

Book Review

Munro collection eagerly awaited

By ALLAN GOULD

It is hard not to become breathless with anticipation. What the Stanley Cup playoffs are to hockey fans; what the Academy Awards are to movie star lovers; that, surely, is what a new collection of short stories by Alice Munro is to followers of Canadian literature.

No, make that world literature. Because with her latest volume, *Friend of My Youth* (McClelland and Stewart, \$24.95, 273 pages) - as if she did not already prove herself with the earlier *Progress of Love* and *Moons of Jupiter!* - southwest Ontario's Munro has shown herself once more to be legitimately spoken of in the same breath as the U.S.'s Grace Paley and Nathaniel Hawthorne, Russia's Isaac Babel, Turgenev and Chekov, and even Ireland's James Joyce. It is a breath-taking achievement and, to use the imagery of our first paragraph, Ms. Munro's artistry is in the same league as Gretzky and Howe, Streep and de Niro. And more.

To review these 10 fairly lengthy short stories - only one is shorter than 20 pages, and that one is 19; several are closer to 30 pages - is to review 10 novels, for that is how complex, how dense, how extraordinarily intricate each one is.

Every story is dotted with lines that leap off the page and into your very soul, creating echoes of agreement, of sad recollection, of delight.

Here's an example from the excellent *Five Points*: "You can make love in a hurry if you have to, but you need time for a fight. Is that what they're starting on? A fight? She feels edgy but happy. Her happiness is tight and private, not the sort that flows out from you and fizzes everything up and makes you good-naturedly careless about what you say. The very opposite. She feels light and sharp and unconnected."

EXQUISITE

Indeed, every exquisite Munro story has a sort-of Joycean epiphany: that moment - often terrifying, inevitably life-changing - when a character sees his/her life in a whole new way. Here is such a moment from the astonishing *Oh, What Avals*: "The threat is of a change, but it's not the sort of change one has been warned

about. It's just this - that suddenly, without warning, Joan is apt to think: Rubble. Rubble. You can look down a street, and you can see the shadows, the light, the brick walls, the truck parked under a tree, the dog lying on the sidewalk, the dark summer awning, or the grayed snowdrift - you can see all these things in their temporary separateness, all connected underneath in such a troubling, satisfying, necessary, indescribable way. Or you can see rubble. Passing states, a useless variety of passing states. Rubble. Joans-wants to keep this idea of rubble at bay. She pays attention now to all the ways in which people seem to do that..."

But Alice Munro's magnificent stories are far more than the sum of their parts, and to even suggest that the above examples can give you a taste of their perfection is like humming a few bars of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to a newly hearing person and assuming that he now understands the majesty of that work.

In Menesteung, the keen depiction of 19th-century small-town Ontario serves to enrich the remarkable creation of the character of Almeida Roth and, ultimately, Munro's profound thoughts about the role of the artist in society. And, although her wit is ever-present ("She thought (him) a bachelor. That twinkly, edgy air of satisfaction didn't usually survive married life"), the story in which those very funny lines appear - *Hold Me Fast, Don't Let Me Pass* - is a deeply serious and thoughtful look at marriage and love and the travails of both. In fact, the previous lines could be used to describe nearly every one of these utterly magnificent stories.

ASTOUNDING

Echoing the justifiably wildly favorable front-page review of *Friend of My Youth* in the *New York Times Book Review*, this critic also longs to list every single story as my favorite. The title story is not only one person's at-

tempt to understand childhood friends of her mother's, but through them, to better connect with her mother, herself. Oranges and Apples is an utterly fascinating study of a marriage and the impact of an outsider on the same. Differently confronts the question that we must all confront in our lifetimes: How we could - and perhaps should - behave "differently," were we to actually believe that we were going to die. And *Wigtime* is so hilarious, yet so powerfully moving, that it would be impossible to describe without reproducing the story, itself. It is astounding.

What then can a reviewer write, when confronting the (latest) glories of Alice Munro? Perhaps the best way would be to recall the humorous words of a famous Broadway theatre critic who complained, a half-century ago, that he was always depressed when the lights went down on a stage, because he "knew it wouldn't be the Marx Brothers tonight."

In the same way, this writer is almost enraged when he sees all the people on the subways and beaches carrying around copies of Tom Clancy and Danielle Steel and Sidney Sheldon. For heaven's sake, why waste your time on them when you could be reading Alice Munro?

- Allan Gould, a Toronto author and reviewer, has had 16 books published, including the co-authored *Child Finder*, the story of Canada's greatest tracker of missing children, and *The Great Wiped Out North*, a book of Canadian political satire.

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Home Post Scripts

By Glenda Hughes, Sales Rep.

873-0300

I must say, there is lots to talk about this week! The biggest problem I am having, is the most important issue to address. Certainly, the most topical is "interest rates," which is on the minds of most people today - however, on a scale of 1 to 10, I am rating it about a 5 on my scale of what to talk about - I'd far rather talk about how to get your home sold in this market, or what can your real estate sales rep. do for you beyond the call of duty to help facilitate a sale. But perhaps I'll address those issues in my next columns, as I am now writing again, every week. So onward, and let's get things into perspective about this little issue!

Firstly, interest rates are not sky high - if we are comparing this era to 1981-82. Having talked to some agents who weathered the storm of the last crisis market, I think we have only "a situation to be dealt with", not a "problem". You see, when interest rates climbed to the ceiling in 1981-82, we were all unprepared for the effects that this was going to have, and didn't know how to approach the situation. This time, we are much more knowledgeable (thank goodness!). You are probably reading the ton of media hype that is constantly passed before your eyes, listening to the propaganda on the radio, and even worse, when you turn on the TV, you are bombarded with the latest "economic forecast". What the media is not telling you, is that there are ways around this dilemma.

Look carefully at the ads, and you will find that in a lot of cases, there will be some mention of a mortgage that can be arranged at much less than the current interest rates. I think that the reason that we are not having a flood of calls about this, is that the general public does not understand what this means - and if they do have any idea of what it's about, they think that it is not applicable to them, or worse, they think that it is just a "come-on". Wrong!

Let's look at what these ads mean. Generally speaking, if an ad reads "11 per cent financing available," or "Vendor will arrange an 11 per cent mortgage for 1 year," this is what those lines mean, to you. The person selling the home, the "vendor," has decided that, in order to sell his house, and obtain a willing buyer, he will "buy down" a mortgage for the purchaser, for one year. I know, I know - you don't know what a "buy down" mortgage is, do you? Of course you don't. This means that the vendor will pay an up-front cost to the lending institution of your choice the difference in the interest rate from the current rate, to 11 per cent, for one year. This amount varies, depending upon how much mortgage money the new purchaser wants, and what the going rate is. But no matter what the figures are, the vendor has agreed that this is what he will do.

To you, the purchaser, it means that you can obtain a 1-year mortgage at 11 per cent, or whatever rate is advertised, and know that for at least a year, you don't have to worry about the rates providing you qualify for a mortgage at the current rate. You don't have to go to a bank of the vendors choice, you are free to choose which institution you please, and you don't have to do anything special, except make sure that the clause is written into your offer by your real estate rep. Even if you see a home that you would like to buy, and you don't see any mention about this little perk, ask your rep. about it, for most vendors are willing to do this in order to get their homes sold.

So now, you understand the meaning of those ads, and you should take advantage of it. Prices are very good - lower than a year ago - and you can arrange a mortgage to suit yourself with the knowledge that I have given you. You can now be an informed purchaser, lucking in to low prices and reasonable mortgages.

Now, isn't that something to smile about?

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