

Mennonite Literature in Canada: Beginnings, Reception and Study

Harry Loewen *University of Winnipeg*

For all the skills they have shown for centuries in the practical arts, Mennonites have failed to develop among themselves an appreciation for the literary arts and even less for literary artists.¹ This is not to say that Mennonites did not read books. As Jacob H. Janzen wrote with affectionate irony some forty years ago: "They [Mennonites] liked to have good books. They bought Menno Simons' writings and laid them away to become dust covered on the corner shelf."² Not only did Mennonites in Russia know the writings of Menno Simons; they also read other works written by non-Mennonites, even works of fiction, especially those which appealed to their sense of religious piety and practical concerns. Works like Jung-Stilling's *Das Heimweh* were not only appreciated by nineteenth-century Russian Mennonites, but were occasionally taken in a literal sense which could result in strange historical consequences.³

During the nineteenth century Russian Mennonites did produce a few poets who achieved respect and popularity among the practically-minded Mennonites. The most outstanding among these was Bernhard Harder (1832-84) of the Molotschnaya who as preacher, teacher and poet spoke and sang his evangelical concerns into the hearts and minds of his people. Harder deserves his rightful place among the emerging Mennonite writers, but as a poet he saw himself more in a didactic and moralizing role than as an artist. The Mennonite literary artist was unknown among the nineteenth-century Russian Mennonites.⁴

It has been suggested that Mennonite literature not only grew out of the Russian-Mennonite tradition, but that in its appeal to Mennonite readers it was in part successful because there was a community which accepted this literature, however reluctantly.⁵ This is no doubt true with regard to the kind of literature which was largely didactic and pietistic in

nature, designed to challenge the Mennonite churchgoer. But when it came to genuine literary art, the Mennonite reader needed to be trained to appreciate literature, and this training process, undertaken by the early Canadian-Mennonite writers, brought with it disappointments for the writers themselves and even alienation between the Mennonite public and the Mennonite artists. We need not go into the reasons here for this Mennonite reluctance to acknowledge the literary artist;⁶ but it is a fact that creative literature is a relatively new arrival among Canadian Mennonites, not much more than fifty years old. This cultural child was in a sense "untimely born," to use a Pauline term, and its aging parents found it difficult to fully accept and love it.

This, then, is an inquiry into the nature and objectives of Mennonite literary beginnings, coupled with an analytical summary of its reception among Mennonite and non-Mennonite readers, critics and students. I shall limit myself to Canadian-Mennonite creative literature and criticism and touch upon non-Canadian writings only insofar as they relate to Mennonite literary activity in this country. Such a summary should give an adequate picture of the state of Mennonite literary art in Canada.

Elsewhere I have argued that Russian-Mennonite literature originated in the upheavals of World War I and the Communist Revolution of 1917.⁷ Before that, there was no Mennonite literature to speak of. It is true that toward the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries Mennonites not only became more receptive to reading material from abroad, but also sent their young people to teacher training institutions, seminaries, and universities in Germany, Switzerland as well as Russian centres.⁸ The Mennonite intellectuals who returned to their towns and villages as ministers, teachers, businessmen and professionals brought with them more sophisticated literary tastes and even began to write themselves. These educated Mennonites felt a need for creative literature, but it is doubtful whether such a literature would have emerged among them at the time without the collapse of the Mennonite world in the aftermath of 1917. Out of the loss of this world and the collective Mennonite pain which resulted from this loss, a Mennonite creative literature was born. The Mennonite writer no longer needed to imitate old, mostly German, literary forms; he now had his own story to tell, a most important prerequisite for literature.⁹ Prior to 1917 there was little to tell. The Mennonites lived in a secure, whole, utopian-like world, a world which resembled the idyllic nature poems which Mennonites enjoyed and imitated. Harmony and peace rarely give rise to creative literature. But when Mennonites suffered loss and tragedy, their creative impulses emerged and poured their particular woe into literary forms of their own making.

The most prominent among the Russian-Canadian Mennonite liter-

ary artists were Jacob H. Janzen, Gerhard Loewen, Georg de Brecht (Gerhard Toews), Arnold Dyck, and Fritz Senn (Gerhard Friesen). These writers wrote primarily in High and Low German about the tragic Mennonite experiences in Russia. What follows, first of all, is a brief examination of their work and its reception by their Mennonite readers.

When Jacob H. Janzen (1878-1950) published in Russia his first collection of stories, *Denn meine Augen haben Deinen Heiland gesehen* (1910), young Mennonite intellectuals like Arnold Dyck were delighted. "This book," wrote Arnold Dyck, "marked not only the beginning of Mennonite belles-letters but also announced its outstanding representative in J. H. Janzen."¹⁰ Janzen's stories are generally unoriginal and sentimentalized, but in the words of Al Reimer, Janzen "has such a crystal-clear style and so engaging a narrative manner that his overt didacticism is not offensive."¹¹ While this work of fiction and Low German playlets like *Die Bildung*, *Die Einbildung* and *Daut Schultebot* (*The Village Council*) were read and generally enjoyed by the Mennonite public in Russia and in Canada, the author himself felt that the literary artists, including himself, remained aliens among their people. "It appears," he wrote in 1943, "that Mennonitism has never been fertile ground for belles-letters."¹²

To prepare the ground for creative literature in general and Canadian-Mennonite literature and its reception in particular, these early writers sought to teach their Mennonite readers the rudiments of literary appreciation by publishing their works, often at their own expense. In the 1935 and 1936 issues of the *Mennonitische Volkswarte*, edited by Arnold Dyck, Gerhard Loewen (1863-1946) published a series of five articles entitled: "Harmlose Plaudereien über Poesie und Verwandtes" ("Harmless Chats about Poetry and Similar Things") in the hope that Mennonite readers would eventually accept the view that poetry and literary prose are not only part of God's creation but that they are also "true" and hence useful.¹³ I am not aware of how readers responded to this gentle nature poet of "Feldblumen", as he called his own poetic creations, but since in addition to being a poet Loewen was also a beloved teacher and minister, his poetic endeavors were both tolerated and to a certain extent appreciated. According to Jacob H. Janzen, Loewen's poetry was appreciated especially for its naturalness and love of nature.¹⁴

The Mennonite writer who was able to recreate the turbulent period in Russia most vividly was Gerhard Toews (Georg de Brecht). In his novel *Heimat in Flammen* (c. 1932-33) and its sequel *Heimat in Trümmern* (1936), published by the Warte-Verlag in Steinbach, Manitoba, Toews describes the civil war period and Mennonite involvement in the *Selbstschutz* (Self-Defense) creatively and realistically and in a prose that is filled with fast-paced action and suspenseful drama. While the charac-

ters and situations in Toews' novels are simplistically drawn, more often than not in black and white, the plots are well developed and the characters psychologically motivated. As Al Reimer comments, "Toews's novels are quite readable and sweep the reader along on sheer narrative energy."¹⁵

Arnold Dyck (1889-1970), arguably the greatest Mennonite literary figure, embodied the joys and sorrows of the artist as no one else among the Canadian-Mennonite writers. Having experienced the collapse of the Mennonite world in Russia, he came to Canada in the 1920s, hoping to use his talents as a writer and graphic artist among his people. He wrote stories and poems in High and Low-German, edited for some time Mennonite periodicals, published his own books and those of others, and promoted fellow writers as much as possible. His most ambitious novel, *Verloren in der Steppe* (*Lost in the Steppe*) (1940s), is a novel in the *Bildungsroman* tradition of German literature.¹⁶ This novel is recognized today by critics as one which can stand favorable comparison with any other work in this genre. Portraying young Hänschen Toews as an outsider and seeker for an identity as an artist among Mennonites, the novel stands symbolically for many Mennonite intellectuals who experienced the Mennonite steppe as a place which confined them personally and restricted their freedom of creative expression.

Dyck's most successful literary creation was no doubt his *Koop enn Bua* series. However, despite the joy and love with which Dyck created his *Koop enn Bua* stories in Low-German — the language closest to his heart — and such tragic short-stories as *Twee Breew* (*Two Letters*),¹⁷ Arnold Dyck the writer and artist remained on the periphery of Mennonite life, never fully understood nor appreciated. Some of his expressed laments with regard to Mennonite attitudes toward art and culture and his failure to persuade Mennonites to purchase and read more books written by Mennonites,¹⁸ reflect at least in part the state of Mennonite literary art in the '30s, '40s and '50s in Canada.

The finest lyrical poet to emerge from the Russian-Mennonite soil was Fritz Senn (Gerhard Friesen). Fritz Senn also left his "Heimat" in South Russia during the 1920s and came to Canada where he tried his hand at farming. This poet of the "Hinterm Pflug" cycle of poems was deeply committed to his Mennonite community and people, but found it difficult to identify fully with the religious institutions of the Canadian Mennonites. Jacob H. Janzen surmises that his reluctance to join a Mennonite church was in part due to his material poverty: ". . . vielleicht weil er denkt, er könne als armer Mann doch nicht recht im Gemeindebau mitwirken."¹⁹ Janzen continues: "Und obwohl mein Eindruck von ihm der war, dass er tief religiös ist, mag ihm unsere Gemeinschaft doch

zuletzt zu eng and zu spiessbürgerlich erscheinen, als dass er sich ihr ganz hingegen und sich dabei wohl fühlen könne."²⁰

Publishing his poems in the *Mennonitische Warte*, *Warte-Jahrbuch*, *Der Bote* and other Mennonite publications, Fritz Senn more than any other Mennonite poet of the older generation expressed his love and longing for the forever-lost Mennonite world in Russia. His poetry, however, is not just nostalgia for the past but deals with timeless human issues and values in general and the Mennonite experience in particular. Thus the "Plowman" motif in Fritz Senn's "Hinterm Pflug"/"Stimmungen" cycle not only describes the faith and life of Mennonite farmers in Russia, but also applies to Mennonite suffering in an existential sense.²¹

The five Canadian-Mennonite writers mentioned represent the most significant of the literary artists writing in German. There are, however, others who wrote and continue to write in this Mennonite-German tradition, although most of them try to adapt their poetry to contemporary Canadian conditions. Valentin Sawatzky of Waterloo, Ontario, has published several volumes of poetry,²² and Abram J. Friesen of New Brunswick, while not prolific, has written some very good poetry in which he develops the tension which arises when different worlds and values meet.²³ Continuing the Low German literary tradition are storytellers and poets like Reuben Epp of Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Gerhard Ens, editor of *Der Bote*, and Jack Thiessen of Winnipeg.

With the passing of Gerhard Loewen (1946), Jacob H. Janzen (1950), and Arnold Dyck (1970), an era in Mennonite writing had come to an end. Both Janzen and Dyck felt that with the disappearance of the German language and the older generation of Canadian-Mennonite writers the brief but significant flowering of Mennonite letters was doomed to an uncertain future, although both expressed the hope that a new generation of writers would continue the some forty-year-old tradition of Canadian-Mennonite writing.²⁴ It must also be said to their credit that their faith in their calling as literary artists and their hope that their people would some day become more receptive to the forms and values of creative literature, far outweighed their personal disappointments in their literary endeavours.²⁵

With the publication of Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962) a new generation of Canadian-Mennonite writers emerged on the scene. Born and raised in North America, writers like Rudy Wiebe, Barbara Smucker, Clinton Towes, David Waltner-Toews, and Patrick Friesen not only write in English but they have shifted the focus of their themes from a description of loss and destruction of a physical homeland to a reflection upon questions of identity as individuals and as a people and Mennonite values in a modern society. George Epp has emphasized

that the older poets and novelists were writers closely attached to their Mennonite group (Gruppenbürger), whereas the new Mennonite writers will have to transcend their ethnic community and as literary artists become "Weltbürger."²⁶ In reading the poetry of these young writers and hearing them speak about their roles as creative artists one definitely senses that they do not wish to be known as Mennonite poets and novelists but simply as writers who happen to be Mennonites.²⁷ They write from their Canadian-Mennonite tradition, but what they have to say is intended for both Mennonites and non-Mennonites. Moreover, having been educated in secular universities and influenced by primarily English and American literature, these young writers will not be hemmed in by what they consider to be narrow Mennonite-religious limits. In addition to raising questions of identity, these writers deal with questions of social and political justice, affluence and poverty, and faith and doubt, to name only the most important ones. It is also significant to note that these younger writers not only deal with Russian-Canadian-Mennonite issues, as the early writers did, but also with the faith and life of the Anabaptists and with questions of what it means to be an Anabaptist-Mennonite in today's society. In this the new writers are reminding modern Mennonites of their historical and spiritual beginnings, while at the same time urging them to transcend their ethnic-cultural bounds.

But this is not to say that the new writers are more appreciated by their fellow Mennonites. When Rudy Wiebe's first novel appeared, a novel which examined Canadian-Mennonite beliefs and practices from the vantage point of the Gospel and Anabaptist values, the attack upon the young writer was so intense that he was compelled to resign from his position as editor of the Winnipeg-based *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. Even some Mennonite academics, while admiring Wiebe as an artist, felt that the author of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was too "sarcastic" in portraying his negative characters.²⁸ Another Mennonite critic found the novel too judgemental of Mennonite life.²⁹ Some condemned the book without reading it. Wiebe himself said: "A lot of people who yelled never read the book. . . . They just got it from reports. It didn't sell enough for all the hullabaloo it raised."³⁰

Rudy Wiebe's second Mennonite novel, *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970), escaped the harsh criticism of the first because, one suspects, it was not widely read among Mennonites and still less understood.³¹ Spanning four continents and dealing with the vast Mennonite story in individual epic scenes in which motifs and characters are developed by means of various literary devices such as flashbacks, stream of consciousness, symbolism and linguistic variations, *The Blue Mountains of China* is an acknowledged work of art, and one of the best novels Wiebe has written.

Rudy Wiebe does not only explore issues related to Mennonite faith and life, but also, like a prophet of old, becomes the conscience of both Mennonite and non-Mennonite societies. Wiebe's moral Anabaptist sense also extends to those in Canadian society who in the past and still today suffered oppression and injustice at the hands of the powerful. In his novels *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977), Wiebe the "Weltbürger" takes up the cause of Canada's native people and the Metis against those who historically have taken advantage of them.

Another Mennonite writer who in her works transcends the Mennonite bounds is Barbara Smucker of Waterloo, Ontario. Even before Rudy Wiebe wrote his first novel, Smucker was writing stories primarily for children, although they are read widely by adults as well. *Henry's Red Sea* (1955) and *Cherokee Run* (1957), published by Herald Press, were written to give Mennonite children a sense of their own heritage. In *Wigwam in the City* (1966) and *Underground to Canada* (1977), Smucker writes with compassion and understanding about the problems of young Indians and black children respectively. *Days of Terror* (1979), Smucker's most successful novel, tells the story of a pacifist Mennonite family leaving their South-Russian village during the upheavals of the Communist Revolution. This story, told through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old Mennonite boy, won the Canada Council Award for Children's Literature. Both *Underground to Canada* and *Days of Terror* were also published by Penguin Books, which indicates the popularity and quality of Smucker's children's novels.³²

B. Mabel Dunham of Kitchener, Ontario, a descendant of Mennonites, wrote several novels in which the early Mennonite settlers of Ontario are treated effectively and sympathetically. *The Trail of the Conestoga* (1924) deals with the Mennonite immigrants to Waterloo County from Pennsylvania, and *Toward Sodom* (1927) deals with the settlers' isolation and non-conformity with regard to the "world" and the problems, especially among the young, that result from this. Similarly, Luella Creighton in her novel *High Bright Buggy Wheels* (1951) draws on the beliefs and practices of a conservative community of Mennonites in Ontario, treating the religionists, whose beliefs the author does not share, with appreciation and understanding.

Among the Canadian-Mennonite poets writing in English, Menno Wiebe, Clinton Toews, David Waltner-Toews, and Patrick Friesen are the most important ones. In their poetry they expose the hypocrisy, materialism, and shallow religiosity of the Mennonites on the one hand and on the other deal with questions of social concerns, peace and justice, and Native rights. What Peter Pauls says concerning the poetry of Menno Wiebe applies to most young Mennonite poets writing in English:

Although many of his poems are religious, they bear little resemblance to the religious poems of Mennonite poets in the past. Mr. Wiebe's individualism, sincerity and perceptiveness appeal strongly to readers who no longer respond to the clichés of the earlier devotional poetry. . . . Some of his poems reveal a distinct impatience with those who are too slow to adapt their Christianity to the needs of the larger human family.³³

David Waltner-Toews' compassion also extends to those who are less fortunate than his fellow-Canadians in such poems as "A Culcutta Street, 1967" and "In an Old Colonial Mansion (Guadeloupe)." After describing the life of ease and luxury of western colonial masters, Toews concludes in the latter poem: "How easily appearances might hold a conscience captive, / and a sunset justify a thousand slaves."³⁴

The most promising of the young Mennonite poets is no doubt Patrick Friesen of Winnipeg. With his three published collections of poems, *The Lands I am* (1976), *Bluebottle* (1978) and *The Shunning* (1980), he has firmly established his reputation as a poet to be reckoned with.³⁵ In *The Shunning* Friesen picks up a subject which characterized the more conservative Mennonite communities in the past and develops alongside this theme several motifs and subjects taken from Anabaptist and Mennonite history. This narrative poem is engaging reading and stimulates reflection on issues which are still part of Mennonite society. In the past a bold poet like Friesen would have suffered severe censure from Mennonite critics; today Mennonites have become too sophisticated (or perhaps only more timid in the presence of university-trained writers) to express their displeasure vocally or in writing. Conversely, the new generation of poets and novelists have become less concerned about the criticism of their co-religionists; they are much more worried about what their literary critics in the academic world have to say about their art. To these literary critics we now must turn.

In our consideration of the secondary literature in the area of Mennonite writing we are primarily interested in some answers to the following questions: First, how have Mennonite and non-Mennonite literary critics responded to the emerging creative literature among Canadian Mennonites? and, secondly, what do these critics have to say concerning the literary quality of Mennonite literature?

It goes without saying that the reception and interpretation of Canadian-Mennonite literature varies, depending in part on the background from which the critic is writing. Moreover, the interpretation of a literary work is an expression of the critics' personal experiences and *Weltanschauung*, although the critics considered here are mostly academics who are well acquainted with the methodology of the literary discipline.

There are first of all those critics, mostly Mennonite, who express an almost pleasant surprise at the emergence of creative literature among

Mennonites. Cornelius Krahn of Bethel College was one of the first to alert Mennonites to the literary artist in their midst. Introducing Johannes Harder to the Mennonite reading public in 1953, Krahn hails this German-Mennonite author as a great literary artist and expresses the hope that Harder will some day write ". . . the Mennonite novel which he carries in his heart and of which we are so much in need."³⁶ Elsewhere Krahn pleads for an acceptance of the Mennonite artist, hoping that artistically-inclined Mennonites will not find it necessary to "leave the fold in order to develop their talents."³⁷ Elmer Suderman, writing in 1963 concerning Rudy Wiebe and his first novel, is encouraged to see "that the Mennonites should have at last a young North American novelist writing in English."³⁸ Al Reimer writes of Patrick Friesen:

What a revelation it is to have a genuine poetic vision of our very own humble, prosaic, taken-for-granted Mennonite World! [Pat Friesen] is revealing our own world to us in all its muted colors and dark illusions, a world that is as real and significant and worthy of being projected into the timeless forms of imaginative literature as any other. Through an artist like Pat Friesen we can at last begin to discover what we truly are as Mennonites.³⁹

And George Epp regards the emergence of Mennonite literature in Canada as "significant", especially in view of the small number of Mennonites among the German-Canadian population in Canada.⁴⁰

There are, however, also those Mennonite literary critics who express a discomfort about portraying Mennonites and Mennonite issues in creative literature. These critics feel that the image of Mennonites which the artist creates, an image that also includes the negative aspects of Mennonitism, will contribute to wrong perceptions — especially among non-Mennonite readers — of what Mennonites really are and aspire to be. Thus Elizabeth Horsch Bender in reviewing the novels of Hans Harder and Peter Epp in 1947 is less concerned about the literary value of these works than concerning how truly "Mennonite" these novels are.⁴¹ Other critics are more subtle in their criticism of Mennonite literature. While paying tribute to the literary qualities of Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, one critic, for example, states that in portraying the Mennonite world, Wiebe shows little "compassion".⁴² Another Mennonite critic feels that the novel lacks "grace".⁴³

Another group of critics, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite, sees much of Canadian-Mennonite literature as an attempt on the part of the poets and novelists to come to terms with their ethnic-religious past. This Mennonite past is perceived to be culturally and spiritually narrow and even stifling. Especially writers like Fritz Senn, Arnold Dyck and Patrick Friesen are seen as struggling with a tradition from which they draw sustenance and inspiration on the one hand and from which they seek release on the other. According to this interpretation the writers and their

characters are non-conformists and to a certain extent even outsiders, or at best people existing on the periphery of the Mennonite communities.⁴⁴ Coupled with the motif of the artist and hero as outsiders and non-conformists is the view that especially ethnic literature is largely preoccupied with questions of self-awareness as individuals and groups and with issues related to group identity. According to this view it is often the literary artist who contributes most of all to the group's sense of identity, an identity which has been lacking or even lost. As Robert Kroetsch said to Margaret Laurence: "In a sense we haven't got an identity until someone tells our story. The fiction makes us real."⁴⁵ John L. Ruth has said much the same in his *Mennonite Identity and Literary Art*.⁴⁶

It is interesting and perhaps significant to note that evangelical literary critics have interpreted Mennonite novels in terms of a Christian witness in a secular society. Maxine Hancock in *Christianity Today*, for example, sees Rudy Wiebe as an Old Testament-like prophet crying as a lonely voice in the wilderness of a perverted and sinful world.⁴⁷ According to Hancock and other evangelicals the Christian literary artist seeks to advance the Kingdom of God with his talents. David L. Jeffrey is more subtle in his analysis of the religious writer's role in society. Of Wiebe he writes:

So Wiebe is a secular and modern man, writing out of frustration, as each of his Mennonite novels . . . makes particularly clear. He is also an angry and religious man; tutored by that sense of responsibility and personal evaluation characteristic of his subculture, he despises the moral sloppiness and evident intolerance of the culture at large. He finds our present cultural apathy a pretentious and consciously hypocritical evasion of every kind of interpersonal responsibility — national, communal or cultural.⁴⁸

While there are still critics who feel that Mennonite creative literature has to be defended and promoted as a particular — perhaps even as a peculiar — art form,⁴⁹ there is emerging today a modest yet important quantity of secondary literature which takes Mennonite literary works more seriously. Non-Mennonite critics like W. J. Keith, Ina Ferris, Hartmut Froeschle, Stephen Scobie, Heinz Kloss, Daniel Lenoski, Michael Hadley, and Sam Solecki, and Mennonite academics like Stanley C. Shenk, Elmer Suderman, Jack Thiessen, Al Reimer, Victor Doerksen, Peter Pauls, Magdalene Falk Redekop, and Hildegard Tiessen have analyzed the works of Canadian-Mennonite writers and ranked them with the best poets and novelists in Canada.⁵⁰

There are other encouraging signs that Mennonite novelists and poets are increasingly recognized and accepted by the academic and Mennonite communities. The Mennonite writers themselves are invited to high schools and universities to read from their works and the reviews of such readings are mostly positive of and encouraging to the writers.⁵¹

Despite the complaints by such authors as Arnold Dyck and Rudy Wiebe that Mennonites have been reluctant to purchase and read their works,⁵² the Mennonite public is beginning to buy the many Mennonite books on the market.⁵³ In secondary schools and in universities Mennonite authors are read and studied. The University of Winnipeg, for example, has several Mennonite authors courses, including Low-German, as part of its academic programme. Low German is far from a dead language among Canadian Mennonites. In April of this year (1982) there took place a significant symposium at the University of Winnipeg at which the participants worked at, and achieved, a standard Plautdietsch orthography. Sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, the Mennonite Literary Society and the Chair in Mennonite Studies, the symposium made an important contribution to Low German writing. Also, Mennonite works are being translated and literary essays are published by the Mennonite Literary Society and the Chair in Mennonite Studies.⁵⁴ Periodicals and literary journals are beginning to appear in which the arts, literature and Mennonite culture are treated and promoted. Especially such journals as *Mennonite Life* and *Festival Quarterly* in the United States and the Manitoba-based *Mennonite Mirror* have been and are promoting Mennonite literature and literary studies. Cornelius Krahn writes in the recently-published revised *Story of the Mennonites* that especially Winnipeg is becoming an important Mennonite cultural and literary centre. He speaks of "an unusual interest" among the Mennonites of Winnipeg in the creative arts, including drama, fiction and poetry.⁵⁵ Drama groups in Manitoba are staging Arnold Dyck's Low German plays and others before large and enthusiastic audiences, and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society is in the process of publishing a complete edition of Dyck's works. There are also several dissertations which deal with Mennonite literature.

In conclusion, Canadian-Mennonite literature, begun in the destruction of the Mennonite world in Europe, especially Russia, and developed in the second quarter of the twentieth century in Canada by authors writing about their lost homeland in German,⁵⁶ is today coming of age with works written in English by second- and third-generation Mennonite writers. And the critical attention given to this developing Mennonite literature shows both increasing maturity in its critical objectivity and in its appreciative acceptance of Mennonite literature. The Mennonite literary artist and the Mennonite literary academic may still feel like stepchildren in their Mennonite homes, but as maturing individuals they are no longer as sensitive to the treatment they receive from their parents, and the parents on their part are learning to respect and perhaps even love them.

Notes

¹ John L. Ruth, *Mennonite Identity and Literary Art*. Focal Pamphlet 29 (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania and Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1978), pp. 26-45. See also H. Görz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*. Entstehung, Entwicklung und Untergang (Steinbach: Echo-Verlag, 1950-51), p. 165.

² J. H. Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 1 (January, 1946), No. 1, p. 22. This article appeared originally in German as "Die Belletristik der Canadianischen Russlanddeutschen Mennoniten," *Warte-Jahrbuch*, 1943, 1. Jahrgang, hrsg. von Arnold Dyck (Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada: Prairie Press, 1943), pp. 83-89.

³ See the article by Victor G. Doerksen, "From Jung-Stilling to Rudy Wiebe: 'Christian Fiction' and the Mennonite Imagination," in Harry Loewen (ed.), *Mennonite Images*. Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1980), pp. 197-208. On what Mennonites read in the 1860s, see Görz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, p. 70.

⁴ Al Reimer points out that "P. M. Friesen's five-page chapter on Mennonite publications in *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (1789-1910) does not include a single work of fiction . . ." Loewen (ed.), *Mennonite Images*, p. 223.

⁵ Georg K. Epp, "Der mennonitische Beitrag zur deutschkanadischen Literatur," in Hartmut Froeschle (ed.), *German-Canadian Yearbook*, Volume VI, (Toronto: Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada Inc., 1981), pp. 143-44.

⁶ Ruth does this well in *Mennonite Identity*, pp. 26-46.

⁷ See my paper "Canadian-Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland," presented before the Mennonite Historical Society of Goshen, Indiana, on February 8, 1982.

⁸ N. J. Klassen, "Mennonite Intelligentsia in Russia," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 24 (April 1969), No. 2, pp. 51-60.

⁹ Ruth, *Mennonite Identity*, pp. 13-25.

¹⁰ Arnold Dyck, "Jacob H. Janzen — Writer," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 6 (July, 1951), No. 3, p. 33.

¹¹ Al Reimer, "The Russian-Mennonite Experience in Fiction," Loewen (ed.), *Mennonite Images*, p. 227.

¹² Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," p. 22.

¹³ G[erhard] Loewen, "Harmlose Plauderei über Poesie und Verwandtes," *Mennonitische Volkswarte*, hrsg. von A. B. Dyck, I (Mai 1935), 5, pp. 180-82; *ibid.*, I (September 1935), 9, pp. 335-38; *ibid.*, I (Oktober 1935), 10, pp. 373-77; *ibid.*, I (November 1935), 11, pp. 418-23; *ibid.*, II (January 1936), 1, pp. 12-17. See also Loewen's "Kunst und Natur," *Mennonitische Volkswarte*, II (February 1936) 2, pp. 45-47; "Ueber Harmonie, Musik und Gesang," *ibid.*, II (Juni 1936), 6, pp. 176-81; "Jungbrunnen," *Mennonitische Warte*, IV (January 1938), 37, pp. 13-18.

¹⁴ Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," p. 23.

¹⁵ Reimer, "The Russian-Mennonite Experience in Fiction," pp. 228-29.

¹⁶ See Michael L. Hadley, "Education and Alienation in Dyck's 'Verloren in der Steppe': a Novel of Cultural Crisis," *German-Canadian Yearbook* 1976, pp. 199-206.

¹⁷ *Twee Breew* was translated into English by Elizabeth Peters as *Two Letters in The Journal of Canadian Fiction*, #16 (1976), pp. 17-31.

¹⁸ Arnold Dyck, "Aus meinem Leben," unpublished manuscript, pp. 29-31.

¹⁹ Janzen, "Die Belletristik," p. 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Fritz Senn, "Hinterm Pflug/Stimmungen," *Mennonitische Volkswarte*, Jahrg. 1 (September 1935), No. 9, p. 328.

²² Sawatzky's books include *Heimatglocken*. Lyrik and Balladen (Selbstverlag, 1962); *Friedensklänge*. Gedichte (Selbstverlag, 1971); *Abendlicht*. Gedichte und Märchen (Selbstverlag, 1977); *Glockenläuten*. Gedichte. Auswahl (Selbstverlag, 1982); *Eichenlaub*. Gedichte und Märchen (Selbstverlag, 1981); *Lindenblätter*. Ausgewählte Gedichte (Selbstverlag, n.d.); Occasionally Sawatzky writes in English or translates his poems into English for the benefit of younger readers.

²³ See some of Friesen's poems in George K. Epp (ed.), *Unter dem Nordlicht*. An-

thologie des deutschen Schrifttums der Mennoniten in Canada (Winnipeg: The Mennonite German Society of Canada, 1977), pp. 66-74.

²⁴ Dyck, "Jacob H. Janzen — Writer," p. 43; Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," p. 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Epp, "Der mennonitische Beitrag," p. 146.

²⁷ See Paul Tiessen's and Margaret Loewen Reimer's interview of David Waltner-Toews and Patrick Friesen in *Mennonite Reporter*, Vol. 12 (Monday, January 25, 1982), No. 2, p. 8.

²⁸ Herbert Giesbrecht, "O Life, How Naked and How Hard When Known!" in W. J. Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 51-63.

²⁹ Marlin Jeschke in a review of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXXVII (Oct. 1963), 4, pp. 335-37.

³⁰ Keith, *A Voice in the Land*, p. 128.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Barbara Smucker's *Days of Terror* has been translated into French and her *Underground to Canada* into German, French and Japanese.

³³ Peter Pauls, "Mennonite poets possess potential to rank with Canada's best," *Mennonite Mirror* (October 1975), p. 11.

³⁴ David Waltner-Toews, *The Earth is One Body* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1979), p. 28.

³⁵ All three volumes were published by the Turnstone Press in Winnipeg.

³⁶ Cornelius Krahn, "Hans Harder — A Mennonite Novelist," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 8 (April 1953), No. 2, p. 79.

³⁷ Cornelius Krahn, "Mennonites and the Fine Arts," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 3 (April 1948), No. 2, p. 3.

³⁸ Elmer F. Suderman, "Universal Values in Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*," reprinted in Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, p. 70.

³⁹ Al Reimer, "Listening to the gift of poetry with Pat Friesen," *Mennonite Mirror*, Vol. 10 (March 1981), No. 7, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Epp, *German-Canadian Yearbook* 1978, pp. 343-55.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Horsch Bender, "The Novels of Hans Harder and Peter Epp," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 21 (April 1947), No. 2, pp. 103-13.

⁴² In Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, p. 63.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ See especially the following studies: Mary Regehr Dueck, "Arnold Dyck: Non-Conformist," *Mennonite Life* (December 1975), pp. 20-24; Jack Thiessen, "Arnold Dyck — the Mennonite Artist," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 24 (April 1969), pp. 77-83; Michael Hadley, "Education and Alienation in Dyck's 'Verloren in der Steppe'," pp. 199-206; Daniel S. Lenoski, "The Sandbox Holds Civilization," in *Essays on Canadian Writing*. Prairie Poetry Issue (ed. by Jack David), pp. 131-42; Calvin Redekop, "The Making of a Stranger: An Analysis of Rimland's *The Wanderers*," an unpublished essay.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ Ruth, *Mennonite Identity*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁷ Maxine Hancock, "Wiebe: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness," *Christianity Today*, Vol. 23 (Feb. 16, 1979), No. 9.

⁴⁸ David L. Jeffrey, "A Search for Peace: Prophecy and Parable in the Fiction of Rudy Wiebe," in Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, p. 180.

⁴⁹ See Epp, *German-Canadian Yearbook* 1981, p. 142-43; Heinz Kloss, "Bemerkungen zur deutsch-kanadischen Literatur," *German-Canadian Yearbook* 1976, pp. 188-92.

⁵⁰ See the following articles among others: Stephen Scobie, "For Goodness' sake," *Books in Canada*, 9 (February, 1980), No. 2, pp. 3-5; Sam Solecki, "Giant Fictions and large Meanings: The Novels of Rudy Wiebe," *The Canadian Forum*, Vol. 60 (March 1981), No. 707, pp. 5-8, 13; Ina Ferris, "Religious Vision and Fictional Form: Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China*," in Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, pp. 88-96; Magdalene Falk Redekop, "Translated into the past: Language in *The Blue Mountains of China*" in Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, pp. 97-123; Stanley C. Shenk, "American Mennonite Fiction," *Mennonite Life*

(July, 1968), p. 119 ff.; Elmer F. Suderman, "Universal Values in Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*", *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 20 (October 1965), no. 4, pp. 172-76; "The Mennonite Character in American Fiction," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 22 (July 1967), No. 3, pp. 123-30; "The Comic Spirit of Arnold Dyck," *Mennonite Life* (October 1969), pp. 166-70; "The Mennonite Community and the Pacifist Character in American Literature," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 34 (March 1979), No. 1, pp. 8-15.

⁵¹ Rudy Wiebe and Patrick Friesen appear frequently in schools and universities to read from their works, and translator of Mennonite works, Al Reimer, is frequently invited by high schools to read from the translated works and to lecture on Mennonite writings as literature.

⁵² See Arnold Dyck, "Aus meinem Leben," and Rudy Wiebe, Keith (ed.), *A Voice in the Land*, p. 128.

⁵³ See the extensive list of Canadian-Mennonite books compiled by Lawrence Klippenstein, "Canadian Mennonite Writings: A Bibliographical Survey, 1970-1980," *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 37 (March 1982), No. 1, pp. 9-13.

⁵⁴ To date the following books have appeared: Dietrich Neufeld's *A Russian Dance of Death*. Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine. Translated and edited by Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1977); Hans Harder's *No Strangers in Exile*. A novel translated, edited, and expanded by Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1979); Harry Loewen (ed.), *Mennonite Images*. The next volume to be published in this series is a novel being written by Al Reimer. George Epp was one of the first in Canada to promote literary publications. See George Epp *et al* (eds.), *Harvest* — Anthology of Mennonite Writing in Canada (Altona: Centennial Committee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba, 1974); Epp and Wiebe (eds.), *Unter dem Nordlicht*. See also Elizabeth Peters (ed.), *Das Dorf im Abendgrauen*. Gedichte von Fritz Senn (Winnipeg: Verein zur Pflege der deutschen Sprache, 1974).

⁵⁵ C. Henry Smith, *Story of the Mennonites*. Fifth Edition Revised and Enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1981), p. 516.

⁵⁶ Other Canadian-Mennonite writers who wrote primarily in German are: Karl Fast, *Gebt der Wahrheit die Ehre*, 3 vols. (North Kildonan, Manitoba, 1950, 1951, 1952); Isaac P. Friesen, *Im Dienste des Meisters*, 2 vols. (Konstanz; Carl Hirsch, n.d.); Heinrich Götz, *Gedichte* (North Kildonan, Manitoba, n.d.); Jakob Warkentin Goerzen, *German Heritage* — English, Low German, German — Canadian Lyrics in Three Languages (Edmonton, Alberta, 1962, 1967); Peter J. Klassen, *Als die Heimat zur Fremde geworden* (Winnipeg: National Publishers, n.d.), *Grossmutter's Schatz* (Superb, Sask., 1939), and *Heimat einmal* (Yarrow, B.C., n.d.); Gerhard Lorenz, *Lose Blätter*, 3 vols. (Winnipeg, 1974-76) and *Stories from Mennonite Life* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Derksen Printers, 1980); Maria Winter-Loewen, *Höhen und Tiefen*, 2 vols. (Steinbach, Manitoba: Derksen Printers, n.d.).