


7-3-2014

The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne: Or a Word or Two on Those Port Annie Miracles by Jack Hodgins

Dania Tomlinson

University of British Columbia, Okanagan

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Nature and Society Relations Commons](#), and the [Place and Environment Commons](#)

Follow this and additional works at / Suivez-nous ainsi que d'autres travaux et œuvres:

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose>

Recommended Citation / Citation recommandée

Tomlinson, Dania. "The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne: Or a Word or Two on Those Port Annie Miracles by Jack Hodgins." *The Goose*, vol. 13, no. 1, article 8, 2014, <https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol13/iss1/8>.

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Goose by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Cet article vous est accessible gratuitement et en libre accès grâce à Scholars Commons @ Laurier. Le texte a été approuvé pour faire partie intégrante de la revue The Goose par un rédacteur autorisé de Scholars Commons @ Laurier. Pour de plus amples informations, contactez scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne: Or a Word or Two on Those Port Annie Miracles
by JACK HODGINS

Ronsdale, 2013 \$18.95.

Reviewed by DANIA TOMLINSON

Jack Hodgins' literary career needs no defending. He is a seasoned and well-established Vancouver Island writer and has won literary awards his entire career, ranging from 1977, for his collection of short stories called *Spit Delaney's Island*, to 2011, for his latest novel, *The Master of Happy Endings*. Early on in his career, Hodgins won the Governor General's Literary Award for his 1979 novel, *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*. This satirical novel, with its scope, eccentricity, and tenderness, has been aptly republished in 2013.

At first glance *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne's* Port Annie could be any small town. There is a recreation centre, a bar, a creative writing group, a public library, a mill, and plenty of gossip. The novel begins after a rogue wave has left "salt water and sand, stunned fish and shreds of tortured driftwood on the streets and front yards of houses." This wave has also brought ashore a Peruvian freighter from which a mysterious and beautiful woman referred to as the "seabird" disembarks and turns the head of every Port Annie citizen. Hodgins' follows her as she walks the streets and side streets of Port Annie, mapping for the reader not only the town's geography and various locales, but, by taking on each character's voice and thoughts as he or she comes across the seabird, Hodgins introduces the townspeople.

The narrative point of view skips from character to character, not chapter-

by-chapter, or even scene-by-scene, but line by line. This technique gives the Victorian tradition of narrative omniscience a new twist. Instead of following each character for an extended period, Hodgins puts one character's thoughts and words next to another character's thoughts and words, even though the two characters are nowhere near one another. This not only allows the reader to see Port Annie's various characters up against one another, but also portrays the community as an organism in itself. There are no main characters in this novel; instead, the main character of *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* is the town's community as a whole.

There is a local mythology about the genesis of Port Annie. It is said that before the town existed the ocean "belched up a gigantic blue whale" that "cried like a human." The next day the whale was gone and in its place was "a great fat lady with pale blue skin, miraculously tiny ears, and a mouth that could swallow you whole." This woman is Fat Annie, the town's matriarch. She is an obese woman who has not come down from her apartment above the Kick-and-Kill bar for twenty years. This genesis story serves as Port Annie's foundation, and gives the town an almost mythic status.

Although one magic realist feature of this novel is its various fantastical events, such as Fat Annie's transformation from a whale to a woman and Joseph Bourne's resurrection, it is Hodgins' writing style that really carries the magic. Whether it is the description of the town as "studded with beautiful shells and glittering stones from the ocean," or the fishing boat washed up in a tree miraculously containing "rocks covered with barnacles," as well as "[c]rabs", "[s]ea cucumbers, [and] [o]ysters," or the swarm of blue jays called a "plague of too much life, too much colour

and excitement and noise,” it is Hodgins’ imaginative writing style that makes Port Annie alive and full of magic.

At first, many of the characters in this novel appear to be stereotypical small-town folk. There is a recluse, an ex-stripper, a quiet librarian, a crazed mayor, and a superstitious old woman. However, as the narrative progresses, these characters become complex and evoke empathy. Although this novel is often considered a satire, Hodgins’ humour is rarely scathing towards his characters. He treats the most vulnerable and laughable characters with tenderness. For example, Jennie Chambers, an ex-stripper who one day visits Port Annie and decides to stay on with a father of eight children, becomes the unlikely hero at the end of the novel. Her striptease brings the town to tears: “In Jenny’s dance they all saw something different, something the same.” While Hodgins could easily turn this situation into comedy at the expense of Jennie’s dignity, he chooses not to. Similarly, the delicate relationship between Papa Magnani and Mr. Manku, two married, middle-aged men, is apparent only through momentary handholding, and Papa Magnani’s careful folding of Mr. Manku’s clothing and eagerness to have him over for wine. There is no narrative judgment placed upon this forbidden and possibly one-way intimacy. The actions are left ambiguous and up to the reader to decide.

The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne is a novel about people, or more precisely, a novel about people in community. In this novel Hodgins reveals the complexity, beauty, and magic of everyday life.

DANIA TOMLINSON is a creative writing masters student at UBC Okanagan. She is currently working on her first novel.