

# Can Lit comes up short

**The Second MacMillan Anthology**  
 John Metcalf and Leon Rooke, Editors  
 MacMillan of Canada  
 \$16.95 softcover

by Randal Smathers

This anthology is likely a textbook in CanLit courses. If it is, remind me not to take those courses.

The book consists of several parts: fiction (short stories and excerpts from longer works), poetry, two substantial sections on writing, plus a short review of the year in Canadian letters.

Some of the fiction is quite good, including a piece called "Unacceptable People" by the U of A's own Greg Hollingshead. For those of you who may be wondering, I've never had Dr. Hollingshead for any classes, so I'm relatively unbiased. Unfortunately, there was much dross, and little gold.

The poetry is dominated by an inaccessible collection called "The Edvard Munch Poems" by Don Coles, a series of pieces about paintings by the famous and inaccessible Scandanavian artist; and "The America Poems" by J.A. Hamilton, each preceded by its own little curious statistic, gleaned from Harper's. Unfortunately, the stats are better reading than the poetry. ("Number of Americans currently frozen in the hope of one day coming back to life: 13", versus "I am/stiff/as a corpse,/stiff as a steak. A real frigid girl./Knock on my womb,/my ovaries clank....")

The lack of depth and variety of the collections made me apprehensive about the discussions on the state of writing in Canada. One is called "Confounding the Dark: A Symposium on Canadian Writing". It is a waste of good paper, consisting of little more than repetitive name-dropping by much of the CanLit "celebrity" panel, who are supposedly answering such breathtaking questions as "Can you identify any influential movements/trends/fashions (domestic and/or international) in contemporary Canadian writing?". Not surprisingly, this is dull stuff.

After all, it is absurd to try and identify trends while they're happening.

The jewel of the book is the section titled "Position Papers: Statements on their craft by 37 Writers." There is no quicker way to peg an author than to get him or her discussing his or her writing, and this collection is a perfect example. In the middle of beautiful explorations of their own psyches, by many of these writers, are lumps such as the following:

"Everywhere it seems there is an impatience with the conventions of literary realism, and with good reason, for the 'real world' is too often shown as fragmentary, a sort of secondary lesion of the senses, trailing off in *diminuendo*..." —Carol Shields. I'll be rushing out to buy her book, real soon. How anyone can write that and not feel embarrassed is beyond my comprehension.

I think the problem with this book is that it is an annual. There are simply not enough good Canadian writers around, given this book as a sample, to fill 300-plus pages of excerpts and analysis once a year. Unless you read Canadian out of some sense of duty, this is not an absorbing read, even for a writer. Give me the greatest writers in the world instead, and if one or more of them happen to be Canadian, then I'll wave our flag. This book makes me want to wave a white flag, instead.

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TW	LW	WO	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL/DIST/ORIGIN
1	8	2	YOUSOU N'DOUR	The Lion	Virgin/Senegal
2	-	1	VARIOUS ARTISTS	It Came From Canada #5	Og/CC
3	9	2	MECCA NORMAL	Calico Kills the Cat	K/CC
4	3	4	ASEXUALS	Dish	Cargo/CC
5	2	7	THE POGUES	Peace and Love	Island/WEA/UK
6	6	5	GRAPES OF WRATH	Now and Again	Nettwerk/Capitol/CC
7	19	4	ZIGGY MARLEY	One Bright Day	Virgin/Jamaica
8	4	4	HOODOO GURUS	Magnum Cum Louder	BMG/Australia
9	12	11	RAY CONDO	Hot 'N' Cold	Cargo/CC
10	14	5	SYD STRAW	Surprise	Virgin/US
11	7	3	CHRIS AND COSEY	Trust	Nettwerk/Capitol/CC
12	5	4	GLEN MEADMORE	Squaw Bread	Amoeba/CC
13	38	2	LOS VAN VAN	Songo	Mango/Island/Cuba
14	29	2	NANCI GRIFFITH	Storms	MCA/US
15	10	2	BODEANS	Home	Slash/WEA
16	-	1	SUN RA	Blue Delight	A&M/US
17	31	2	WILLIE P. BENNETT	The Lucky Ones	Duke Street/CC
18	18	5	STOMPIN' TOM	Fiddle and Song	Capitol/EMI/CC
19	1	4	BEASTIE BOYS	Paul's Boutique	Capitol/US
20	-	1	DON CHERRY	Art Deco	A&M/US
21	-	1	TISH HINOJOSA	Homeland	A&M/US
22	RE	4	54-40	Fight for Love	Reprise/WEA/CC
23	26	7	LL COOL J	Walking with a Panther	Def Jam/CBS/US
24	34	4	SALIF KEITA	Ko-Yan	Mango/Island/Mali
25	13	4	SCHOOLY D	Am I Black Enough for You?jive/BMG/US	

### TOP 10 SINGLES, EP'S, AND CASSETTES

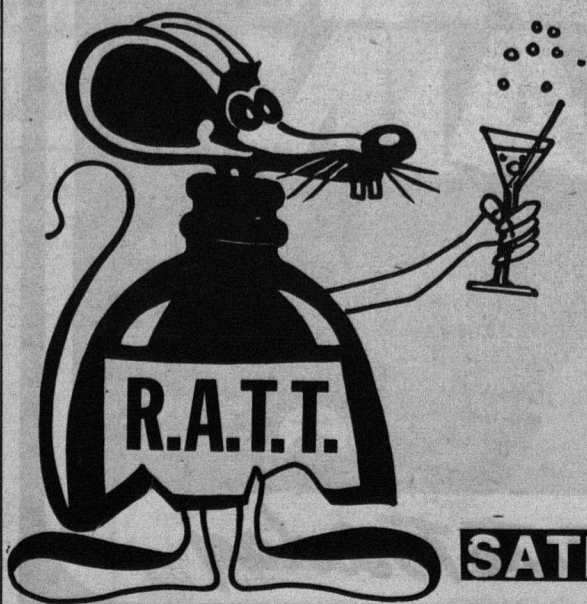
TW	LW	WO	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL/DIST/ORIGIN
1	1	7	KILLING TIME	This Ain't Heaven (tape)	CC
2	4	4	HEAVY D & THE BOYZ	... Our Own Thang (12")	Uptown/MCA/US
3	5	2	SHOVLHD	Proud as a Moose (tape)	Incentive/CC
4	2	3	BEL CANTO	Dreaming Girl (12")	Nettwerk/Capitol
5	RE	10	FLEM	Demo (tape)	CC
6	-	1	DINOSAUR JR.	Just Like Heaven (12")	SST/Cargo/US
7	RE	3	FORBIDDEN DIMENSION	Creepsville '99 (7")	Raging/CC
8	-	1	KILLDOZER	Yow! (7")	Touch and Go/US
9	-	1	ENDORPHINS	Demo tape	CC
10	-	1	FUGAZI	Margin Walker (EP)	Dischord/Cargo/US

- Compiled by Glenn Drexhage, Music Director

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