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The Box Social & Other Stories

James Reaney



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The Box Social & Other Stories gathers together nine of James Reaney's short fictions written in the 40s and early 50s and never previously collected in book form.

The collection takes its title from a short piece the author originally published in the University College *Undergrad* and which provoked a firestorm of eight hundred angry letters from subscribers when it was republished nationally in the *New Liberty* in the late 40s. It also thwarted the young author's designs on the editorship of the *Undergrad* because of his clear moral unsuitability for such an august position. (This is doubtful, because the *Undergrad* eventually came to be edited, thirty years later, by PQL publisher Tim Inkster.) `The Box Social' is remarkable, not only that it introduced the theme of date rape to Canadian literature some thirty years before the phrase was coined, but also that it is told from Sylvia's point of view, and yet again that it ends with one of the quietest lines of literary vitriol imaginable ... ```I hated you so much," she said softly.'

If Alice Munro has put the sexually awakening female under glass in *Lives of Girls and Women*, then *The Box Social* could just as easily have been titled *Lives of Boys and Men*.

In `The Bully', the brutality of what passes for etiquette in secondary school is contrasted with the simpler life of the farm personified in Noreen who drops grain in the shape of letters to feed her chickens -- `so that when the hens ate the grain they were forced to spell out Noreen's initials or to form a cross and circle. There were just enough hens to make this rather an interesting game. Sometimes, I know, Noreen spelled out whole sentences in this way, a letter or two each night, and I often wondered to whom she was writing up in the sky.' `The Bully' was included in *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories* edited by Margaret Atwood and Robert Weaver.

The young Margaret Atwood first encountered `The Bully' as an undergraduate. She read the story, oddly enough, in an anthology edited by Robert Weaver, and the experience was apparently seminal to her own development as a writer of fiction ...

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