

Non Semper Fidelis

Sam Foster

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With intriguing looks at military loyalty, Non Semper Fidelis takes a thoughtful look at American marines.

Sam Foster's *Non Semper Fidelis* skillfully examines the inner workings of a Marine Corps base, Quantico, during an uneasy period in 1968.

Private Jack Kendrick has a moral streak, but also some anger issues. He takes it upon himself to correct injustices meted out to his fellow marines, and focuses on William Buck, a fellow soldier who is black. Buck is AWOL following a visit to his mother in Memphis on the weekend that Martin Luther King was assassinated. Kendrick's honesty and determination overcome the injustices dealt to Buck, though his loyalty to the Corps is at risk as a result.

The narrative is at its best when it eyes the intimacy of the marines' lives. Dialogue is filled with military lingo, acronyms, and vulgarities, which imbue the novel with a sense of place and time. Commanding officers are stern and formal, but everyone is shown to take pride in their roles, including in their pristine appearances. Kendrick is more complicated. Confronted with biased superior officers or ignorant hippies, his usual response is to try to convert them with his fists. His fights are detailed in language that is crisp and realistic.

Information about the military installation itself sometimes bogs down the story line. Half of a chapter is devoted, exposition-style, to a detailed analysis of the finer points of joint maneuvers, demolitions, and close air support. One secondary character is introduced but never reappears; a few central characters are introduced late.

While the narrator switches between points of view, most scenes remain firmly on the base or in nearby Washington, DC. While several minor characters, tangential to the plot, reveal their inner thoughts, Corporal Buck is known only by his immediate conversations on base and a telephone call from Memphis, so his reasoning goes relatively unexplored.

Non Semper Fidelis is noteworthy for its accurate portrayal of military life and a peek behind the mystery of how officers are selected and trained.

THOMAS H. BRENNAN (Winter 2017)

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