

Book Review

Macmillan anthology a weak effort

By ALLAN GOULD

Each spring for the past three years, Macmillan has been putting out a decently priced, handsomely designed and often richly rewarding paperback of recent Canadian fiction, poetry, essays, reviews and more. The latest, The Third Macmillan Anthology (274 pages, \$16.95), is arguably the least successful of the trio, which might possibly be due to the choices of editors John Metcalf and Kent Thompson, or more than likely the weakness of most of the material sent to them. There's a lot of chaff here.

A few examples might explain one's initial disappointment with this year's bouquet: In the second collection, released in 1989, there were two astonishing stories by the awesomely talented Alice Munro, which were later anthologized in her latest brilliant collection, Friend of My Youth. Simply to leaf through a gathering of Canadian writing and encountering some Munro was like raking one's garden and coming across several gold coins.

But it wasn't only Munro! The second anthology also had several dozen pages of some utterly fascinating quotations from a large number of famous and not-so-famous Canadian writers, talking about "why I write" and "how I write." It was irresistible, and made that anthology a must for any fan or new writing coming out of our country. And, sadly, this latest anthology has nothing similar, in either quality of individual writer or collections of interesting creative statements.

HILARIOUS

This is not to say that the Third Macmillan Anthology is not without its rewards, however. Or even its occasional "star." For instance, the last 25 pages are on The Year in Review, with Kevin Connolly, Michael Darling and Fraser Sutherland - all of them intelligent and thoughtful critics - reviewing novels and poetry. Connolly's devastating attack on one poet is almost worth the price of this fairly priced paperback: "Poetry is to the eighties what macramé was to the seventies. One can only hope that a sense of event arising from the passing of a decade encourages some of these people to move on

and victimize some other art form." Hilarious!

And Sutherland's enumeration of flaws in Canadian reviewing at various newspapers is invaluable. Meanwhile, Darling's rave over Irving Layton's collected letters made me vow to get ahold of them, which I guess is why we read reviews in the first place - to help us decide what to read and not to read during our limited free time.

Speaking of that wildly uneven, vulgar, yet supremely gifted Montreal poet, Layton is represented several times in the anthology, which is a welcome surprise (even if not at the level of joy over discovering Munro). As always, he can be very funny ("All poets are magicians or murderers; the indeterminate end up editing magazines or working at Harbourfront!" is the opening of Birthday Poem for John Newlove). And Layton's poem to wife No.?? is quite disarming: "I take my Anna everywhere./She is so beautiful she can break/a man's heart with a look,/the proud thrust of her shoulder.") But the most fun are his two highly autobiographical poems, Thoughts of Tiling My Next Book, Bravo, Layton, and Review of Bravo, Layton. The latter begins - if highly predictably -

"Boo, Layton! Boo, Layton, Boo.../In this book Layton has stripped away/all the trappings of restraint and decency..." Pretty obvious, but most entertaining. Layton has written world class poetry in his nearly eight decades, and although none of these come even close, it's good to see him still churning out his unique anger, fury and sexual ranting. Canada has no one else like him.

What then to say about this latest anthology of new Canadian writing by Macmillan? That it's uneven, hit-and-miss, flawed, but often surprisingly satisfying. And that I look eagerly forward to No. 4, in 1991, in spite of/because of it all.

Allan Gould, a Toronto-area writer, is the author of 16 books, including the co-authored First Stage - The Making of the Stratford Festival. His latest book of humor/parody/satire is Canned Lit, about Canadian literature, out this fall.

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6:30 - Glances Into Medicine
6:54 - P.S.A. No. 12
6:57 - P.S.A. No. 11
7:00 - Halton Seniors TV Productions
8:00 - Anatomy of the mind, No. 4
8:30 - A Taste of Wine, No. 1
9:28 - Closing

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5:30 - Vocational Training
6:00 - Document
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6:53 - P.S.A. No. 1
7:00 - This Is The Life, No. 1
7:28 - P.S.A.
7:30 - Alice
8:42 - The Red Cross In Action
8:54 - P.S.A. No. 7
8:59 - M.S.P.A. (1 Minute)
9:00 - Electrifying Research
9:24 - Closing

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5:30 - Money In The Bank
5:58 - P.S.A.
6:00 - Regional Council

MONDAY, JULY 23

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7:30 - Anatomy of the Human Mind, No. 5
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8:30 - Halton Hills Health Spot
9:00 - Vocational Training
9:30 - Closing

TUESDAY, JULY 24

5:30 - Pentecostal Presence No. 1
6:00 - George's Country Jamboree
7:00 - Literacy in the 1990's
7:14 - The Red Cross In Action
7:26 - Carmanah, Something Wild
7:30 - Path To Nepal
7:52 - Canada's GST
8:00 - Centennial Alumni Choir
9:33 - Closing

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5:30 - Wetland News
6:00 - TV Storytime, No. 3
6:30 - Glances Into Medicine
6:54 - P.S.A. No. 8
7:00 - Wilderness Will, No. 3
7:30 - Israel Review
7:52 - Canada's GST
8:00 - Anatomy of the Human Mind, No. 5
8:30 - A Taste of Wine, No. 2
9:28 - Closing

THURSDAY, JULY 26

5:30 - Imprint On The Land
5:52 - Out Of The Shadow
6:00 - Document
6:30 - Fishing In Ontario
6:56 - P.S.A. No. 10
7:00 - Pentecostal Presence, No. 1
7:30 - Earth News
8:00 - If You Love This Planet
8:26 - P.S.A.
8:30 - The Acton Library presents Craig Douglas "Juggler"
9:12 - Canada's GST
9:20 - Closing

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