth study. Far from being a biography, the book is a tribute paid to Munro. It is also a text of unusual composition as it is made up of four distinct parts, which seek to echo and evoke the structure of a musical piece.

Not only have Buchholtz and Sojka divided the book into the four parts following the musical genre of symphony, but they also promoted pluralist approaches to Munro in these sections. Therefore, in order to follow the pattern, they have named the sections "Reminiscence," "Interpretation," "Adaptation" and "Comparison," which evoke the alterations and developments of symphonic form. Moreover, the editors have invited a remarkable group of writers, artists, and scholars to reflect on Alice Munro and her fiction as well as on film and stage adaptations of her works.

The symphonic structure of the text is explained by Buchholtz and Sojka in the introduction to the volume, in which the editors reveal certain decisions connected with grouping the essays. The editors claim that it is not only an interpretation of Munro's short stories that the text provides but also "four different forms of enjoyment: auto/bio/geo/graphical reminiscence, interpretation of her selected stories, adaptation of her work for stage and

screen, and comparison with her antecedents and contemporaries” (9-10). The book’s wide-ranging approach, and the amount of distinguished writers contributing, makes the volume a particularly valuable and pleasurable one.

The volume opens with a literary meditation on Munro and her foundational *Lives of Girls and Women*, written by Daphne Marlatt particularly for this occasion, and thus, makes it a delightful start. A poetic and personal piece, it arouses the reader’s expectations although it is so short that it finally leaves a sense of insufficiency. In the same section, there is another private reflection on two meetings with Munro written by Tomson Highway, a Cree writer, musician, and activist. His “Two Stories” offer his memories of encounters with Munro that took place in the 1970s and 1990s. This section concludes with another intimate reminiscence: Gerald Lynch’s funny and touching memories of his and his family’s intersections with Munro, cumulating in his account of the Alice Munro Symposium which took place at the University of Ottawa in 2014.

The second part, “Interpretations,” begins with Lola Lemire Tostevin’s study of Munro’s “nice little stories about small towns in Ontario” (35), Carstairs in particular, where the action of the title story of *Open Secrets* takes place. The story is read through Paul Riceour’s *The Symbolism of Evil*, which becomes an intriguing way of exploring the text’s themes. Kim Aubrey, on the other hand, excavates the narrative structure and patterns of evoking tension in Munro’s “Floating Bridge” and “The Bear Came Over the Mountain.” The two essays that follow, Corinne Bigot’s “Ghost Texts, Patterns of Entrapment, and Lines of Flight: Reading Stories from *Too Much Happiness* and *Dear Life* in Connection with Earlier Stories” and Alicja Piechucka’s “[T]hat Embarrassed Me Considerably. As It Would Any Man’: The Masculinity Crisis in Alice Munro’s *Dear Life*” concentrate predominantly on more recent collections by Alice Munro: *Too Much Happiness* (Bigot) and *Dear Life* (both Bigot and Piechucka). Bigot explores the grim and uncanny elements in Munro’s writing such as murder, spectral haunting, and entrapment, whereas Piechucka focuses on the masculinity crisis and the presentation of men in *Dear Life*. Piechucka investigates the ways in which Munro shows masculinity, this “once . . . clear-cut category” (78), which she sees as a blurred concept in these stories.

Part 3 of Buchholtz and Sojka’s book is devoted to “Adaptation” and it includes essays by Katarzyna Więckowska, Shelley Scott, and Marta Sibierska. Więckowska deals with the phenomenon of adaptation understood as “a process of constant transformation in the encounter with various social and cultural patterns or texts” (95) in *Who Do You Think You Are?* The essay explores multifaceted patterns of identity formation and reads Munro’s collection through Slavoj Žižek’s interpretation of Lacan. Shelley Scott, in turn, provides an insightful analysis of Munro’s short story “Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage” (from the 2001 collection of the

same title) and its stage adaptation by Marcia Johnson under the title *Courting Johanna* which premiered at Ontario's Blyth Theatre Festival in 2008. What is especially interesting both for admirers of Munro's fiction and for those interested in theatrical performances is that the author draws upon her own experience of directing this very play at the University of Lethbridge in 2014. This discussion is also enriched by a selection of photos by Jaime Vedres, which increase the readers' understanding of Scott's argument. Marta Sibierska's essay focuses on Liza Johnson's 2013 film adaptation, entitled *Hateship Loveship*, of the short story mentioned above. Although the film has not received much critical attention, it provides a very interesting basis for Sibierska's discussion of the main character Johanna Parry as well as, more generally, of how the film "explores" rather than "adapts" Munro's story for screen (130).

The final part of Buchholtz and Sojka's book, "Comparison," offers essays by writers, literary critics, and scholars from Canada and Poland. George Elliott Clarke's text introduces the issue of multiculturalism, which at first sight does not seem to be a pivotal element in Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. Clarke, however, identifies a "shadowy whiteness, an albescent blackness, or a white that is really an albino displacement of blackness" (151) through which Del Jordan becomes "an honorary Negress" (151). Małgorzata Poks explores the ways in which small communities with their archetypal characters and atmosphere influenced Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. Poks reads these short story collections as semi-autobiographical reflections upon the formative years of both authors—years which were spent in such communities before the "escape" necessary to their development as artists. The two final essays closing the section devoted to comparisons are the inquiries proposed by Agnieszka Salska and Mirosława Buchholtz. The former is an in-depth analysis of the significance of place in the writing of Alice Munro and Eudora Welty. Salska draws her conclusions on the basis of a selection of stories, interviews, and more scholarly-oriented articles published by the two authors in question. Buchholtz, in turn, proposes an unconventional reading of Munro's writing and literary career through a comparison with Mavis Gallant's work and life. What Buchholtz displays in her essay is "the existence of certain defining qualities of twentieth-century Canadian female writing, precisely, the Canadian junction" (217), which serves as a point of departure for Munro's and Gallant's fiction, simultaneously very different and intriguingly similar.

Through its self-conscious symphonic structure, *Alice Munro: Reminiscence, Interpretation, Adaptation and Comparison* offers a fresh and appealing perspective on Munro's work. The combination of scholarly essays, poetic reminiscences, and personal accounts not only evoke the musical form

with its alterations of tempo and tension; they also challenge conventional expectations of literary criticism. Overall, the diversity of approaches is a strength of the volume, making *Alice Munro: Reminiscence, Interpretation, Adaptation and Comparison* a highly distinctive, original, and rewarding addition to the body of Munro scholarship.