

# Book Reviews

## Reviews of Fiction and Poetry

Jeff Gundy. *Spoken Among the Trees*. University of Akron Press, 2007. Pp. 107. Softcover, \$14.95 (U.S.)

In Jeff Gundy's fourth collection of poetry, the observing self is everywhere, as multitudinous as the insects that buzz these pages and as profligate in its praise for the natural world as a pollinating bee. *Spoken Among the Trees* is a curious collection, reflecting the unquenchable inquisitive desire that Gundy's poetic "I" shows in taking on the challenges of writing the natural world and the place of the human within it. The collection is also curious in its mercurial antsiness. My insectile metaphors are not incidental, for there is something of the winged creature in the collection's speedy touching-down on the large questions of existence, faith, and selfhood only to flit off again; what appears to be a determination to present process poems like "Notes Toward Local Representation of Complex Linguistic Events" or the self-parodic "The Visiting Poet Blunders Through His own Assignment" gives parts of the collection an unresolved lightness. To be sure, such self-deprecating strategies can be effectively ironic – as with Margaret Atwood's "Notes Toward A Poem That Can Never Be Written" – but Gundy's frequent use of the "Notes Toward" and "Report from" format is a bit puzzling, as the equivocation seems less ironic than non-committal.

An exception to this is “Notes toward an Interrogation of Staged Violence,” which does seem to be an allusion to Atwood’s poem, in which the humour and horror mixes fluidly in a theatrical proposition to explore “a creative alternative to stabbing your / brother with a kitchen knife” (15). Gundy’s humour is supported by melancholy in “When Madonna Met Menno,” with its wry comment on aging and its portrait of Menno Simons as someone who would offer Ms. M. “a basket of fries” (41). You can smell the hot grease and hear the subway rumble as the pair find common ground in comparing the dark ways of the world.

In *Spoken Among the Trees*, the voice of Gundy’s observing poet is affable, eager to slip away from workaday responsibilities but ever-watchful, and offers a self-conscious iteration of the world as we must, and do, live in it. The loveliness of many of these lyric poems gain strength from the kind of ecstatic attention identified by the late great Denise Levertov, an embracing of the chaos of the endlessly-proliferating material human-made presence that barges in to obscure the landscape, or surprisingly often in Gundy’s poems, just as easily blend in with it. This graceful (and often grateful) lyricism provides the book’s best moments; the numinous opening poem, “Damselify,” and its bookend poem at the end of the first section, “Firefly” record the illuminating moment, the fleeting insight into self and world. Poems like “An Hour” and “Astonishing Details of the Universe” combine a neo-Romantic sensibility with a consideration of the limits of language. Others, like “Fulks Run to Cumberland” and “Dark Man Blues,” make the passage of human bodies through space both tender and melancholic. Two works toward the end of the collection, a sequence titled “Spring Tractates,” and the final contemplative poem, “Night, the Astonishing...” bring Gundy’s aesthetic back to the hard question of how writing matters, and how our sometimes awful hunger for “sweet words in a row” (106) leads inevitably back to the space beneath the trees.

Tanis MacDonald  
Wilfrid Laurier University

Yorifumi Yaguchi. *The Wing-Beaten Air: My Life and My Writing*. Trans. Clive Collins and Yujin Yaguchi. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2008. Pp. 226. Softcover, \$11.95 (U.S.).

The publication in 2006 of *The Poetry of Yorifumi Yaguchi: A Japanese in English* provided a much-needed retrospective on this

influential Sapporo-based poet, Mennonite pastor, and American literature professor and underscored his place in Mennonite writing. Yaguchi's compelling life story *The Wing-Beaten Air* extends this project, revealing the interplay between Yaguchi's life experience, Christian faith, and the development of his poetic voice. The formal construction is intriguing in its own right. By cross-cutting chronological narrative with poetry – much of it unpublished in English – the book generates dynamic shifts in register and perspective that honour the artifice of a life remembered.

Easily the most striking sections of *The Wing-Beaten Air* are those that explore his childhood in Ishinomaki, a small town far from Tokyo. Born in 1932, Yaguchi spent much time with his grandfather, the town's Zen Buddhist priest: "At dusk, it was my grandfather who rang the big bell. The sound of its ringing eddied through the temple grounds, out to the village houses and the countryside beyond, as if a great rock of sound had been dropped into a deep still pool" (15). We gain a sense of the texture of village life, the blind Shinto nationalism of his father who died young, and his mother who attended a Protestant church while studying nursing in Tokyo. Ishinomaki's proximity to a naval air force base brought terrifying air raids during the war and American occupying soldiers afterwards, with whom Yaguchi practiced his English. These formative experiences engendered a thirst for pacifism that would lead him far away from his Buddhist roots.

When Yaguchi became a teacher, he eventually found a position in Hokkaido, and it was here that he met a Mennonite missionary. After attending Goshen College in the mid-1960s he became immersed in American poetry, developing formative relationships with such poets as Robert Creeley and William Stafford, and it was then that he published "The Kite," his first poem in English: "In the field of twilight / A boy was pulling the string / Of a kite in his dream, / Which had been swallowed into the sky / And disappeared" (97). On returning to Hokkaido, Yaguchi taught American literature and pastored many small Mennonite churches.

A search for Anabaptist simplicity drives Yaguchi forward and he is disturbed by both the wealth of North American Mennonites and the Old Order Amish disengagement from the world. Indeed, Yaguchi's commitment to pacifism – a very activist and political stance which often places him at odds with his Japanese neighbours and conservative Christians alike – forms the core of this book. He has campaigned against nuclear arms and power plants, and led lawsuits against constitutional changes that would see the Japanese army become an offensive force.

The reader could easily be lulled into reading the poems embedded in the narrative as strictly autobiographical texts. The alternation

between literary forms, however, ultimately works to disrupt the illusion of coherence in Yaguchi's retrospective gaze and adds another fascinating dimension to the "straight" telling of his life. *The Wing-Beaten Air* is an engrossing work, one that offers profound insights into the life and writing of an important Mennonite poet.

Christopher Wiebe  
Ottawa, ON

Jean Janzen. *Paper House*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2008. Pp. 74. Softcover, \$9.95 (U.S.)

Scenes from the paradox of life. That's the essence of Jean Janzen's *Paper House*: *paper*, fragile and not, its source a deep-rooted tree; *house*, solid and sometimes not, since so much depends on its foundation. Think brick, wood, or straw; think rock or sand. Think fault line. Darkness and light. With these sometimes apparently incommensurable elements, Janzen constructs, inhabits, and collapses the house of her life. Like the Indian mystic poet Tagore, who describes faith as "the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark," Janzen navigates here oft-darkened paths.

The collection's first part begins with a memory, a recollection of following a cowherd home, the pace languid. The poet is an infant, behind the slats of a crib, while last light gives way to lamplight and sounds: a fire, father's footsteps, chatter, and children singing. "I am, I am," she declares in "December 1933" (6), and, like butter which remembers its origins, "blazing grass / through the dark labyrinths of the cow" (7), Janzen pays homage to her forebears, "all of them / stepping toward a larger / union" (14). She honours her own early life, too, her talent for reciting the books of the bible, when "no one else could do it - / 66 books in 33 seconds" (9), then "playing Mendelssohn on the piano at weddings" (18), and singing "at funerals, pregnant" (19). Pregnancy expands her vision to the thin line between "the living and the dead ... nothing but skin and air between us" (19). "How simple life once was" (25), she sighs.

In "Five Lessons on Piety," she reflects on the meaning of baptism, church quarrels, and hypocrisy. "What remedy for greed and hate?" she asks and answers - though her answer may be more of a cry: "We need someone hovering ... / who holds us in uncertainty / ... cool cover / ... near as breath" (27-28). Janzen's raw honesty causes the reader to feel her heart's hunger even as it touches their own; the three-page-long poem recalls a friend's death, "the glory / how she took it with her /

how it stays" (28), and is at least as evocative as a full-length memoir could be.

Other endings follow this death: children leave home, the body ages, and then the ominous "Black night, a new yielding ... before the splendour of dawn" (33). So begins Part II, the poems of which cause this reader's heart to ache. The metaphorical house of the first section becomes "The Architecture of Falling": floors creak, dry rot spreads, and roof tiles, stroked by a leaning cypress, loosen. "The world so full it presses against us," she writes in "Beloved" (41) and considers the unseen "a secret fullness in the colour grey" (48), leaving instructions, as if departing for a trip. One feels, throughout, like a child sitting at the feet of a wise elder. Janzen ponders *Visio* (on seeing it whole), and Glory. "Can Love Make us Whole?" she asks (59), and clearly thinks that it can and with that, ushers us through the "Final Night" and into the title poem, "Paper House," a poem that links past, present, and future, where, "Room within room within room / The heart closes" (65). Janzen ponders her own mortality as she attends to her husband's life-threatening illness: "Our marriage / light as a page / ... one last breath / and it floats / out of reach" (65). However palpable her sadness, though, it is not without hope.

In the book's first poem, Janzen has declared, "I am. I am." In the final poem of the collection, wide-awake to her humanity, she acknowledges, "Dawn breaks / I dissolve like mist and rise" (67). She can say this peacefully because she has also discovered, "You, the Other / the absent / here / in the crack / ... in breath / and no breath / ... You are." This quiet collection of poems ought to be read in one sitting and then read again, slowly, just one or two poems at a time, as if one were lighting an altar of candles, each one a small messenger or a prayer.

Elsie K. Neufeld  
Abbotsford, B.C.

Beverley Lewis, *The Shunning*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997. Pp. 283. Softcover, \$15.99.

Beverley Lewis, *The Secret*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. Pp. 364. Softcover, \$15.99.

I'll start with confessions, though not the kneeling-before-the-congregation or private-with-the-bishop kinds expected of Katie Lapp, the heroine of Beverley Lewis's *The Shunning*. First, I read romances. Second, the only other time I've picked up an inspirational romance, it

got burned unopened. I was helping Dorothy Grove weed the Nairobi Mennonite Guesthouse library. The first book she pulled from the shelves was an inspirational romance based on her missionary experience in Somalia and that book went straight into the fireplace. She said it had always angered her that the novel's Dorothy-character fell in love with the fictional pilot who evacuated her after her husband's murder. *The Shunning*, which is credited with launching the current Amish romance craze, is also based on a life, that of Lewis' grandmother. Lewis's most recent novel, *The Secret*, in contrast, is based on "the collective story of countless women who have given up a child...to adoption" rather than a story from Lewis' Amish contacts (2009: 363). These contending aims – offering an authentic view of another world and telling stories that a wide range of women can connect with – define Lewis's books. She balances them well enough to have sold millions and to have Amish readers. The Plain women who read Lewis and other "bonnet book" authors give them mixed reviews, though. Some are gripped by the stories, while others are unimpressed by their portrayal of Amish life (Alter, 2009).

Since most of Lewis's readers are not Amish, she spends a lot of time describing the Pennsylvania communities in which her stories are set. She paints a clear, though not vivid picture of the day-to-day activities of Amish families, but doesn't have Armin Wiebe's talent for *Dietsch*-inflected English. On the plus side, she explains, rather than stereotypes, Amish beliefs and behaviours; her Plain people are neither stolid nor saintly and their world is not static: gas appliances and indoor plumbing are common by 2009, for example.

In most romances obstacles and misunderstandings build from slight beginnings to a climax near the book's end, with a tidy resolution in the final chapter. By contrast, Lewis's characters wrestle their angels throughout. Heartbreak and prosaic marriages are as common as happily-ever-after conclusions. All her protagonists are young, and they struggle with the temptations of the English world and with the nearer dangers of Mennonitism: flowered dresses, unstructured prayer, and non-*Ausbund* singing. Faith is central to their lives, but readers are not bludgeoned with spiritual lessons. While Lewis's characters are reasonably complex, their feelings are often described rather than revealed via action or dialogue. Like the leading ladies in racier romances, Lewis' heroines, while well-covered, are also prettier, less submissive, and lead more eventful lives than their peers.

Lewis' stories unfold at a leisurely pace. *The Shunning* has enough plot for a novella, but runs to 282 pages and the full story takes up another two books. The story is plotted as a coming-of-age tragedy whose protagonist may find her true self once she is separated from family and community, but its penultimate chapter wrenches the story

onto a comedic track with an incredible act of author-as-god. Bloggers note that Lewis is known for “captivating twists and turns” of plot, but I was disappointed by this one.

While Lewis has polished her style since 1997, *The Secret* shows she has not altered its essentials. The narrative portentously reveals the complication that will change Grace Byler’s life in the first chapter, then slows to a crawl while character after character encounters a bit of the secret, and sub-plots, both minor and major, are introduced. Chores are done, friends visited, and young men callers received, but the path of potential love isn’t smooth. This novel is also the first in a trilogy, and “hold on to your *kapp*, there’s more coming” might as well be printed after the earnest prayer of the last sentence.

Why will thousands of readers be waiting for the sequel, or rushing to buy anything with a bonneted woman on the cover, as several publishers claim? As sales of inspirational grow, their appeal is worth exploring. Most romances rely on an exotic setting, whether a castle, celebrity mansion, or crypt, to generate a hero whose differences will excite, but who will ultimately offer the heroine security and higher status. Amish farms are wildly exotic for most North Americans, and the idea that these simple, community-oriented lives are real no doubt makes them particularly attractive in recessionary times (Lorrigio, 2009). Amish romances may also allow women to imaginatively experience practices about which they are curious: What does it feel like to cover your head, wear body-concealing clothes, or have a cleric dictate the intimacies of your life (2009: 198-9)? Alternately, some readers may vicariously enjoy the heroine’s successful manipulation of “the menfolk who rule” her life (2009: 275). Factors like this may explain the sales of “bonnet books,” but are unlikely to be voiced by those waiting in line for their copy of Ms. Lewis’s latest. They are more likely to point to the interest of a fresh setting for the kind of accessible story that is already part of their reading life, to an emotionally involving story that is uplifting but not saccharine, and maybe also to the charm of a courtship centered on conversation, handholding, and chaste kisses. As Pittsburg’s Carnegie Library advises patrons: “If you enjoy stories about faith, family and love told in a slow-paced style, you may like some of these titles.”

### Works Cited

Alter, Alexandra. “They’re No They’re No Bodice Rippers, But Amish Romances Are Hot.” *Wall Street Journal* online, 9 September 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125244227154093575.html>.

Loriggio, Paola. "Amish romances: when love culminates in a kiss." *The Star* (Toronto) online, 10 October 2009. <http://www.thestar.com/living/article/706475--amish-romances-when-love-culminates-in-a-kiss>.

Ruth Rempel  
Menno Simons College  
Canadian Mennonite University

Cindy Snyder, *Finding Anna Bee*. Illus. Mary Chambers. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007. Pp. 163. Softcover, \$9.68.

In *Finding Anna Bee*, a group of young people who call themselves the Menno Slick Six travel to the past to meet martyrs and other faith heroes from Mennonite history. Along the way, Alicia, Fabio, Isaac, Justin, and Li discover that Anna, their newest member, is the daughter of a present-day hero. Her mother Elizabeth is a soldier imprisoned for refusing to torture people while overseas, an allusion to atrocities by members of American-led forces in Iraq. In this novel for young people, the pacifist Mennonite community is presented as an alternative to a militaristic national community constituted to "provide for the common defence" (The Constitution of the United States of America). According to Tess Cosslett, time-slip narratives such as Snyder's offer "an openness to 'other' histories, rather than the potentially nationalistic search for roots" (244). The Mennonite community's openness to people with different cultural roots is a main topic of Snyder's time-slip narrative. For example, Anna's mother was born in Ireland, Anna's father is Cherokee, and Anna calls herself "red and white" (146). Each member of the Menno Six shares aspects of their cultural heritage at the Mennonite summer camp where the Six do their time-travelling. As a camp counsellor says, "We can't understand the present unless we've learned from the past. And we can't plan the future unless we understand ourselves and our faith roots" (89).

To learn about the roots of faith heroes and campers alike, the Six cross a bridge covered with vines, engravings, and Chinese *tangrams*, or puzzles. Fabio calls attention to his Hispanic roots when he identifies an engraving on a stepping stone of the bridge as an image from the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life. Li deciphers a *tangram* that bears a picture of her great-grandfather, Tee Siem Tat, who became a Mennonite. The bridge inspires members of the Menno Six who have non-European roots to talk *about* their ancestry, and transports all members, regardless of their roots, into the past to talk *with* the



European ancestors of Isaac, the group's "Model Mennonite" (21). Isaac wants to be a preacher and is knowledgeable about Anabaptist and Mennonite history. Interestingly, a motif of time-slip narratives is a "child [who] does some form of archival research to establish the truth of his or her experience of the past" (Cosslett 244), and Isaac, in *Finding*, is certainly the researcher who verifies the truth of what the Six experience of the past. To some extent, he also signifies the text's Eurocentric bias.

Coming face-to-face with European martyrs does provide an opportunity for the members of the Menno Slick Six to question the choices of martyrs and of those who martyr them. Alicia is one of these questioners and the novel's main focalizer; she thinks of herself as "black" (25), and wonders if this is a reason others don't like her. When Alicia and Isaac cross the magic bridge together, they witness the drowning of Felix Manz, and Alicia asks Isaac if they can stop Felix's murder and "change the course of history" (38). Alicia's experience of the past through time travel accords with another theme Cosslett identifies, that "of moving on, growing, accepting change, death and loss" (244). Changing history is very much on Alicia's mind: her mother died and Alicia still mourns her loss. When Isaac tells Alicia that the past cannot be changed, he is, on a personal level, advising acceptance of the death of loved ones; on a geo-political level, however, Isaac, a Euro-American pacifist whose ancestors were martyred, advises Alicia, an African-American pacifist whose ancestors were enslaved, to move on from the heritage of slavery. Alicia's internalized racism makes her feel more of an outsider and less willing than the other group members to welcome Anna, the newcomer. While the novel's own logic suggests that greater attention to the history of Americans' enslavement of African peoples would facilitate Alicia's self-understanding, there are few references to heroic resistance to slavery or to the Civil Rights movement.

*Finding Anna Bee* defines heroism as refusing to impose one's beliefs on others. When Anna travels to the Netherlands in 1550, she offers to help Jacques Dosie escape from prison. Jacques refuses, willing to die for his belief that baptism imposes on infants a belief system they haven't chosen. The present-day analogy for Jacques's situation is that of Anna's mother, imprisoned by American officials for opposing a belief system that accommodates torture. Hans Werner suggests that "The use of frameworks that consciously tell the Mennonite ethnic story in terms of transnational, transcultural and diasporic identities appear to be just emerging and point to a combining of [...] concepts of migration with gender and racial difference" (27). Although *Finding Anna Bee* strains credibility with its didacticism and the most incredible of its time-travel devices, Snyder's novel is one such framework.

### Works Cited

- Cosslett, Tess. "History from Below": Time-Slip Narratives and National Identity." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 26 (2002): 243-53. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 27 Dec. 2009.
- Werner, Hans. "Peoplehoods of the Past: Mennonites and the Ethnic Boundary." *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 23-35. Print.

charlie peters  
University of Winnipeg

Leanne Boschman, *Precipitous Signs: A Rain Journal*. Lantzville, B.C.: Leaf Press, 2009. Pp. 63. Softcover, \$16.95

Elsie K. Neufeld, *Grief Blading Up*. Abbotsford, B.C.: Lipstick Press, 2009. Pp. 24. Softcover.

Mennonite writing in Canada is alleged to have sprung crocus-like from the prairie, specifically from Winnipeg and its surroundings. That may be true, but when *Half in the Sun*, edited by Elsie K. Neufeld, appeared in 2006, it was a bold reminder that the west coast is teeming with Mennonite writers whose prose and poetry thrive in rain and sun, mountains and valleys. Not that there hadn't been previous Mennonite writers in that region: Len Neufeld writing about Yarrow, Patrick Friesen leaving Winnipeg for Vancouver, and Carla Funk launching her first book on the eve of the third millennium. The year 2009 saw the launch of two more poetry collections, both debuts, by west coast women: Leanne Boschman's *Precipitous Signs: A Rain Journal* and Elsie K. Neufeld's *Grief Blading Up*.

In *Precipitous Signs*, Leanne Boschman stakes out the province's northwest coast for her poetic landscape: its terrain, its weather, its history, and its people are the material from which she fashions her poems. She knows this geography and is well acquainted with rain's incessancy. In this landscape, "... the wolf is always slinking out of the forest, the mighty giant wakes up hungry and ill tempered," and "resourceful men and women ... measure their chances" (19). Central to this area (and this project) is Prince Rupert, a city where rain "thrums in my head" (35) and the settlement "... rusts / and rots as fast as men can build" (17). The colourful cast of characters, past and present, who have populated this settlement and inhabit these poems include Charles Melville Hays, railroad builder; a paper boy; and various murder and rape victims.

In the long poem "First Posting" (20-23), a woman narrator recalls her experiences as a "newly minted" teacher of students who were

“hungry” or “sullen” and sometimes died tragically of communicable diseases. Her students “helped carry in wood” and “swept the entranceway” but also waited for the time they could “*leave this goddam school.*” When she dreamt of her students they were:

A flock of starlings, they landed on me,  
Pecked with sharp beaks then flew away all at once,  
Their feathers glinting, astonishing. (20)

At the end of the poem the teacher wonders, “... do they remember / that I loved them fiercely at times?”

In “sunday morning in the brothel” (24), a woman lying on her bed reflects on light and on pretty words like “*clove,*” “*tinsel,*” “*nectar,*” subjects far removed from her occupation. Alongside such poignant narrative poems, this volume includes lyrical reflections on real estate, traffic, the highway, and more rain. Boschman’s poems are varied in both content and form: sometimes the rhythm is carried on long, flowing lines, while elsewhere words are splashed like rain across the page. Naming often takes central place in these poems. Examples range from marine plants whose “unearthly / forms and hues are called *cup and saucer,* / *sea lace,* / *spongy cushion.* / and *soda straw.* / surely their naming declares a desire to navigate safely home” (49). In this case, the naming serves to enhance the sensuous and lyric quality of the poem, but like any poetic device, listing can easily become predictable and even tiresome if over used. Another characteristic of this work, especially in the first section, is the practice of running words into one another – “fastmovingtides,” “slideinfront,” “warmflesh,” “growingtown” – and the desired effect is not always clear to the reader. This is, nevertheless, an ambitious work by a poet who is finding her voice and her subject.

Like Boschmann, Elsie Neufeld is aware of the seasons and is quick to celebrate or mourn experiences and songs that surface from memory, triggered by growth or decay in the natural world. *GriefBlading Up* is a collection of quiet poems shot through with grief and gardens. In “Lilacs in March” (8), for instance, the poet remembers “... the day my father dug up the saplings and / the day we stood round his grave” (8). Her mother is described elsewhere, “... heart rooted in earth, her hands / finding never enough dirt to garden” (“My Mother’s Hollyhocks” 12). Neufeld must be a gardener herself or at least a faithful observer of gardens. Her poetry, with its familiar, often unsurprising, garden imagery, is essentially spiritual and elegiac: like the moon “it grazes both heaven and earth” (13), aware that death is ever present and sometimes, as in “Mums on the Stairs,” evoked by sound:

Wheels on linoleum  
 A gurney. Slow footsteps.  
 The echo inside a long  
 Grey corridor. (16)

Both Boschman's and Neufeld's debut collections are evidence of literary fecundity on Canada's west coast. It will be interesting to observe how the writing, already well-rooted, will evolve and flourish.

Sarah Klassen  
 Winnipeg, MB

Robert Martens. *ever after and other poems*. Abbotsford, gentle jake press, 2009. Pp. 108. Softcover.

In his latest collection of poetry, accomplished BC poet Robert Martens has chosen a bit of titular legerdemain as structure: *ever after and other poems* is really two collections under the rubric of one. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the aesthetic disjunction between the two halves is a bit jarring. The first half of the collection is a Rabelaisian revisiting of the fairy tale idiom that becomes vividly realized—and modernized – in Martens's parabolic imagination. In another context, some of the imagery could be seen as merely scatological, but Martens re-imagines such things as Jack (of "the Beanstalk" fame) and his magic beans, which are rendered here replete with relaxed sphincter and defecatory act as necessary aspects of a mythic cycle of fecundity. Martens enters these alternate fantasies armed with a sense of poetry as "language in love with itself": he is keen on wordplay and puns, which enact linguistically the defamiliarization that is taking place in the stories themselves. At the same time, this section is intensely allusive, weaving in tributes to the poetic tradition of Middle English literature as well as to modern writers such as Frost and Tolkien.

The section half of the collection takes a very literal homeward turn: the first selection is called "housebound" and is a meditation on the symbiosis between cat and human. Even in more humble settings, though, Martens can't seem to resist the echoes of the epic within the quotidian: a trip to the dentist is rendered in terms familiar to fans of Beowulf or Yeats's "Second Coming", with a monstrous vision of "the great beast" with "fangs slavering guilt" who "slouches to us, / grateful for a little kindness." Martens's call to metaphor also comes to the fore here: in "the mender of broken hearts," for example, he observes

“your hacksaw tongue, gunfire / brain,” and asks his reader to follow him in his love of the strange healing powers of language. Martens has clearly read his Beat poets, as evidenced in the contractions and syntactical deformations of poems like “duration” and “harold/grammatically.” Some of the poems – and “bag lunch” is one – echo Ginsberg at his strongest, as Martens draws on coarser-grained words to render a society wrestling with internal declines and the threat of environmental catastrophe.

In spite of the sometimes dire subject matter, Martens holds a wicked sense of humour close: in that, he resembles the great humanists who take human folly as their subject matter. His humour is sharp but never unkind, and he leaves us with a vision of humans who, using the recuperative powers of the imagination, render habitable a sometimes bewildering world.

Tom Penner  
University of Winnipeg

Steven “Reece” Friesen. *Pax Avalon: Conflict Revolution*. Scottdale, Herald Press, 2008. Pp. 103. Softcover.

*Pax Avalon* tells the story of an unorthodox group of crime fighters whose conflicts with crime are underscored by internal conflicts over a pacifist Christian approach to dealing with violence. This problem of conscience is embodied in the figure Pax, a woman who possesses the ability to heal by taking on the suffering of others. The allegory is, I’m sure, deliberately drawn in bold colours, since Friesen seems to be targeting a young adult market unlikely to trade in theological subtleties. Pax and her squad are sent out to tackle a gang that is intent on bringing world peace through deeply unethical means. This provides Stevens with a framework to raise complex moral issues regarding war, revenge, and society’s inability to keep pace with reproductive technologies. In this, the book is a success, even providing questions to help the reader in “thinking it through.”

Friesen, though, has set himself a daunting task: to draw and write a graphic novel in which violent problems are solved without recourse to violence. The story’s dramatic tension suffers, possibly unavoidably, when Friesen includes too much textual exposition. While philosophical musings may serve him well in his work as youth pastor, the frames of a graphic novel can’t support the ruminations in which these characters indulge, especially when they suspend disbelief to do so in the middle of combat. And while the art is visually appealing, it is

often occluded by the speech or thought or prayer bubbles that clutter too many of these pages.

The relatively large number of characters presents its own set of problems, as Friesen acknowledges, since the reader is left unsure where to focus their sympathies. Although Pax is given the majority of the screen (and praying) time, there simply isn't room in 103 pages to give the other heroes – including those involved in a minor subplot about the importance of athletic ethics – enough setup to explain why we might care about either their interactions with Pax or their conflicts.

Finally, Friesen's most daring risk was likely an unavoidable one given the text's goals: in providing the moral signposts of Christianity to light the way for the reader, Friesen runs against a tide of noirish moral ambiguity that has characterized the graphic novel at least since Batman gave way to the Dark Knight. The uneven and unpredictable ethics of Gotham City are not to be found in Pax's world, which is, ultimately, one in which God exists, answers prayers, and provides the answers.

Tom Penner  
University of Winnipeg

Rhoda Janzen. *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress: A Memoir of Going Home*. New York: Henry Holt, 2009. Pp. 256. Hardcover, \$14.00 (U.S.)

*Mennonite in a Little Black Dress* is as lively, vivacious, emotionally engaging and witty a read as the slightly naughty title suggests, the kind of book you want to buy ten more copies of to give to your friends. According to current bestsellers' lists many people are doing just that. *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress* joins the growing oeuvre of Mennonite books documenting the exigencies of a traditional community in the process of losing its distinctive cultural identity as it is gradually absorbed into the modern North American mainstream. Typically and most vividly, this literature depicts the anxious experiences of young people who must negotiate the already fraught time of adolescence and young adulthood with the extra baggage of intercultural confusion.

In Rhoda Janzen's hands, this experience is a poignant but also often funny one, and the dilemmas extend well into middle adulthood: Can you serve hearty eastern European/ Russian/Ukrainian inflected Mennonite peasant food at a dinner for postmodern fusion "food snobs" at a Midwestern university faculty party? Can you wear a bathrobe constructed out of "red fur" by your practical and endlessly creative

mother while typing a manuscript intended for fashionable literary ears? Is “God” a concept best left alone in the contemporary secular professional context, or is it okay to draw on a religious heritage with very specific traditional iconography for the divine? If yes, which aspects of the divine apply?

These questions are made urgent by the narrator’s double whammy midlife crisis: her husband Nick leaves her for a man he meets “through Gay.com” and, not long after, she is seriously injured in a car accident; the two events prompt Rhoda to wonder just what a successful professional girl does in such dire circumstances. When Rhoda decides to “go home” for a year of convalescence and reflection, she re-engages with her quirky but nurturing family, reasonably pleasant memories of her own childhood and adolescence, and the warm if somewhat claustrophobic local church community she left behind when she left with intentions to become a professional intellectual, travel internationally, and never, ever, have children.

What made Rhoda fall for a guy who was not only sexually ambivalent and unfaithful but also often emotionally abusive? Who or what will help her recover from the double trauma of their divorce and her car accident? Who is Rhoda now? These questions are gradually answered but not in a straightforward way. Rhoda takes us through numerous humorous anecdotes, many of them revisiting childhood memories in the company of her endlessly cheery mother. Along the way we also meet an entertaining array of eccentric and gently caricatured characters from her childhood community, now grown old and affluent. This is still a caring, closely-knit community, though, and it welcomes outsider Rhoda who returns as an unrepentant but good-natured and still affectionate strayed sheep. Rhoda’s parents are somewhat of an enigma in this regard, seeming magnanimously unconcerned about their daughter’s high profile defection from the faith, even though they are themselves devoted national leaders in the Mennonite church.

I enjoyed this book but I did have one persistent unrequited wish. Rhoda Janzen is an educated woman, an English professor, who travels the world when she’s not convalescing from midlife trauma. I wanted a few serious intellectual gestures from such a well-heeled narrator, but most of the intertextual references are insistently middle or low brow: Oprah, Disneyworld, Condeleeza, Dracula. The book is consistently flippant, breezy, and almost relentlessly “upbeat,” certainly too much so to accommodate openings of any depth into self-realization of the psychic or intersubjective varieties. Somewhat strangely, the book seems to be informed by a insular vision of the world that is hardly bigger than the self-absorbed Mennonite community it gently (and sometimes not so gently) satirizes. Though the narrator is careful to include herself in her parodies so as not to claim superiority over her

subjects, and though she does undergo a certain recovery over the course of the book, I can't help feeling that the circle of her attention is still that of the California small town girl, caught between generations and cultural codes and time periods, enamoured of both her parents and the "mainstream" in surprisingly uncritical ways, unable to let herself really go into a genuinely intercultural cosmopolitan globalized consciousness, not yet ready to seize her own mature identity as an independent intellectual woman and artist of the world.

Or is that the Canadian in me, aching for a bit more meta-American awareness, a bit more self-reflectiveness, a bit more room for *multi-cultural hybridity*, a bit more spiritual and political depth in an age when the most powerful culture on earth is showing cracks in its homogenizing machinery?

Di Brandt  
Brandon University

## Reviews of History and Social Sciences

Linda A. Huebert Hecht, *Women in Early Austrian Anabaptism, Their Days, Their Stories*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2009. Pp. ix + 252, soft cover. Indices.

Huebert Hecht's text is a valuable contribution to scholarship on women and Anabaptism but also easily accessible for the non-specialist. Part sourcebook and part monograph, Huebert Hecht translates and analyzes the court records of women tried as Anabaptists in the Tirol region of Austria from 1527-1531. The result is a fascinating portrait of a segment of society that has otherwise left little in the way of historical record: poor and middle-class women of sixteenth-century central Europe.

The two primary purposes of Huebert Hecht's text are to name all the women involved in the Anabaptist movement (even the unnamed ones!) and to tell the stories of these women (martyrs, missionaries, lay leaders and believers) in order to commemorate and celebrate their "faith, courage and sacrifice." (12) The first purpose is well achieved. Both the translated court records and the fourteen-page "Index of Women's Names" at the end of the text testify to the involvement and leadership of women in this outlawed religious movement. The second purpose is also well-achieved although one troubling aspect of this time, the implications of these women's actions for their children,



causes me to wonder whether censure is warranted along with praise. Huebert Hecht observes that Anabaptist women experienced a degree of freedom not part of western culture for many centuries prior to the Reformation and notes that for these women “religious faith took priority over concerns for family and children.” (154) Though these women certainly deserve credit for consciously rejecting the sexism of their time, it would strengthen the book if Hubert Hecht also discussed the cost of this freedom for these women’s children—who were either left as orphans when their parents were killed or, as the record indicate, sometimes abandoned. Such a discussion would be a welcome addition to Huebert Hecht’s thoughtful epilogue.

Huebert Hecht’s text achieves much more than she modestly proposes. The court records reveal the life situations of the women who endured interrogation and illuminate the attitudes of this time. Corporal punishment (flogging and the like), torture and execution were all considered valid means by which authorities found the truth of the spiritual state of these heretics. In fact, the court records report surprise when torture is not necessary and the Anabaptists voluntarily reveal their true beliefs. A further value that is apparent in these records is the inappropriateness of executing a pregnant woman (even though imprisonment and beating are acceptable). Several times a pregnant woman is reported as having been flogged but no woman can be executed until after she has given birth. Several such heart-wrenching stories are included in the court records. Other details are notable—the confession of Helena von Freyberg, noblewoman and Anabaptist leader, the wording and processes of recantation as given by Ferdinand I, Archduke of Austria, and the list of questions which interrogators used to question Anabaptist women all provide intimate insight into the judicial processes of ‘dealing with’ early Austrian Anabaptist women.

Huebert Hecht’s text is outstanding as a sourcebook but a little weaker as a historical narrative. The great value of this book is two-fold. First, it is orderly and easily accessible presentation of primary sources that would otherwise be very difficult to utilize. Second, the translation of these records will open up numerous possibilities for further research on this topic. The use of torture as a part of church discipline in the history of the church and the attractiveness of anti-government religious movements in the middle classes are just two potential areas of study.

Patricia Janzen Loewen  
Providence College

Peter J. Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2009. Pp. xviii + 260, hard cover.

In the five-century history of Mennonites, the two and a half centuries of Mennonites in early modern Poland and Prussia have received relatively short shrift. Klassen, professor emeritus of history at California State University, Fresno, addresses this significant lacuna in the literature. In the preface, we begin with early modern Poland as an “island of toleration” (xiii) in sixteenth-century Europe that enticed Mennonites to migrate from the Netherlands and in the epilogue, we end with Mennonites faced with giving up the historic peace position in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Prussia but in the text, the religious issue of toleration or accommodation is interwoven into a complex interplay of economics and politics. It is not a book about religious tolerance freely given. It is about the economic prosperity of Mennonites and the political tug-of-war between nobles, religious authorities, and the king resulting in religious freedom and limited economic liberty for Mennonites.

Although Klassen writes of early modern Poland as an “island of toleration” in the preface, in the first chapter he recognizes that Mennonites migrated from the Netherlands for economic as well as religious reasons. The next three chapters are organized geographically – first, the Vistula Delta, Ellerwald, and Drausensee, then, the cities of Danzig, Elbing, and Königsberg, and finally, the Vistula Valley. The subsequent four chapters are arranged thematically – the influence of the Netherlands on Danzig, church life, Mennonites’ relationship with religious and political authorities, and military obligations. The concluding chapter deals with the nineteenth century. The work provides insight into the different regions and facets of Mennonite life but the task of chronologically ordering two centuries of Mennonite history in the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania remains.

The long-awaited arrival of this book, promised in the forward to the author’s 1989 *A Homeland for Strangers: An Introduction to Mennonites in Poland and Prussia*, has given Klassen two decades to make extensive use of archival data in Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, and North America. His secondary sources also include English, German, Polish, and Dutch literature. The book is an invaluable English synthesis of original and existing scholarship. For German readers, Horst Penner’s *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen and wirtschaftlichen Leistungen* is still recommended reading.

A shortcoming of Klassen's book is the portrayal of Mennonites as prospering economically. Although tempered somewhat by the recognition that at times Mennonites were in need of financial aid from their co-religionists in the Netherlands, one is left with the impression that Mennonites were affluent. There were Mennonites who were well-off but the early years in the delta, perhaps into the second generation, were times of hardship and in the late eighteenth century, there were both agricultural and urban households that were not only not wealthy but poor.

A book that treats two and a half centuries of history is much like a survey course – it is an important place to begin but leaves one with many unanswered questions. How was the Mennonite migration from the Netherlands to Royal Prussia part of the *Drang nach Osten*? How did the polity of an elective monarchy affect the bargaining over Mennonite privileges? What of Mennonite involvement in the Amsterdam-Danzig trade? As with all thought-provoking research, we are left with the well-worn phrase – further research needs to be done; fortunately, this book is an excellent place to start.

Ingrid Peters-Fransen  
Canadian Mennonite University

Leonard G. Friesen, *Rural Revolutions in Southern Ukraine: Peasants, Nobles, and Colonists 1774 -1905*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2008, Pp xii + 325. \$39.95.

This book is a bold overview of the history of a region critical to an understanding of the development of Mennonite society in Imperial Russia, New Russia, between its incorporation within the Russian Empire at the end of the eighteenth century and the revolutionary disturbances of 1905/06. The term "Revolution" in its title, however, refers not just to a specific political event but more to the general transformation of an essentially rural society in the face of agricultural and industrial modernization right across the period.

The book is based on primary archival sources, contemporary published accounts and secondary sources. It was announced as forthcoming some years ago by Harvard University Press. The delay between manuscript completion and publication is often a problem for academics but few sources published after the late 1990s are cited. Given the immense changes in Russia and Ukraine, the opening of

archives and the publication of a number of important new primary and secondary accounts relevant to his subject, this failure to use or engage with recent literature is unfortunate.

The story Friesen presents is basically one of a transformation of a frontier society into an important commercial region in terms of agricultural production, trade and industry. The bulk of the book deals with rural issues and covers a wide range of issues: environmental conditions, demographic change, the economic shift from a pastoralist economy based on sheep to wheat production and the impact this had on the structure and function of agrarian society. Friesen carefully outlines how the varied settlers who colonized New Russia adopted different strategies in their adaptation to their new environments: state peasants and serfs and their masters as well as Tatars, and a range of foreign colonists, including Mennonites. He suggests that as the nineteenth century progressed and economic, social and political conditions changed, there was a degree of convergence between the groups. However, the pace of change, adaptation and “success” varied. Friesen also discusses the rise of industry and urban centres and the impact these had on rural society.

No single approach in terms of methods or frameworks of explanation is followed although Friesen makes the compulsory nod and courtesy to a number of academic approaches (Braudel, Wallerstein, Scott, etc.), again those writers in fashion up to the mid 1990s. The book is therefore mainly descriptive and generally analytic, part economic history, part social history and part political history without clearly being associated with any of these approaches.

The economic data provided to support his argument, especially for the later nineteenth century, lacks the precision expected by economic historians. There is, for instance, no real discussion of processing industries of which milling was the most important for Mennonites, or of the increasing importance of service industries. No figures are provided on wealth, income or expenditure for the different groups, data that would have added substance to his argument. Friesen also presents very general and often contradictory accounts of peasant life. In some passages peasants are presented as backward, rejecting innovation and maintaining traditions, but in others they are described as innovative and willing to adopt new farming techniques and technology, often following Mennonite leads.

The discussion of the various groups does not provide much detailed material on their very different social structures or on any changes in social structure that the developments he discusses may have caused. The issue of how social estates were transformed into social classes in terms of labour relations, wealth and education is not addressed, nor are the roles of economic changes on the division of labour in field and

factory. Apart from the semi-nomadic pastoralist Tatars, the agrarian world of rural New Russia at the end of the eighteenth century was that of a peasant society dominated by un-free labour, a situation common to most European societies but profoundly so as one moved further into Eastern Europe. As Jerome Blum showed in his magisterial *The End of the Old Order in Rural Europe*, by the 1870s rural life was transformed all across Europe as much by economic as by political forces. The situation in New Russia was thus part of a much larger process not restricted to Russia but linked to global forces involving industrialization reaching out to rural societies. As a newly settled frontier region, change came rapidly to New Russia but the changes in labour relations that plays a major role in Friesen's book was far from unique.

Finally the role of the state in the development of the region and which varied from group to group in terms of its impact, especially before the Great Reforms, is underplayed (or at least understated). Some colonists in particular, especially Mennonites, received more attention and assistance than peasant groups and even other foreign colonists. The increasing, and at times shifting and decreasing role of the state is an important factor in the development of New Russia and its integration into the larger Russian Empire.

The final chapter addresses the issue of peasant unrest, focussing on the 1905 revolution; the conclusion looks ahead to the events of 1917. This seems to shift the work in a direction not easily linked to the points raised in the main text. In the conclusion Friesen appears to be criticizing ideas and approaches that he has not made explicit. He seems to talk as a person of Mennonite descent arguing that peasant unrest was not directed at others on account of the basic of ethnic/ nationalist sentiments but that unrest was driven purely by localized economic/ social issues. There might be some justification for this argument in terms of 1905, but the seeds of ethnic prejudice had been well sown long before 1905 with regard to Jews. Official pan-Slav and nationalist sentiments that sanctioned pogroms against Jews had been directed against the Russian German populations, including Mennonites, since the 1880s but it had not penetrated through to rural peasants to the same degree as among some urban, educated classes. The twelve years between 1905 and 1917 not only witnessed an economic boom followed by the collapse caused by First World War, but also a continuation and intensification of earlier official hate campaigns. Friesen's arguments in his conclusion fail to consider such matters that address issues well beyond the subject of his main text.

Mennonite readers will have to contend with a text where all the place names are presented in modern Ukrainian transliteration rather than the more familiar Russian. An appendix lists the Russian and Ukrainian forms but it all seems rather unnecessary when Russian

terms were predominantly in use in the area during the period discussed. But I suppose a book published by a Ukrainian Research Institute has to conform to the correct line in such matters. Such correctness, however, should not extend to changing the spelling of a place name in a quotation, as it does in at least one instance.

But I do not want to end on a negative note. The real significance of this book for readers of this journal is that it extends our understanding of Mennonite life by locating them in the wider context in which they lived. While Friesen's discussion of Mennonites adds little new information on the particulars of internal Mennonite life, by including them in his wider discussion he provides an important new perspective on the significant transformation of the Mennonites in Russia in the nineteenth century.

James Urry  
Victoria University of Wellington

Edgar Stoesz, *Like a Mustard Seed: Mennonites in Paraguay*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008. Pp. 312, soft cover, \$24.99.

Who is a Mennonite, is not a question that one would have asked one hundred years ago. The answer would have been too obvious within the small ethnically homogenous religious group. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the question must be raised as the Mennonite community has expanded to include people across the globe. No where is this more obvious than in the nation of Paraguay. Landlocked and overshadowed by its powerful neighbours of Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador, Paraguay is home to a diverse Mennonite community, essentially representing a microcosm of the global Mennonite world. In *Like a Mustard Seed*, Edgar Stoesz traces the roots of this contemporary profile since the 1920s when the Mennonites first arrived from Canada. Prepared for the 2009 Mennonite World Conference, Stoesz's work tracks the arrival of the first Mennonites of European descent through to 2009, highlighting both the triumphs and challenges over the first seventy-five years in Paraguay.

The book is split into three primary sections, highlighting how the Mennonites arrived, how they prospered within a difficult environment, and how they now contribute to the nation. In the first section, Stoesz chronologically notes the arrival and emergence of the various Mennonite groups that currently exist. The Russian Mennonites from Canada came first in 1926, settling in the Chaco region and creating

the Menno Colony. A second large group of refugees from Russia settled the Fernheim Colony, followed by another group of Canadian Mennonites in 1947, the Mexican Mennonites between 1969 and 1983, and finally Swiss and Amish families from the United States and Canada. Stoesz is careful to include Paraguayans who converted over the decades including indigenous groups from the Enhlet, Nivacle, Guarani and Ayoreo peoples, as well as Spanish-speaking Paraguayans.

Stoesz traces the economic success and spiritual struggles of the first generation in the second and third sections of *Like a Mustard Seed*. He divides this very complex and broad issue into specific categories highlighting the roles played by the church, cooperatives, credit, education, and the role of women among others. It is here that the extent of the challenges faced by the first settlers is evident. Due to the incredible physical and theological difficulties, progress was almost imperceptible within the first generation. It is not until the 1960s, Stoesz argues that life became easier and allowed these Mennonites to begin to prosper. The book ends with a focus on the historic and current relationships between Mennonites and the Paraguayan governments and the local indigenous groups.

This work will be of great interest to both academics and laypeople alike. Drawing on more than forty years of experience as director of various programs with the Mennonite Central Committee, including the Latin American program that served Paraguay, *Like a Mustard Seed* is clearly written by someone who is intimately connected with both the people and events. Stoesz convincingly argues that the struggles and challenges of the Paraguayan Mennonites are those of all Mennonites, particularly with the incorporation of women into the broader story, the relationships between European Mennonites and indigenous peoples, along with a continuous struggle for theological clarity and adherence to Anabaptist values while simultaneously adapting to contemporary politics and economic challenges of the region.

Patricia Harms  
Brandon University

Lorenzo Cañas Bottes, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making. Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future*. Leiden: Brill, 2008. Pp, xvii, 216, hard cover.

Here is yet another anthropological work by a non-Mennonite scholar on Old Colony Mennonites in Latin America. It focuses on

several Mexican Old Colony Mennonite communities: one founded near Guatrache in central Argentina in 1986; three other more established and larger colonies – Swift Current, Riva Palacias, and Santa Rita – near Santa Cruz in Bolivia. The book reports on field research over five consecutive years between 1996 and 2001, and a follow up visit in 2004, times in which the author lived with Old Colony families, working on the farms, attending colony meetings, even migrating with them. His subjects include both those at the heart of the colony and on the periphery, both lay members and leaders. They are subjects with emotion; they speak about their fears, their uprootedness, their sense of being strangers, their fears and hopes for the future, their evolving faith. They share their ubiquitous humour, they open their books, they offer friendship, they also shun. It is nothing less than a dynamic set of encounters.

While the book makes for fascinating reading it is also an academic treatise, written to advance anthropological theory. It is after all a published doctoral dissertation from the University of Manchester and hence tests cutting edge lines of enquiry to consider the complex cultural codes of people many of us consider rather simplistic. It employs the theoretical work of Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and others, to peel back the cultural understandings and forces that infuse these exponentially growing communities.

For students of Mennonite society in particular, the book makes numerous significant arguments. In fact the author seems to critique much of the corpus of Mennonite and Amish scholarship on traditionalist groups; he is especially critical of the tendency to see conservative, anti-technology Anabaptist groups “as the solution to the longing for community and lost values” in North America. (5)

His first central argument is that these colonies are not examples of communitarian equality and faith, but “mini-nations” where power is dispensed by a leadership that “absorbed the political and concealed it within the religious” (192), even “internalizing the monopoly on legitimate violence.” (196) Second, he argues that the Old Colony Mennonites are not backward looking but possess a powerful “imagination of the future,” always plotting how their worlds can be reproduced for the next generations; the Mennonites only call it “the ‘past’ in order to legitimize their present order.” (9) Third, the Old Colonists are not a migrant people simply looking for farm land; their “construction of a community that spans across territories of different states” (71) is an intentional “translocal strategy”. (78) They play one nation’s privileges against another; escape religious strictures or secure news ones, or find in the migrations ways in which they “juggle...the rules more freely.” (74) Fourth, the author suggests that the communities are rife with conflict and in fact depend on it: in their history conflict was “not only inherent,



but also something that contributed to their continuity.” (xv) Fifth, there is nothing simple about Old Colony self-identity; depending on who is asking, they are either *Christenvolk*, *Dietsche* or *Mennoniten*. (87)

These are all interesting hypotheses, but the author makes them powerfully through his participatory ethnography. His visits coincide with numerous notable events. There is a fruitless meeting chaired by church and colony leaders in La Pampa to determine interest in founding a new colony. There is a lawsuit that brews in Argentina where Mennonite leaders were cheated of \$250,000 by someone promising them a meeting with the country’s Minister of Education to address the state’s insistence that Mennonite children learn Spanish. There is a conflict over a question of whether or not a Quilmes, Argentine couple, Sergio and Silvana -- converted to a faith of simplicity, sincerity and peace from a life of punk rock and drugs -- should be allowed to join the community that feared “blood being mixed.” (137) There is another over an Old Colonist Abraham, who endorses the traditional anti-technological and “suffering” stance, but thinks the Old Colony should be more evangelical and pre-millennialist.

Scholars of Anabaptist old order groups will have their concerns with aspects of the book. One does wonder whether the underlying thesis of the book is affected by the author’s rocky reception by colony leadership, a reception seemingly affected by the presence of Jehovah’s Witness missionaries. The fact is that the book reports to a much larger degree on the ideas of those who (with apparent just cause) are disillusioned with the Old Colonists, than with the majority who know it as home. The author’s defense that such a view affords a “decentered view of the Old Colony” is well made, but to my mind it still renders a less than balanced view on Old Colony lifeworlds. (114) The author is impatient with the Old Colony leadership’s passive aggressive approach to new ideas on the colonies, even though as agrarian people they do not have the theological discourse to counter eschatological, premillennialist and pietistic ideas of missionaries. Nor are testimonials of “the Holy Spirit’s presence” (99) at Old Colony baptisms considered in the conclusion that baptism is essentially “a coming of age and a ‘social contract.’” (192). Finally, the book provides much historical background, useful for the envisaged scholarly audience, but it is infused with quite a number of small errors of date and nomenclature that detract from the book’s rather stimulating argument: the Reinlaender were formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and not early 20<sup>th</sup> century (27), school is conducted in High German not Plautdietsch (28) and so on.

Overall, this book is a provocative and insightful work, engaged and thoroughly documented and researched. It opens up debate on the complex constellation of power relations and cultural codes to outside eyes;

the author challenges those who romanticize communitarian groups to be truthful in their analyses. The problem is that there is enough rich ethnography in this book to reinforce the ideas of both those groups who see among the Old Colony evidence of unmatched community-mindedness and those who see the Old Colony's ways as undemocratic and 'secular.'

Royden Loewen  
University of Winnipeg

Heinrich B. Unruh, *Fuegungen und Fuehrungen: Benjamin Heinrich Unruh 1881-1959, Ein Leben im Geiste christlicher Humanitaet und im Dienste der Naechstenliebe, mit einem Nachwort von Peter Letkemann*, Detmold, Germany: Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums, 2009. Pp. 509, hard cover.

Benjamin H. Unruh is one of the more important, and also one of the more controversial, Mennonite leaders in the twentieth century. He began his career as a teacher in the *Kommerzschule* in the Russian Mennonite community of Molotschna, and spent most of his life in Germany helping Mennonites in the Soviet Union.

In Germany he had to deal with the Weimar Republic, Hitler's National Socialist regime, and after the war, with the Allied occupation forces. Many Mennonites saw him as a hero who saved them from the horrors of Stalin's communism, while others saw him as a villain who collaborated with the Nazi regime. Raised in the home of a Mennonite Brethren bishop (*Aeltester*), one of the better educated Russian Mennonites of his day, and for decades the official representative of Russian Mennonites, he was shut out of the Mennonite World Conference program in Karlsruhe in 1957. In his life there were contradictions and ironies galore.

Most of the book is written by Heinrich Unruh, son of Benjamin H. Unruh. The largest portion deals with Unruh's life before Hitler came to power in 1933. In Heinrich's final chapter he briefly discusses his father's life during the Hitler era. The last section of the book, written by Peter Letkemann, adds information about the latter part of Unruh's life.

For a son to write the life story of so controversial a figure is obviously a risky undertaking, and Heinrich acknowledges this. He says his aim is not to defend, but to try to understand his father's life and actions within a very difficult era in his country's history. He says his goal is to present the story in a factual manner. In the main he achieves this, even though he also addresses what he thinks are

unfair accusations against his father – accusations that he feels ignore the context or misinterpret his father’s actions. There are also large sections of Benjamin Unruh’s activity that are not covered in the book, and this of course also affects the interpretation of his life.

The book begins with a brief summary of Mennonite history, the settlements in Russia, the story of the Unruh family, and a life history of Benjamin Unruh including his study years in Basel, Switzerland, when he earned the equivalent of a doctorate degree, and married Frieda Hege.

The largest part is, however, devoted to B. H. Unruh’s work in helping Mennonites escape from the horrors of the Soviet Union. It discusses the contribution Unruh made to the founding of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), to the emigration to Canada in the 1920s and 1930, to the resettlement of Mennonites who escaped over the Amur River to Harbin, China in 1929/1930, and to the settlement of Mennonite refugees in Paraguay and Brazil in the early 1930s. Unruh notes that his father’s role was so significant that some referred to him as the “Mennonite Moses.” Because of the controversy over Benjamin Unruh’s relationship to the Third Reich, his contributions to these major events has tended to be muted in recent historical accounts. Hearing about Unruh’s work in some detail is a helpful reminder of his contributions.

The last chapter is entitled “Die Jahre des Dritten Reiches” (The Years of the Third Reich). In the first few pages of the chapter Heinrich Unruh discusses why so many Germans supported Hitler. Hitler offered hope in the midst of a terrible economic situation, he was seen as a strong bulwark against Soviet communism, and, for Unruh, Hitler provided the best possibility for assisting Mennonites in the Soviet Union. Most of the chapter, though, deals with Unruh’s unsuccessful attempt to unite German Mennonites in the 1930s into one conference, and thus speak with one voice to the government.

Benjamin Unruh wrote an extensive narrative account of his early life up to 1933, called *Fuegungen und Fuehrungen*, hence the title of this book. Unruh, however, wrote no similar account of the last 25 years of his life. Of his voluminous correspondence, only a small portion has found its way into archival holdings. Heinrich collected some material before his death in 2003, but apart from the short section in the chapter mentioned above, he also wrote little about his father’s latter years. In order to address this gap, the Unruh family asked Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg, to write an article, which is included as a ninety page *Nachwort* (epilogue).

In the *Nachwort*, Letkemann discusses some of Unruh’s more controversial involvements before and after the war, and his final years as an elder statesman who was increasingly sidelined by his own community. Letkemann admits that his *Nachwort* is incomplete. His

aim, he says, “is not to complete the story Heinrich Unruh began, but to provide the interested reader with additional details about important aspects of Benjamin Unruh’s life and work during the turbulent years of the “Third Reich” from 1933-1945, and during the difficult years after the war from 1945-1959.”(363)

To do B. H. Unruh justice, and to present a balanced picture, Letkemann says, would require additional careful research in many archives. This work, Letkemann admits, he was unable to do. He draws attention to a 200 page listing of relevant sources – a list that is available in various Mennonite archives. A 21 page selection from this list is included in the book.

Heinrich Unruh’s study, augmented by Peter Letkemann, and prepared for publication by Benjamin Unruh’s granddaughter Renate Quiring, is a valuable contribution to this important twentieth century Mennonite leader. As the sub-title to the book says, his was “a life in the spirit of Christian humanitarianism, committed to love for his neighbour”

In this service he was challenged as few have been. A Mennonite, thus part of a church that saw itself as the “quiet in the land,” he was delegated to take up very a public and political role, negotiating with two of the most repressive totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century: the Soviet Union and Hitler’s Third Reich. As the book indicates, Unruh faced incredibly difficult decisions when all options seemed grey. Although likely not the last word on Benjamin H. Unruh, this book is a valuable and courageous study of a complex leader who lived in troubled times.

John J. Friesen  
Canadian Mennonite University

Ruth Derksen Siemens, *Remember Us: Letters From Stalin’s Gulag (1930-1937), Volume I: The Regehr Family*. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2007, Pp. 407.

Ruth Derksen Siemens’s book, *Remember Us: Letters From Stalin’s Gulag*, is based on a selection of 463 letters written by the Regehrs, a Mennonite family that experienced the horrors of Stalin’s Gulag during the 1930s. The letters passed through many hands before being delivered to the Regehrs’ relatives in Canada, the Bargins, who had narrowly escaped the clutches of Soviet authorities when fleeing the Ukraine in 1929. In 1989, Bargin family members discovered the letters, and Peter and Anne Bargin translated them for publication.

The book memorializes the Regehr family and the injustices they suffered, and adds this family's dreadful experiences to the relatively obscure knowledge of life in the Gulag camps. In the Siberian camp system, food was extremely scarce, and warm clothing and adequate medical care were non-existent. The added component of grueling outdoor labor left millions dead by the end of the decade, including the father of the Regehr family, Jasch, in 1933, and one of his sons, Peter, in 1938. The surviving family members were living skeletons, who were forced to endure inhumane treatment, including months of incarceration in terrible prisons for crimes they did not commit (367). The Regehers hoped that their letters would convince their loved ones to send them aid. They also to feared that the wanton, cruel, nature of the Stalinist system would be hidden from the world (180) and, ultimately, that their lives, and suffering, would be forgotten (87, 95, 123).

Accompanying the commemoration of the Regehr family, and the important contributions of this book, are cursory references to the context of these events, and the communal, and broader, significance of the ghastly suffering in the camps. The introductory chapter struggles to maintain objectivity and to provide clarity on key points, particularly the reason for the Soviet onslaught on farmers in Ukraine. Inferred, here, is that Mennonites had been singled out due to their "perceived prosperity and their religious practices" (23), as the author claims was the case during the Russian civil war. Instead, Mennonites in Ukraine were *Kulaks*, as defined by the state (prosperous land-owners with cattle, horses, and hired labor), which Jasch Regehr acknowledged. He also expressed his disdain toward fellow Mennonites, who had informed the state officials of this fact (65, 163). These points invite further treatment, along with explanation of the central factors behind the campaign to eliminate the *Kulaks*, which included Stalin's industrial targets and fear that Ukrainian prosperity would lead to its secession from the Soviet Union.

Concluding with an epilogue titled, "What then must we do?", the author beckons readers to raise their awareness and responsibility in relation to injustices, and claims that our act of remembering will "foster tolerance." (388) While these are laudable goals, the preceding account reveals that tolerance is not enough. Jasch Regehr's letters haunt us, as he expressed repeatedly his astonishment at how no one, especially loved ones, seemed to care about his family's dire situation, and his anger toward fellow Mennonites who collaborated with the state for their own benefit.

Steven Schroeder  
University of the Fraser Valley

T.D. Regehr. *A Generation of Vigilance: The Lives and Work of Johannes and Tina Harder*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2009. Pp. 301, includes photographs, charts and maps.

At the invitation of the Yarrow Research Committee, T.D. Regehr has put together a major biographical exploration of the lives of Johannes and Tina Harder, key leaders in the early years of the Mennonite community of Yarrow, B.C. The well-researched book includes seven pages of primary source references including 14 interviews. Regehr explores the Harders' lives in depth, from extended examination of their ancestors in Russia to their arrival and work in Canada. The material is broken up chronologically and topically, revisiting the same period a number of times within the framework of a new vantage point each time. Through these successive passes the rich contributions of this couple to the development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Yarrow, and in the wider Mennonite Brethren community, are revealed.

This is not hagiography. Regehr has labored to make this couple stand out in the richness of their existence, showing struggles and foibles, as well as strong contributions. For example, while Johannes is clearly a popular figure within the church, the passive aggressive way he made use of that popularity is obvious. Tina's struggles to present the proper face of a prominent Mennonite churchwoman, and to ensure her children are of the appropriate character, are well detailed. These glimpses into the underlying reality of each gives a sense of authenticity to the work, as it explores how they, and in particular Johannes, helped build the church in Yarrow and beyond.

In its detail the book is a fascinating exploration of the life of a congregation. Regehr takes us through the Harders into the life of the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church. We enter the world of the behind-the-scenes negotiations, and the compromises and concerns, of an emerging Mennonite Brethren church in the 1930s and 1940s. In its time one of the largest Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America, its dynamics were those of immigrant Mennonites struggling and failing to rebuild the lost glory of Russia among the hop farms, berry fields and dairies of B.C. The detailed strictures of daily life and the dynamic of poverty and living amidst a pro-war majority culture come to life. Failed initiatives such as the Bible school are explored in depth. The interaction of a powerful leadership figure with the reality of minimal support and economic difficulties show just how church life allowed unrealistic ventures to proceed based on internal dynamics of church life and the determination of powerful figures.

The work becomes more difficult as it explores issues of theology and belief. While the Harders are clearly committed to Mennonite

beliefs, including non-resistance, the irony and complexity of their eldest sons' choice of a career in the Canadian military never really gets probed. While Harder was a preacher, we never get a feel for his sermons. All we learn is that he was very attentive to scripture. A quantitative analysis of themes would have been especially helpful. At times Regehr's own theology seems to interfere with his ability to see Johannes theology as when he stresses Harder's commitment to a theology of the Priesthood of all Believers (105), which, if so, would make Harder one of the pioneers of this neo-Anabaptist perspective, preceding significantly its exposition by C.J. Dyck and John Howard Yoder in the later 1950s. Regehr also states, without evidence (75) that for Johannes and Tina sex was only for the purpose of procreation. This seems an unwarranted assertion, perhaps reflecting Regehr's inference from their concern about public display of affection, something not uncommon at the time, and not necessarily representing anything about their personal desires for one another. Regehr is also at pains to stress that Johannes and Tina functioned as a partnership (p. 105), but never makes it clear how they did so, or why, given that they clearly supported a more traditional division of labour in their public and private lives. This is not a contemporary model of partnership, and while it may indicate one in keeping with family life of the time, the separate roles involved should be identified even if that makes them less sympathetic to a contemporary reader.

Technically the book is somewhat cumbersome, heavily footnoted, and significantly repetitive. At points the writing is hard to follow. It is at its easiest to read when dealing with institutions and most difficult when describing Johannes and Tina themselves. Regehr has a tendency to summarize material by giving its structure rather than its content, telling us that a thing happened, but not taking us inside the event itself.

While the book is a fascinating glimpse into a community in formation, it is never really clear what the book is about. Regehr's writing is the strongest in relation to the institutions and one cannot help but think this would have been a better book had he focused on the institutions rather than the people. Regardless, the book provides a detailed examination of an important Mennonite immigrant experience, one foundational to a significant part of the Mennonite Brethren experience in North America. For that reason it is significant.

Bruce Hiebert

University of the Fraser Valley/University Canada West

Ernie Harder, *Mostly Mennonite: Stories of Jacob and Mary Harder*. Abbotsford: By the Author, 2009. Pp. ix + 280, soft cover, \$29.95.

Henry Poettker, *A President's Journey: The Memoirs of Henry Poettker*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 216, soft cover, \$26.50.

At first glance it does not seem that these two autobiographical writings should have very much in common. Ernie Harder's book is a combination of the biography of his parents and his own memoir. Harder suggests that his parents were freed "from telling others what their beliefs should be" but "at heart their identity remained mostly Mennonite." (243) None of their seven children, however, have "ties to a Mennonite Church." (237) Henry Poettker's memoir, in contrast, chronicles a life of serving the Mennonite Church in its highest offices in education and conference leadership. And yet both stories begin with a migration in the aftermath of the turmoil of revolution and civil war in Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century and both engage the nature of the ethnic and religious dimensions of Mennonite identity by a generation now old enough to review their lives from a vantage point that acknowledges its looming end.

Ernie Harder's parents were twenty and fourteen when they arrived in Canada and the first half of the book is a potpourri of anecdotes and recollections of Harder family history. Throughout the book, the story is told in the present tense, a technique that gives the stories an immediacy and 'folksy' feel, but is sometimes confusing. Similarly, the lack of reference to sources often leaves the reader wondering. For example, the detailed numbers of how many Mennonites applied for military exemption in 1925, the number whose request was granted, and how many were imprisoned is prefaced only with "records indicate." (66) It is unclear if the numbers refer to all of Russia, the Ukraine, one colony, or one village. At approximately the middle of the book when the time line of the story is in the mid 1930s, the genre changes from biography to memoir. While still focused on the Harder family the narrative becomes much more clearly the author's memories. The account is nostalgic, there is clear reverence for the author's parents, but the stories are interesting and rich in conveying the texture of a Mennonite immigrant family finding its place in Yarrow, B.C.

Henry Poettker, was one when he came to Canada and his memoir offers no personal memories of Russia, but his account of his family's experience foreshadows the theme of consensus leadership that



will dominate the memoir. Even in Russia before the author's birth the story is about progressive church leaders, organizations and facilitating compromise: "committees and agencies were formed," "a commission was appointed," and it took time for "plans to materialize." (15) The strength of Poettker's memoir is in its portrayal of the parallel lives of a prominent and busy church leader. While he is involved in an impressive array of committees and meetings all over North America, we also learn about the trip with a U-haul through the United States, the new friendships with neighbours, and the details of homes and renovations. The story is that of an academic administrator and church leader and that means we become intimately involved in the papers heard, written and presented on the issues of the day, the challenges of institutional staffing, and the restructuring necessitated by the need to meet external academic standards. Poettker's travels while on sabbatical also figure prominently in the narrative, sometimes to a fault in their detail. Missing from Poettker's account is a clear sense of what leadership 'at the top' was like during a time of dramatic change in society and the Mennonite Church. The narrative glosses over the turmoil that must have accompanied the changes of the 1960s and 70s: the language of church, the role of women, urbanization, the sexual revolution, and the rejection of Mennonite ethnicity in favour of a diverse church based on neo-Anabaptist foundations.

The two autobiographical writings amply illustrate the ironies of Mennonite identity over the last fifty years. While the story of the Harder family is an illustration of Mennonite ethnic identity that treasures its storehouse of religious and cultural values while at the same time rejecting formal Mennonite theology, Poettker's memoir illustrates the North American church's embarrassment about and gradual rejection of Mennonite ethnic identity in favour of sixteenth century Anabaptism as a credible message for everyone regardless of race or culture. In both cases the reader is invited into the richness of the ordinary and private in the lives of two first generation Canadian Russian Mennonite families.

Hans Werner  
University of Winnipeg

Adolf Ens, Ernest N. Braun, and Henry Fast (Eds.), *Settlers of the East Reserve: Moving In – Moving Out – Staying*. Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2009. Pp. 328, soft cover, \$30.00.

*Settlers of the East Reserve* is the latest book in a series begun by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society and continued by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. The book is a compilation of numerous writings and transcriptions based on over ten years of research by numerous authors. Its contents focus on the early history of the Mennonite East Reserve of Manitoba, 1874 to 1910, although some earlier and later material is included. The book is split into four parts: The East Reserve: People and Institutions; Village Histories; Biography and Family History; and Departures from the East Reserve. Each section contains useful information for researchers of all levels. The book has no index. Instead, an optional cd is available for purchase along with the book. Here the book has been recreated in pdf format, and this makes searching for names and places very simple and worth the cost.

The first section, “The East Reserve: People and Institutions” includes translations and transcriptions of primary source material, such as “Homestead Applications, Patents and Cancellations” and “Federal Census 1891”, among others. This material is invaluable for historians, and the editors and compilers should be thanked for their efforts in making this available to a large audience. The section also includes interesting information on the nature and evolution of the Mennonite fire insurance system (Die Mennonitische Brandordnung). The compilers of this section do a good job of explaining the historical context of the institutions and records they present, as well as the location and condition of original documents. They also occasionally explain potential problems in transcription and invite readers to comment and pass on corrections. This was useful in conducting my own research when I noticed potential discrepancies in the “Tax Assessment Records: RM of Hespeler and Hanover, 1885”. After going to the original records at the municipal office of the R.M. of Hanover, it was clear that the columns indicating livestock possessions were incorrect in the transcription. This resulted in serious errors, such as mistaking 11 cows for 11 oxen, hogs for horses, and missing an entire column of young horses. Eight people are ascribed to the Cornelius Plett (elder) household that according to the original document only held four. In this case at least, although the presence of the record is useful, the organization of the data is faulty. This is a reminder that researchers should always consult original records where possible.

In Section B, the village histories of Friedrichsthal, Rosengart and Schoenwiese are explored in detail. The introduction to this section lists other East Reserve village history publications. Section C includes translations of the journals and autobiography of Jacob T. Wiebe, Jacob D. Wiebe, and teacher Heinrich R. Rempel, as well as the history of the Erdmann Penner and Johann and Katharina Koop families. These are well written and will be of interest to descendants.

The final section, "Departures from the East Reserve", helps fill in gaps in the historical records regarding the post-immigration movement of Mennonite people. Mennonites moving out of the East Reserve for better farmland went to the Dakota Territory (1874-92) and the West Reserve (1878-1882), while some of those searching for greater religious freedom travelled to Paraguay (1926-27). This section outlines in some detail the routes and the reasoning behind these movements in a sensitive and contextualized manner.

*Settlers of the East Reserve* is very much an index of adaptation of the Mennonite people. The lists and records attest to the order of settlement and how Mennonites fit into the new social and physical landscape of the young province of Manitoba. Mennonites were deeply concerned with maintaining social order based on religious principles. It is striking to see the degree of responsibility expected of a villager in the section on the Mennonite fire insurance society; "16. Outside bake ovens must be placed 12 rods from all flammable material", and "19. In case of fire everyone is obliged to hurry to the scene of the fire with his fire tools and to assist in extinguishing the fire" (123). The new settlers' own concern for order and social control was spliced with the legal governing structures of the new country. They were able to translate the status of their officials into Canadian parlance, and "saw acceptance of this marriage of their old system with the Canadian system as a means of maintaining local control of their community" (79). Mennonites, however, studiously ignored "all the intricacies of the political legislation", used "German titles in the minutes for the officers of the municipality" and recorded council minutes in German for 34 years (79). The Manitoban government, meanwhile, ignored these infractions, since local governance ran smoothly.

Throughout the book we are given glimpses into the sense of order Mennonites looked for in their social life. When this order was not found, we are reminded that people had the option to leave.

Roland Sawatsky  
Mennonite Heritage Village

Richard P. Church, *First Be Reconciled: Challenging Christians in the Courts*. Waterloo: Herald Press, 2008. Pp. 232, soft cover, \$22.99.

Richard Church's fine book, a revision of his Duke University doctoral thesis under the supervision of Stanley Hauerwas, is part of the *Polyglossia* series published by Herald Press. Church, a health care attorney and farmer in North Carolina, confesses to some level of theological discomfort with his work as a lawyer, discomfort that leads him to interrogate what he considers the "uncritical embrace of the courts by all Christians and the loss of the church as a discerning body in which disputes are reconciled" (13). The central question, as Church poses it, "[i]f peace is more determinative than the absence of violence, if the reconciliation of God to human *and* human to human is at the heart of the good news, then what of litigation?" (16).

Much is at stake here, according to Church, nothing less than the church's authentic witness to the peaceable kingdom. Considering the gravity of the issue, it might be expected that Church would seek to establish some kind of 'position' regarding litigation in and by the body of Christ. However, Church strongly claims that he will not seek to produce any such thing, but instead will focus on discernment regarding the practice of litigation by recovering an understanding of particular biblical texts (particularly I Cor. 6), the broader witness of the gospel, and memories and practices of the historical church.

Church's recovery of the church's understanding of the issues surrounding litigation is not meant to be particularly original or innovative; rather, he is seeking to deepen the church's memory regarding participation in litigation. And so he 'reports' on biblical scholarship concerning I Cor. 6, and surveys the historical context and interpretive work of Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin insofar as these great theologians address the issue at hand. All of this work sets the table for a lengthy and fascinating treatment of the Anabaptist tradition and its historical understandings and practices concerning litigation. Here, however, the huge leap from early Anabaptism to its twentieth-century expression is jarring, as is the relegation to lengthy endnotes of too many discussions salient to the argument.

Church's looping back to these issues historically and theologically leads him to put forward the body of Christ as the primary locus of ethical discernment. Thus he resists the desire for black and white answers, a 'position,' and instead encourages Christians to be discerning in their thinking and practices regarding litigation in such a way that reconciliation is served. If there is a 'conclusion' to be had, it is that we are called to remember "the means by which Christians

resolve disputes is at the heart of the church's witness to the gospel" (135).

Church's project might be described as exemplary, in that it serves to display how the church can understand an issue such as litigation. Here the deep influence of John Howard Yoder is clear, but not by way of the amassing and arranging of various quotations from Yoder's body of work. Rather, Church tries to work like Yoder would have worked – and in so doing, Church is Yoderian in the best sense. That is, he not a Yoder apologist, but rather someone engaged in extending an approach or stance, a way of working, to issues that confront the body of Christ.

Paul Doerksen  
Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute

Paul Redekop, *Changing Paradigms: Punishment and Restorative Discipline*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2008. Pp. 293, soft cover.

Jarem Sawatsky, *JustPeace Ethics: A Guide to Restorative Justice and Peacebuilding*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008. Pp. x + 98, soft cover.

These two books share several commonalities. They are both written by Winnipeg-based scholars working in the Mennonite tradition; they both deal with the systematic social benefits of a restorative approach to justice and they both contain forwards penned by Howard Zehr, whose *Changing Lenses* (1990) is a seminal work for the field of restorative justice. Further, as we shall see below, the two monographs contribute to the study of restorative justice by showing how its principles have consequences far beyond the mere application of new techniques for dealing with criminal matters. Read together, *Changing Paradigms* and *JustPeace Ethics* provide important insights about not only the reform of our justice system but also concerning how our approach to justice can potentially contribute to a substantively peaceful society.

Paul Redekop argues that what is needed to effect a positive change in our justice systems is a shift away from punishment centred retribution towards restorative discipline. Redekop's main argument explores the restorative paradigm, which contrasts starkly with its retributive cousin. While a retributive, punishment-based approach seeks to respond to transgression by the infliction of harm on a perpetrator, Redekop's "restorative discipline" recognizes the essential nature of

harmful acts as examples of broken relationships that require healing and reconciliation. Jarem Sawatsky also discerns the need for us to understand transgression within a relational framework, which, he adds, ought to include a deep respect for diversity. In this regard, Sawatsky effectively argues that respect for particularities of any given culture or context will improve the prospects for restorative justice to foster substantively just and peaceful healing in our societies.

For Redekop, the beginnings of a shift towards such healing can already be seen in the constitution of offender mediation services, sentencing circles, community conferences and peer mediation programs in schools. With the aid of illustrative case studies, Sawatsky draws our attention to the need for the restorative justice movement to not be complacent about such previous successes and seek to apply a single technique for justice to all situations. In particular, by referencing the tradition of virtue ethics, Sawatsky demonstrates how restorative justice can never be effectively practiced in a dispassionate, violent or technical fashion across cultures and traditions. In this manner, Sawatsky shows that due to the deep relational approach, which he argues characterizes any exercise of restorative justice that is truly respectful of diversity; there will never be a “one size fits all” solution to transgression. In contrast, Sawatsky’s vision of JustPeace ethics provides a meeting place for people from various religious and cultural traditions to come together in a nonviolent and mutually enhancing manner. For him, it follows that while “injustice robs people of power, JustPeace returns power.”

Along with Sawatsky’s reflection on the importance of justice being empowering, caring, nonviolent and respectful of diversity, it is crucial to note the important insight that Redekop is highlighting: the restorative paradigm has consequences that reach far beyond criminal matters. Indeed, both Redekop’s and Sawatsky’s monograph stand as a testimony to the hope that working within the restorative paradigm could achieve tangible healing in all areas of society. Commenting on why restorative justice seems strange to many of us in Western societies, Redekop comments that we are currently socialized into a “myth of punishment,” which falsely promises that punishment will bring peace to our society. For similar reasons, as part of his discussion concerning the problematic nature of technical approaches to peace and justice, Sawatsky argues further that we tend assume that justice is something that is “served” or is done to us. Such assumptions, Sawatsky continues, allow us to falsely conclude that justice can be “served” when its exercise results in bitterness, destruction or pain. In this regard, both Redekop and Sawatsky present detailed arguments to demonstrate how the myth that punishment and violence can lead to peace shapes our reality in harmful manner, not only in the criminal

justice system but also by negatively influencing relationships within our families, schools, religious traditions and the larger social context. Sawatsky adds that such thinking can unduly limit the exercise of our collective moral imagination, further reducing the prospects for a just peace.

Despite this malaise, Redekop argues that the shift toward a restorative paradigm in the larger social context has already begun to occur. Redekop notes, for example, that it is no longer normative for parents to control their children with physical force because of the growing recognition of the harm a violent methodology of punishment invokes. When the myth of punishment is exposed in a society and replaced with what Redekop labels “restorative discipline,” we shift not only an idea about how to deal with transgression, but also simultaneously provide a foundation for positive social change. Sawatsky demonstrates how people who do not leave love and compassion behind in favour of a technical approach to problems when they associate with others in their personal and professional lives most effectively bring about such a shift. Drawing on the legacy of Ghandi and Thich Nhat Hanh—that peaceful means are the only effective method to break the hold which the power of violence has on this world, Sawatsky shows how being representative of the change we seek is necessary for any effective social transformation.

In the end, read together, these books demonstrate how restorative justice pursued along relational lines will have tangible benefits. As Sawatsky argues, a relational perspective shows us that peace and justice can never be decoupled if either one is ever to be substantive or truly empowering. His use of the term “JustPeace” captures the essential nature of this connection. It follows that we need restorative discipline and deep relational ethics as part of any movement towards the flourishing of human communities. In this light, restorative justice comes to accord with a socially just peace, helping communities exit from the spirals of violence and conflict that accompany broken relationships in the world today.

In this manner, the paradigmatic and JustPeace ethics approaches represented in Redekop’s and Sawatsky’s work on healing justice can help us transform this spiral of violence into substantively peaceful relationships. If, as the restorative justice movement suggests, prisons are de-humanizing, costly and, most notably, violent responses to transgression, we are left with one question: when will society become fully cognisant of these realities, see the true cost of retributive attitudes and more fully commit to the hard work of healing justice? Offering a response to this question, Redekop and Sawatsky show us a path towards doing more for our communities by creatively working to integrate the best of restorative justice principles into our daily lives

and the functioning of our institutions. This is an immense challenge. However, those who take up this challenge can rest assured that they can find a strong foundation for their efforts in these two books. Perhaps crucially, after reading *Changing Paradigms* and *JustPeace Ethics* such concerned citizens will also be able to more fully understand how their efforts will have positive consequences beyond the walls of prisons. Through such insight, like I have in wake of reading Redekop and Sawatsky's books, they might come to appreciate working for restorative justice as an act of relational peacebuilding benefiting whole societies.

Christopher Hrynkow  
Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice  
St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba

Kathleen Kern, *In Harm's Way A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams*. Cambridge, England: Lutterworth Press, 2009. Pp. xi+602, soft cover. \$49.00.

Kathleen Kern narrates twenty years of courageous nonviolent action undertaken by Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in some of the world's most entrenched conflicts. In 600 packed pages, she recounts stories from the ground, highlighting the contexts of violence in conflict areas like Israel/Palestine, indigenous communities in North America, Iraq and Colombia while also shedding light on the organization's modus operandi and CPTers working passionately to reduce violence. The organizational history of Christian Peacemaker Teams, which at times reads as a reflective organizational evaluation is personal and informative providing insight into a variety of different regions and violent contexts where the team has sought to intervene.

*In Harm's Way* takes readers into the struggles and personalities of a people trying to follow a biblical call to reduce violence. In Haiti, one of CPT's first projects, team members struggled to stay true to CPT's mandate for nonviolent action in an atmosphere of extreme economic violence and partners' call for solidarity or presence. In Hebron and the West Bank (Occupied Palestinian Territories), CPTers and the Palestinian population have faced ongoing intimidation, threats and physical violence and the organization has begun to ask the question, "What should CPT do when a crisis is chronic?" (228). The book also describes how the organization and individual team members have grappled with trauma as they follow their nonviolent convictions, especially in regard to the kidnapping of four CPTers in Iraq in 2005.



Kern explores each of these histories in detail while also revealing Anabaptist/Mennonite connections to CPT's founding and ongoing work as well as uncovering systemic ties between US policy and violence. As Kern describes the work of CPT in Colombia these connections become evident. The Mennonite Church of Colombia issued the original invitation to CPT to "get in the way" of violence against workers and families in Barrancabermeja. Additionally, the team saw that "the entire heavily funded US War on Drugs, became a tool to suppress guerrilla and civil society groups" (411).

As a full time CPTer for 15+ years involved in a variety of assignments, Kathleen Kern knows the organization. As a researcher, she incorporates the voices of CPT reservists, support staff, part-timers and delegation members and gathers data from many years of CPT news articles and internal CPT documents. The voices of outside partners, constituency and observers are less salient. Another drawback is that editing errors and continual eye movement to access accompanying footnotes, some of which offer fascinating input while fewer provide extraneous details, often thwarts readers' attention to the account.

Minor weaknesses aside, the witness of CPT throughout this portrayal are inspiring. Individuals interested in the growth and twists of an Anabaptist related organization working valiantly to reduce violence and build capacity for peace would find this extensive history worthy and riveting.

Jodi Read

Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice  
St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba