

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

it were not for the two sentences "The chipped lettering on the door reads 'Salvation Army,'" and "I laughed, hugging her close. 'You know,' I replied, 'I was just wondering the same myself!'" (pp. 62, 64)—which make the situation depicted too conspicuous and thus less poetic—this six-page story would have been an excellent one.

Pamela Bush's "Bedtime Story" is a harmless little tale about witches, bad spirits and superstition; it has nothing to offer, neither intrinsically nor extrinsically.

Beth Powning's "Limbo" is the most conventional of the five stories. The style, setting, and central motif of this typical kitsch-story make it ideal for *feuilletons* and Saturday Family Supplements. Should Ms. Powning once decide to write a novel, she would have no problem finding a publisher.

S. Elkhadem

## JACK HODGINS

### *Spit Delaney's Island*

Toronto. Macmillan, 1976. Pp. 199.

The blurb on the dustjacket of this book is unfortunate. Canada's three leading women novelists, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, and Margaret Atwood dutifully trot out superlatives to convince us that we have something unusual before us. Assurance is given that Hodgins has generated considerable excitement in the literary community. The idea that outside a dozen friends the author might have there is such a community in Canada and that it can get excited by anything is news to me. We are told also that Vancouver Island, the locale of the stories Hodgins writes, has universal relevance. There is an inevitable comparison made with Faulkner's *South*. One grows tired of the patronizing attitude of Toronto publishers toward Canada's regional literature, of their vehement assertions that there are people way out on Vancouver Island and they really do matter. Hodgins needs none of this shrill shouting from the barricades to protect his turf. His presentation of life on the island is vivid, detailed, and convincing. In the life of

Spit Delaney, the main character of the opening and closing stories of the collection, we see what happens when a man breaks the routine of a lifetime. The stories assert again and again how much we are creatures of habit, how comforting our habits are, how easily habits foster illusions, and how many perils we encounter when we abandon our habits.

Hodgins is concerned with how people gradually drift apart or how they can suddenly come together, with the disruption caused by the decisive intervention of one life in another's. He is good at showing how people who live together for years as neighbors, or man and wife can remain essentially strangers because they are so obsessed with their own viewpoint that they cannot appreciate anyone else's. His characters are not glib self-analysts. Once a habitual pattern of life is broken they are often bewildered at being unable to explain exactly what is happening to them. He does not overexplain his stories. He allows his characters to retain some mystery in their stubborn persistence. By manipulating point of view he, like Alice Munro, draws the reader into a puzzle. He does not have her confident control, but he does not tease the reader either by implying that there is more mystery than one has any grounds for believing in, as Munro occasionally does.

"Separating" the leadoff story does not seem wholly successful to me. Spit Delaney has devoted all his love and care to operating a steam engine at a paper mill. When the engine is taken away from him, his life without that keystone collapses. Because Hodgins insists on observing Spit's wife and children from outside they become caricatures. That is his point, of course, that is how they appear to Delaney. But this family which is no longer real to Spit becomes incredible to the reader. Hodgins is good, however, at showing how, when a man becomes untracked, he is overwhelmed by fundamental questions that he has had no training in coping with. In the last story, which gives its title to the collection, we pursue Delaney's confusion after the breakdown of his marriage. He knows that an exotic, female poet who barges into his life and represents everything he hates has something to teach him. For a moment their lives touch and overlap. With great patience Hodgins sets out the defensive, grudging, wryly Self-deprecating quality of Spit's mind. He wants to tear away the coils of resentment