

Johanna Schouten-Elshout (1910-) and Michaël Slory (1935-), represented in Chapter 9 of *Creole Drum* along with novelist Edgar Cairo (1948-). "Prose production in Creole has always been meager"—though we should not forget such excellent tales as the *srafutentori* ("slave-time-story") in Chapter 3 of our anthology—so the appearance of the first Creole novel, Cairo's *Temekoe* (1969), "came as a big surprise to insiders." Creole writers have now entered the modern world, treating themes like race, politics, and injustice, trying to "understand their own problems and their own history in terms of universal sorrow and glory" (p. 219). How close we are to them is suggested by this passage from *Temekoe*: "Te den ogri boy fu na birti ben e pasa, leti dape den ben e fringi ston. Ala san den ben si na kino, leti dape den ben e kon du dati baka, someki un no ben abi rostu. . . . Kru nanga kru ben e feti." ("When the hooligans in the area came along, they pelted precisely this place with stones. Everything they saw in the cinema they put into practice there, with the result that we had no peace of mind. . . . Gang and gang were up against each other" [pp. 266-67].)

In short, a most intriguing book.

J. David Danielson

KENNETH REED

Mennonite Soldier.

Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1974.
Pp. 518. \$6.95.

This retelling of the parable of the prodigal son is set in the period of World War I. The contradiction in the title characterizes well the lives of the two brothers with whom the novel deals. Mastie defies parents and community to enlist in the U. S. Army. In contrast, Ira suffers for his steadfast loyalty to the Mennonite principle of pacifism.

The novel opens in a traditional Mennonite farming community in Pennsylvania. The "prodigal," Mastie, a person of warmth, vitality and a certain recklessness, is increasingly in revolt against the narrow-

ness and hypocrisy he sees in his religious and cultural milieu. Ira, a teacher, is pious and obedient, and makes no secret of his disapproval of his brother's way of life. As the novel unfolds, the parallel between these two and their biblical counterparts becomes more explicit, one son being a model of dutifulness, the other increasingly alienated from his whole past.

The paths of the two brothers diverge physically as they have for some time spiritually. The novel's focus alternates between Mastie, who by enlisting has disgraced the family, and Ira, who has been drafted despite his claim to conscientious objector status.

Mastie and his fellow recruits arriving in France are filled with wonder and excitement. Very soon, however, they are plunged into the degradation inseparable from war. Mastie's own heroism in saving his comrades' lives, at great risk to his own, turns sour when he comprehends the mass butchery his brave action has entailed. As he lies injured in hospital and reflects on his experiences, Mastie undergoes a kind of conversion. Family and faith take on new meaning for him. The warmth, understanding, and readiness to forgive, which he shows in all his relationships, combine with the revulsion that war inspires in him to prepare this change.

Back in America Ira's introduction to military life is very different from his brother's. At every step, motivated by his pacifist principles, he resists participation in any activity which might, in however indirect a manner, further the prosecution of war and pushed beyond endurance, he strikes a sergeant who has been tormenting him. Ira is courtmartialled and although he knows that, were the fact of the sergeant's own physical violence against him to become known, it would be in his favor, he keeps silent and is sentenced to twenty-five years in prison.

Yet, for all his martyrdom to principle, Ira remains a "tinkling cymbal": it is his brother Mastie, the wilful prodigal toward whom Ira displays such eternal resentment, who is truly informed by what the old biblical translators called charity. Paradoxically, it is Mastie's adventures at the battle front where he seeks escape from his ancestral world that bring him full circle.

While the novel is basically the tale of these two brothers, it also depicts vividly a

polarized wartime society. More particularly it describes the intolerance shown to a nonconforming minority by a majority driven to a frenzy of bigotry by the hyperpatriotism endemic in war. Not Ira alone, but his mother and father are made to suffer physically as well as mentally for their convictions. Their steadfastness and their lack of violence or even of resentment bring about in a convincing manner a change of heart in their persecutors. However, as the court interrogation of Ira by his colonel makes clear, it is not just this family, but the whole Mennonite way of life that is on trial in this novel.

As a group the "plain people" come off very well: their most impressive quality being their simplicity, in the sense of singleness of heart. Yet the novel itself is not simple, for the parable which supplied the basic theme is not simple; nor is Reed's picture of the Mennonites. The narrowness and hypocrisy that drive Mastie away from church and home are very real, but they are clearly shown as defects in individuals, rather than weaknesses in Christianity or in the Mennonite way of life.

While Kenneth Reed has succeeded in painting a broad picture of Mennonite society in this especially trying period, and in bringing to life the complicated relationship of two brothers, the novel is not without shortcomings. The characterization, especially of those shown to be antagonistic to the Mennonites, is frequently close to caricature. The simplicity of Reed's language is generally in keeping with the book's subject as it deals with a people known for their simplicity, sincerity, and lack of affectation. At times however, his choice of expression does not ring true. In some of the dialogue the effort to portray simplicity becomes too obvious, and one is aware of that curious brand of reverse snobbery called "cuteness."

Again, *Mennonite Soldier* seems unnecessarily long and diffuse. Kenneth Reed has written short stories with a great deal more impact. It is hoped that he will bring this quality to his next novel.

Jack Patterson

ALICE VAN WART, ED.
Face to Face: Anthology of New Brunswick Women Writers
Pp. 80.

Face to Face is a collection of twenty-nine poems and five short stories by "New Brunswick Women Writers." There is no doubt that "publishing outlets are always limited," and that "they are particularly so in New Brunswick" (p. 5), but the fact that talented writers like Mary Lund, Nancy Bauer, and Nancy K. Gormley had to publish their works in such a poorly designed and unprofessionally edited "anthology" shows how desperate the writers in New Brunswick have become.

The book has no publisher, no place or date of publication, the cover is tasteless, the layout is clumsy and amateurish, and the spelling is inconsistent (e.g. the word "neighbor" is spelled differently within the same story; pp. 24, 25). Nevertheless, one has to admit that the stories by Lund, Bauer, and Gormley make this booklet worthy of reading (even of buying; if one could only find out who sells it and how much it costs).

Mary Lund's "Could We Visit Grace" is a traditional genre picture that realistically depicts an afternoon which the narrator spends visiting a hard-working New Brunswick family. It is well-written; I only regret that Ms. Lund did not incorporate more of the narrator's inner monologue into her story, and that she did not experiment with unconventional points of view.

Nancy Bauer's "The Saint" is a fragmentary but professionally executed short narrative. In only four pages the authoress introduces three unusual and highly dramatic characters and narrates a strange anecdote which might not satisfy the traditional reader's desire for consistency and logical development. In anticipation of this reaction, the Editor—or maybe Ms. Bauer herself—felt it necessary to include a three-line note explaining its experimental nature.

In "Looking Up" Nancy K. Gormley demonstrates an impressive narrative talent. She relates, in a rather straightforward manner, the Christmas-time experiences of a husbandless mother of two children. If