

ENGL\*4280 Seminar: Canadian Literature // ENGL\*6201 Topics in Canadian Literature

Summer 2017

Reading for Fun: Alice Munro in Context

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This course has been designed to appeal to people with varied interests, including English and/or Theatre and/or Creative Writing, by inviting reflection on Alice Munro's short story writing in a range of ways designed to allow us to experience fully and to discuss closely its highly forceful yet very subtle theatricality, narrativity, and lyricism – its verbal as well as visual as well as musical appeal. Readings and class discussion will focus on Munro's achievements in 30 stories chosen from volumes ranging from her first collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), through her breakthrough books *The Progress of Love* (1986) and *Friend of My Youth* (1990), to her career-climaxing *Too Much Happiness* (2009) and *Dear Life* (2012).

Munro's stories will be examined in a number of contexts, including both world short story writing and world short story theory. In addition to the 30 stories by Munro, we will read a total of 30 other world stories: 15 (identified by the instructor) from our class anthology *The Art of the Short Story* and either 15 more (chosen by each individual student) from the same anthology or else the 15 that comprise James Joyce's pioneering story cycle *Dubliners* (1914). By way of promoting a strong theoretical understanding of the history and the possibilities of the form, we will also read Irish writer Frank O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1962) and American critic Charles E. May's *I Am Your Brother": Short Story Studies* (2013).

Course assignments are intended to involve day-to-day quality participation by all class members, a series of four informal mid-length seminar presentations (20 minutes each including discussion, with an accompanying 1½- to 2-page outline), along with regular reading journals (recording your favourite sentence in each of the 30 world stories you read and in successive chapters of the books by Frank O'Connor and Charles E. May), and a final research paper due no later than Noon Mon. 31 July 2017 – preceded, three weeks earlier, no later than Noon Mon. 10 July, by the submission of a 2-page outline and a working bibliography (not annotated) for that research paper.

The required length of the research paper will be 2,500 to 3,000 words for students registered in ENGL\*4280 – and 5,000 words for students registered in ENGL\*6201. In determining the focus for your final research paper, encouragement will be given to class members to continue work on material or a topic that you have already begun investigating earlier in the course – or, again in consultation with the instructor, to broaden your scope and pursue a comparison between material or a topic considered in this course and something else of personal intellectual interest to you.

I have elected to give this course the title "Reading for Fun: Alice Munro in Context" because if we can't make what we are doing here in some strong measure "Fun" – that is, if we can't constantly find ways to take imaginative delight in the work we're doing – then why are we here?