

Book Reviews

Reviews of Fiction and Poetry

Di Brandt, *Walking to Mojácar*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2010. pp. viii + 212. Softcover, \$17.00.

The motif of ‘poetry as translation’ that recurs throughout Di Brandt’s breakthrough new volume of poems could well serve as its subtitle. It’s the older history of “translate” that is specifically brought to bear, the original Latin notion of conveying elements from one setting or condition to another. In its association with “interpretation,” ‘translation’ can be thought of as transferring aspects of a text to a reader who desires some measure of understanding. As exemplified in the poignant middle section of Brandt’s volume, ‘translation’ can also mean moving the remains of a memorable person or saintly site from one place to another. But *Walking to Mojácar* also features the most common understanding of ‘translation’: each poem in the first section appears on the opposite page in a French translation by award-winning poet Charles Leblanc of Winnipeg; all but one of the poems in the second section stand opposite a German text; and each poem of the third section appears in a Spanish translation by Ari Belathar of Vancouver.

Mojácar opens with a series of nine ghazals that transfer prairie images and modern, urban cultural images back and forth. The ghazal, of ancient Eastern origins, was introduced to the West by nineteenth-century romantics, took leave for most of the twentieth century, and recently has made a comeback. Brandt’s translation of the form is at

once radical and brilliant. In her ghazals, a hard-bitten voice, married to the prairies and still touchingly intimate with them, sounds laments that carry through the book, over genealogies of cultural sordidness and recklessness, environmental ruin, historical amnesia, spiritual losses, and the emotional degradation of our new age.

The ghazals are followed by two apocalyptically-minded sequences featuring prose poems, another form in vogue today. These sequences are long poems comprised of individual poems. In the first series, consisting of twelve prose abstracts on nuclear fusion and other meldings, Brandt's translation of transformations in nuclear physics both recalls the intellectual and imaginative play of the extended metaphor in late Renaissance poetry and conveys an underlying mistrust of such poetic conceits. Poetic conceits depend on a stable system of interpretation in which figures fuse effortlessly with a second level of meaning. But just as today's energy scientists reach for nuclear fusion as a kind of Tantalus prize, Brandt's unstable and abortive analogies – both between atomic science and engineering, and between these two and moral philosophy, art, human friendship, love, and intimacy – signal a litany of frustrated desire and wary whispers of hope. Because of the speaker's ineluctable yearning, the reader is free to reach beyond the poem's restraints and ironies to imagine life-giving fusions.

The second sequence of prose poems deals mainly with environmental despoliation. Here, as in Brandt's *Now You Care*, an abiding love for our physical world, deep passion over “social and ecological ravage” (64), and intense desire for reformed thinking and action are in the forefront. This series concludes: “*In several millennia, when we have given rise to the Fifth Age, it will be our turn to be Ancestors. Who knows what this new age will remember of us as it tells its tales and stories to its children*” (66). A small assortment of mainly lyrical meditations rounds out the first section of *Mojácar*.

For those of us who know by heart the songs in our grandparents' hymnals, the second section of *Mojácar* – “Hymns for Detroit: Trans(e)lations of traditional German Mennonite hymns” – is especially notable. Six of the twelve pieces in this section present imagistic or thematic weavings of hymn stanzas on the right page and, on the page opposite, a translation that quickly veers into a messy, heart-eating world named “Detroit.” The hymn's spiritually harmonious order and the scaffolding of memory that surrounds it live in translation for only a few words before the culture emblemized by Detroit takes over. The result is an English poem of profound dis-ease – and yet, the German hymn remains, insisting on its presence even as “Detroit” erases it on the opposite page. Other poems in this section illuminate what “trans(e)lations” may mean, specifically, the transference of *elation* from a hymn's dimension to ours. The iconic adoration of Christ's beauty is

translated, for example, as an affectionate celebration of our “Omas,” and a resurrection hymn to the returning sun/son is transformed into a passionate song to a lover back from an almost fatal illness.

The book’s final section ‘translates’ the Canadian speaker and her North American imagery to Spain, where Mennonite refugees, bison, and Métis furnish a mnemonic moment of likeness in “The lottery of history,” a lyrical evocation of Barcelona’s history. In “Rodeo,” the Calgary Stampede and Hutterite colonies approximate elements of desert valleys of southern Spain, and New York enters an invocation to Lorca in the splendid title poem, “Walking to Mojácar.” Di Brandt and her translators deserve our admiration for this tour de force of “translation” and for an extraordinarily rich new resource for courses on contemporary Canadian literature and poetry.

Leonard Neufeldt
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Darcie Friesen Hossack, *Mennonites Don’t Dance*.
Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 2010. pp. 180, \$18.95.

While the title, *Mennonites Don’t Dance*, suggests the too-familiar image of colourless Mennonites who are defined by what they refuse, this first collection of short stories is not a rite-of-passage dismissal of conservative Mennonitism. It is, instead, an exploration of a basic question – to be or not to be – reframed in more vivid terms: to dance or to block out beauty and love. In Hossack’s fictional worlds – on a typical Mennonite farm, for instance, or in a cluttered urban apartment – life itself depends on a joyous capacity to delight in sensual experiences. The cover photograph, “The Suicide” by Madalina Iorache-Levay, is hauntingly appropriate. The empty dress, evanescent as a wispy cloud and hanging from a half-shattered tree against a gothic sky, foreshadows a world in which women are often seen through, or seen only to be condemned to non-being. Yet men are just as likely to face judgment. Worse, both men and women cooperate in their own erasure, seemingly unable to break free from inherited patterns of behavior, even as they yearn for more than what is offered.

Hossack’s deceptively simple style, unobtrusive symbols, and easy balance between ordinary dialogue and introspection involve us immediately in the lives of the bewildered, struggling protagonists. Because we share their perceptions of fairness and injustice, loss and subsequent defense against vulnerability, the suspense in some stories is almost unbearable. The opening story, “Luna,” walks such

a tightrope between despair and hope that I stopped reading halfway through. I could not watch poor Jonah become as cruel as his father, not after he had learned to love joyously. But I also couldn't not read on, and I returned to the story to discover a beautiful, yet altogether believable resolution. Thereafter, I was in Hossack's hands, unable to stop reading, full of dread and hope in equal measure, for everything seemed possible and not possible.

The book is far less about Mennonites, whether ethnic or religious, than about the compelling project of becoming fully human. Not every character is brave enough to attempt it, not when basic longings have been twisted into self-loathing through fear of an implacable God. While some of the Mennonite communities certainly contribute to judgmentalism, more than one story features warm and generous Mennonite neighbours who help the tormented families that have broken down into their smallest, most vicious parts. There is no overt condemnation here of anyone, not even of the "pickled old shit down the hill" (43) who has lived without beauty, love, mercy, or trust. Even he has acted only out of his own misery, defending himself against further emotional disasters. The cruelest characters are ruthless in their grief because they assume that they deserve their losses as punishment by a God who is a terrible judge of sinners. Even Lizbeth, the once-happy protagonist of the title story, "Mennonites Don't Dance," concludes that her few waltz steps with a young admirer have cancelled out her faithful prayers for her beloved brother. Because she danced, he was murdered. Such is often the logic of human beings, especially children, trying to make sense of random evil in the world.

If Hossack is unflinching in her depiction of familial misery, she is equally unafraid of offering genuinely good characters. From the over-worked mother who initiates her daughter into the secret pleasure of dandelion wine, to the critical, stingy mother-in-law who finally abandons her efforts to forget the death of the "daughter who made her think in colours" (57), the women and men who embody hope are the ones whose hearts have not been calcified by too many refusals to dance. Their undercover resistance and surprising pleasure in sensuality keep alive the certainty that love can and will flourish, despite forced sacrifices and trampled gifts. The strength of these fine stories is their psychological realism and the dignity of choice that Hossack grants her characters. Narrative voice in one or two of the shortest stories is perhaps weaker than it might be, but even these stories are convincing within the strong, coherent vision of the collection as a whole. I look forward to Hossack's first novel.

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David Bergen, *The Matter with Morris*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2010. pp. 256. Hardcover, \$29.99

In *Morris Shute*, Bergen has perfected his novelistic penchant for characters who are, at their core, extended meditations on philosophical propositions. In this case, it is Saul Bellow's suggestion (quoted in the novel) that "People don't realize how much they are in the grip of ideas." *Morris* spends the novel grappling with (and reading about) the dilemma that this poses for his life: how can his sensual self be reconciled with the intellectual self that is its constant companion and critic?

Morris is an anxiety-ridden neurotic, who spends the days following the disintegration of his marriage and career seeking to find a solid place to lay the blame for his son's death in Afghanistan. This quest occupies the bulk of the novel, during which not much happens. He has soulless encounters with prostitutes, including one who turns out to have been a friend of his son. He converts all of his capital into cash and hides it around his apartment like a paranoid apocalyptic. He attends a men's group, even though, in one of his many moments of snobbish evaluation, he finds the other men "incredibly average" (200). A strange epistolary romance-that-isn't-quite-an-affair signals the extent to which he is playing with subconscious forces he cannot control. He cuts himself off from society, even getting rid of his answering machine so he will be beholden to no one in his solitary exploration of his suffering. The ringing, unanswered phone becomes a repeated echo of *Morris's* dilemma: to what extent can a person divest himself of social contact and maintain a self? What is a self, when viewed without the consolations and constructions of the social world?

Morris has plenty to occupy his attention in the midst of his solitude. His money has given him enough material security to do practically anything he wants. Like all good existential protagonists, though, he feels he has "become a slave to freedom" (214). *Morris* struggles with the question of why the guilty sometimes go unpunished and why the innocent are made to suffer. His recollection of a candy he stole as a child offers a glimpse into his family's history of paternal wrath and echoes the repeated theme that the sins of fathers are visited on sons, a theme we see most clearly in the debilitating sense of responsibility *Morris* feels for his son's decision to go to war. It's worth noting that *Morris's* conviction that this decision was made solely to spite him is only the most significant manifestation of his great pride, or, less kindly, his absolute self-absorption.

Throughout *The Matter with Morris*, Bergen indulges in one of his favourite novelistic pastimes, opening intertextual windows in the book

to let the light of other writers help illuminate his central points. Of the *many* works cited here (directly and indirectly) the most central is, as Morris himself notes, Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, which also features a vaguely autobiographical central character undergoing a midlife crisis, trying to find a balance between his inner turmoil and his relationships with (and in) the world. Like *Herzog*, Morris is a compulsive writer of letters, though a few of Morris's are actually sent, with unexpected results. Unlike *Herzog*, Morris's bleak vision is not explicitly redeemed at the end of the novel, or only belatedly so. He may be coming to realize, as *Herzog* does, the wisdom of Blake's proposition, that "Man liveth not by self alone but in his brother's face."

Perhaps the other pivotal text here is Plato's *Republic*, with the cave from which Morris seeks to emerge represented as largely one of his own making. It is a relief that Bergen avoids what may have been tempting popular clichés about "processing" grief: by the novel's conclusion, Morris may finally be closer to seeing the cave's shadows for what they really are.

Bergen's concise prose here is as coolly lapidary as ever. The problem with *The Matter with Morris*, though, is that the central character is as dispassionately detached from the reader as he is estranged from himself, which makes him a rather unsympathetic focus for this extended meditation on guilt. The intertextual answer Morris might have found most useful is absent here, but one can't help wondering if E.M. Forster's famous dictum in *Howard's End*, "Only connect," might have saved Morris a great deal of anguish and the reader from sharing quite so much of his ennui.

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Carla Funk, *Apologetic*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2010. pp. 120. Paper, \$17.00.

Carla Funk's latest collection of poetry is magisterial and disciplined, a serious and rather lonely book that offers an exquisitely detailed world of words. These are carefully crafted poems – Funk is capable of turning out a lovely sonnet – that are particularly adept at offering elaborate and extensive alternate versions of, or synonyms for, the things we take for granted. Birthdays, night-time, the moon, a small winter bonfire: Funk re-envisions and re-casts both matter and evanescence in rewarding ways. Occasionally, Funk's care with language and her determination to say nothing in expected ways lead

to levels of hyper-specificity that are not necessarily beneficial. In the poem "Northern Crèche," for instance, I had to study the phrase, "That lit icon hacksawing darkness," for too long, and I left the title poem "Apologetic" uncertain just what the speaker was sorry for.

Funk's poems are long on atmosphere and short on narrative: there are very few poems here that move beyond an extremely sensitive "I" who is preoccupied with insight. It would be nice to hear more about plain people and everyday work from Funk's amazing point of view; her observations are so acute that one wishes they would get out and about more. Because so many poets do not have a strong enough personal voice, my next criticism might seem strange, but Funk's "I" is so strong and stable that it's a relief to sometimes encounter the pronouns "you," "she," or "we." Funk's voice is wonderfully confident, and perhaps it is perverse to wish that she'd slip sometimes into uncertainty or flail a bit in the mud; nevertheless, I do.

The best poems here are Funk's religious poems and her poems about her parents. While one might expect the realm of the spiritual to encourage too much this poet's interest in atmospheric and meditative spaces, her religious investigations actually lead her in the opposite direction. "Morning Prayer" crackles with distinctness, as does "Found Between the Pages." In the former, the line, "In the morning, I bend to a God shadowed by my own stupidity," is commanding and memorable. The postcard of Christ found between the pages in the latter poem is considered in a manner unusually dramatic for Funk: "He looked at me, content / in his unearthing, no doubt / aware I'd fallen too." The humility and good humour of the religious poems (especially the reworking of the Adam and Eve story in "Prologue") provide a vivid counterweight to Funk's carefully honed depictions of mood and experienced phenomena. In particular, the lively "Dear John on the Island of Patmos" could easily be translated into a little film. It has everything: longing, enigma, resentment, beauty, admonition, wit.

But the poems that assess and hesitantly honour her familial past are the most amazing. "Fumbling Towards the Star," an account of an heartbreaking, unsophisticated Sunday School Christmas pageant, is astonishing, a breathtakingly tender and sharply astute rendering of two very human parents. The parents appear again in "Love Poem" and "My Father in Heaven," flawed and beautiful, lit with a grown daughter's new recognitions, and still steeped in the mysteries of their own personalities.

Carla Funk is working a deep vein of longing and gratitude, of close scrutiny and intense thought. Her poems are gloomier, I suspect, than she realizes. She often works toward moments of hope which seem to have more solidity for her than they do for the reader. There can be too much of the otherworldly in her writing, but there is no doubt that her

poems reward patient re-reading. Sometimes her poems really sing, and when they do, she makes you love poetry again.

Gather up the figure lying facedown on the floor,
and blow the ashes from her eyes. Let her see
the table's feast. Let her drink. Let her eat
and then walk singing to the star-washed street.
("Psalm from the Dollhouse")

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Melanie Siebert, *Deepwater Vee*. Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 2010. pp. 88. Paper.

To enter this book is to travel the rivers and roads of Canada's north into wilderness territory unfamiliar to many of us. Concerning such travel, Tim Lilburn writes: "When consciousness crosses the divide into the wilderness of what is there, it expects to find a point of poetic privilege: at last a clear view into the heart of things. But what it does find on the other side is further peculiarity, a new version of distance" (4).¹ Crossing the divide is not for the faint of heart. Only with a skilful guide should a novice venture out into untamed country. Poet Melanie Siebert, familiar both with the braided currents of northern waterways and also with the vibrant potential of poetic language, is such a guide. She brings to her work a respect for water and terrain born out of experience. And although her writing is less concerned than Lilburn's with mystery and more with stark reality, there are hints of a willingness to acknowledge the essential unknowability of the territory.

To describe the waters she has navigated, the poet chooses language that is terse, precise and powerful, language with a forward momentum readers will find hard to resist, propelled as they are by the same lure that drove early explorers. Indeed, it is Alexander Mackenzie's story that inspires these poems, and Mackenzie's historic journeying and Siebert's experience as a northern river guide become parallel illustrations of how unpredictable and dangerous such exploration can be, how frequently expectations might be dashed, or must be altered. The toughness of this journeying is vividly illustrated in "Mackenzie's Dream," in which the explorer "drills into the unfuelled offshore / throat, dull knife at the first joint, rocks falling from the cliffs like rifle / shots, black box of sky lowered down" (23). Similarly muscled

¹ Tim Lilburn, *Living In The World As If It Were Home*. Toronto: Cormorant Books, 1999.

imagery illustrates the plight of a contemporary trucker who says, “On a ladder, in the second-hand light, I pull my legs across rotten ice / with a knife” (53). Relationship with such a country, however awesome the landscape may be, is never idyllic, always uneasy. “Hard-breathing hoofs of the dark-hooded wind skid us sideways / across the river’s buck” and “even the leashed boats threaten [...] lift off” (68).

Against the experience of travelling remote back country, Siebert sets a motley collection of characters who weave in and out of the narrative, buffeted by forces of nature and driven by who they are. There is the busker, subject to weather, seasonal change and doubt: “You want dirt rammed up your nostrils and the contour of your brain mapped on a machine that’s wired to show you’re fucked? [...] You want to hack the tails off your dreams and sell them for a buck a piece?” (41). Horsechild, son of Big Bear, already knows, at age twelve, “something / about death” (46) and has “got the knack of floating like a rope / trailing behind a mare” (54).

Several “Grandmother” poems pay tribute to the poet’s grandmother whom she re-imagines as a woman who “hang[s] her prayer on the hooks of the house [...] folds up the fields and tucks them in her bra,” “sleeps days in a rusted-out car,” and invites a fellow traveller/busker to “Ride this continent out / onto the dark seas” (55, 56). Mackenzie remains the pivotal figure in this collection though. He is the persistent explorer braving the vagaries of water, land, weather, and people. In several poems, each titled “Letter To Kitty, Never Written,” Siebert imagines a more vulnerable side to this man who pens lines to “his northwest woman” (23), but even these lyrical pieces can be tough:

Your belly, a swan’s muscled body
 shot out of the wind. I left you
 a hatchet, cracked heels.
 landslide in your cramping gut
 did you make it back to your father’s camp? (56)

Those who set out to explore the unknown, find themselves mapping its beauty, wildness, and character as they search, like Lilburn, for a way of being in this corner of the world.

Deepwater Vee, a truly Canadian collection, is a remarkable poetic debut. Rarely is a first book so consistently strong, so meticulously shaped, and so solidly informed by an understanding of the subject and its poetic possibilities. It is a tribute to Canada’s history and her northern rivers and a powerful introduction to an emerging Canadian poet.

Sarah Klassen
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Leonard Neufeldt, *How to Beat the Heat in Bodrum*. North Vancouver: Alfred Gustav, 2010. pp. 14. Softcover.

Leonard Neufeldt's *How to Beat the Heat in Bodrum* is one in a series of three chapbooks published by The Alfred Gustav Press. Consisting of a preface, three poems, and an afterword, *How to Beat the Heat in Bodrum* is compact and concise. Although the poems flow well one to another, they are all quite different, both in form and in narrative. The title poem, for instance, "How to Beat the Heat in Bodrum," mimics wisdom literature. Neufeldt's words here are sparse and clean, and the rhythm of this poem showcases his skill. It is as though the poem itself is the place it speaks of – spare and bold.

"Hand-Crafted Plates of Nicea" muses on the history behind the plates that the narrator and his wife love. Rich in historical allusion, the poem contrasts modern concerns with the histories that helped create them. Neufeldt also draws a comparison here between the plates' histories and the histories of the Anabaptists:

Those who escaped unlearned
 heaven and hell, and those who didn't and therefore
 had time to say goodbye to friends still
 at home and polite as always, were like those
 Father left behind, who bade the secret
 police welcome, stepped aside, and no one
 not even the police, knew where in the Gulag
 the men would be sent and who might return for other
 mornings and evenings. (5)

This extended image is a powerful one and a saving grace, coming as it does immediately following a long list of historical references. The poem as a whole is filled with so many names and places, a reader less than familiar with Turkey's past can easily be overwhelmed.

"Traditions and the New Near Mardin" is the most experimental of the three poems. Neufeldt weaves what appear to be excerpts from a travelogue with personal recollection and the reimagining of a Sumerian goddess. The contrast between the three voices gives the poem great strength by bringing to mind the varying kinds of wisdom that exist and interact with each other. Neufeldt's deft blending of the three perspectives – the goddess who knows the land, the man who witnesses the land, and the bloodless tract that advertises the land – creates a poignant commentary.

While Neufeldt's preface is helpful in explaining his location and interest in Turkey, the afterword is far more revealing. Here Neufeldt

articulates the logic behind his collection and simultaneously expresses his belief that story and narrative are alive and well in contemporary poetry. Indeed, the afterword can be understood as a delayed thesis, one that the poems elegantly display. My only disappointment was that in all that he's remembered, Neufeldt seems to have forgotten the old adage, "a taste is a tease." I understand that the Alfred Gustav Press specifically seeks out small collections, and that this volume is one in a series of three. However, three poems are not enough, especially when they are poems as compelling as these. Part history lesson, part travel guide, part catalogue, and, throughout, rich poetic musing, Leonard Neufeldt's *How to Beat the Heat in Bodrum* is a collection worth exploring.

Reshal Stein
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Al Rempel. *understories*. Half Moon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press, 2010. pp. 91. Paper.

This first collection of poetry by Al Rempel is a series of hymns to place. Its five sections probe facets of the Northern British Columbia landscape and peel back the layers of what it means to live on the earth. The plural title *understories* suggests multiple possibilities, several of which the collection explores. First, we see the world through stories and the human grids and maps that support these stories of human origin. Beneath these narratives, though, are other stories, spoken beyond human language by the trees, the rocks, the rivers themselves. "Understory" is also a technical term for the layer of forest that exists between the tree's lower branches and the earth, the "story" in which humans dwell on earth with other creatures.

The first two sections of Rempel's book – "back alleys" and "strata" – explore the "understory" of city and place. Along with a few local drunks and crazies, weather and geography are the dominant characters in these sections. In "back alleys" human artifacts – vehicles, shopping carts, bicycles, telephones, electric wires, roads – story the environment. In "Fretting Winter, for instance," the poet says, "We wrapped cable TV around ourselves to keep warm / the birches were birches and nothing more." "[S]trata," the second section, moves outward towards geological stories in which human narratives merge with the natural world. In "Skylines," he says, "we beat our eyes against the West/ we're always doing that: building words into mountain ranges / only to watch the transcription of DNA in those shape-shifters dissolve." He creates a history for a "river stone/ jammed under an open door" in "Stone:

A Story,” and in “Go Down to the River,” he urges readers to swallow the river, with all of its grit and litter, to “make this water holy water.”

In the third section of the book, “under my skin,” the poet’s voice deepens its lyricism in a series of tender poems addressed to family members: elegies for his father, love poems for his wife and daughter. His long three-part poem, “Eloise,” shows the natural world reborn in the arc of his daughter’s eye:

I have seen the flight paths
Left by birds flitting through the leaves
Eyelash arcs
That open

Human relationships and community are thus at the core of this section, which also contains the collection’s one narrative poem, “Desire & the Devil,” a poem that dramatizes a sexual assault in a Mennonite pastor’s family. Here Rempel skillfully uses a spare language, repetition, and visual space to sketch the scene and evoke emotion by leaving much unsaid.

In the book’s final two sections, “black as crow,” and “thin rain,” Rempel returns to a description of the natural world, but retains touches of the personal explored in “under my skin.” As humans merge with the natural world, so the world takes on human qualities. In “Shiver In,” for instance, “the world is varicose/ at least as far as the knees/ a pulse/ we can feel under the veneer.” The final section, “Thin Rain,” is a single poem in ten parts that layers stories of seasonal cycles, astronomical phenomena, and the relationship of the poet and his beloved; with this poem, the intersections of human and natural stories come full circle.

Throughout the collection, the poems play with language, especially with visual spacing, repetition, the transliteration of sound syllables, and multiple plays on meaning in the layering of stories. Most of the language play is engaging and makes the surface of the poems more interesting, though it can sometimes be distracting. Because Rempel does not use capital letters (other than I and selected proper nouns) in his poems, even at the beginning of sentences, I first tried to read each poem as a continuation of its title. This is not, however, how Rempel uses his titles, as I discovered only after reading the first poem, “Bernice,” several times. Overall, however, this rewarding book introduces a poetic voice charged with sensitivity, to the natural world and its human creatures, to the ways that language shapes our response to them, and to the nuanced stories they tell together.

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Dora Dueck. *This Hidden Thing*. Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2010. pp. 327. Softcover, \$19.50

In *This Hidden Thing*, Dora Dueck presents a multi-layered exposé of the life of a Mennonite immigrant woman thrust into live-in domestic service in the 1920's and 30's. Maria Klassen exhibits characteristics easily recognizable in those of her generation and background: she is obedient yet independent; subservient but also tenacious; naive and unassuming, yet also proud. Her wages provide the funds her family desperately needs upon arrival in Canada, while her experience in the home of the Lowrys, who are busy establishing their own position in Winnipeg's River Heights society, draws Maria into unfamiliar challenges.

When the oldest son in the Lowry family, a worldly university student, gently and methodically offers Maria companionship, she cannot recognize when the line between mutual friendship – so refreshing in her painful loneliness – and seduction is crossed. It soon becomes clear that Mrs Lowry is neither curious about, nor understands herself to have responsibility for, the resulting pregnancy. In desperation Maria negotiates with Mrs Lowry to help conceal the birth and to enable Maria to give her son up for adoption. This secret shapes the rest of Maria's life, which is outwardly a model of piety and propriety in the centre of Mennonite settlement in Winnipeg.

Although Maria is a fictional character, her experience as a domestic servant was typical of thousands of young Mennonite women in the decades after their families arrived in Canada, and, indeed, is not unlike that of countless women of other immigrant groups, past and present. These young girls, typically feeling disassociated, unprotected, and even sacrificed for the sake of their families' economic futures, were exceedingly vulnerable in the homes of their employers. Maria is a startlingly authentic character, a fully individualized composite of dozens of Mennonite domestic servants whose oral histories were collected in the mid-1980s and are preserved in Winnipeg's Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. Dueck is right to perceive volumes behind these stories, which are disturbingly one-dimensional in their communication of the women's boundless loyalty to the Mennonite community, their saintly resolve and faith in God, and their martyr-like resignation to their fates.

Maria's life plausibly reveals what could happen to the young and well-intended innocents, who were sent into the world of domestic service protected by little more than a prayer. While their families counted on them to pay off travel debts, the girls were simultaneously elevated

(or burdened) as “ambassadors” for the Mennonite community in the new land. Maria’s actions and psychological/spiritual conflicts can be understood in the context of the resulting collusion: Maria needs to work for money *in the world* but she also needs, eventually, to return to, and belong in, a community self-consciously building a reputation as “in the world but not of it.” In this enclave of piety, virtue, and respectability, the most common responses, when things went wrong, were cruel purgings or hidden secrets.

As the novel presents it, Maria’s decades of inner conflict over the secrecy – originally contrived to protect the Klassen family’s reputation and later credited, by Maria herself, as the source of her particular mercy for others’ misdeeds – has no positive utility. While the secret keeps Maria in her community, its effects are insidious and ultimately render her life irrelevant. She becomes more adored than loved as a role model of ideal though unattainable perfection, and, because she cannot fully recognize or claim the son who seeks her out in her old age, she can neither participate in healing, or be relevant to, the young woman who is her biological granddaughter.

Dueck’s book stands in contrast to many popular Mennonite novels in its restrained, indeed modest, expression. Even as she comes to jarring insights about the secret she hides, Maria is always more dignified than undone, and more perplexed about her own role in the central causal events of her life than inclined to anger or to blaming others. Maria’s eerie authenticity and the novel’s success are, in great part, an effect of this restraint: Dueck creates a moving and fully believable depiction of a Mennonite woman of a particular era and experience.

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Katie Funk Wiebe, *You Never Gave Me a Name*. Scottsdale, PA: Dreamseeker and Herald Press, 2009. pp. 280. Paper.

Katie Funk Wiebe begins her autobiography in 1945, the year she arrived in Winnipeg to attend MBBC and serve as secretary to president J.B. Toews. Much of what follows the opening chapters is material that has appeared previously in published articles or has been adapted from talks given by the author, which accounts for some of the overlap and repetition and may explain why the book is thematically rather than chronologically arranged. Certainly the author’s account of her two years at MBBC vividly evokes an era of MB life that she recalls as patriarchal, conservative, and restrictive, especially regarding

women students who were “advised out of theology classes” (25) and for whom “homiletics and Greek was out of the question” (26). At MBBC she learned that, “You were an inert vessel through which God poured his blessings. All you needed was a spirit of submission” (39). There was much to unlearn in later years.

Wiebe grew up in Saskatchewan where Mennonites spoke English and mingled with other ethnic groups. The Funk family worshipped in Mennonite, Russian Baptist, and United churches, allowed dating and movies, and did not draw a sharp distinction between ‘*Kanadier*’ and ‘*Russlaender*.’ Wiebe learned about this distinction later, both at MBBC and in Hillsboro, Kansas, where she moved in 1953 when her husband Walter felt called to literature ministry. They had met at MBBC and married in 1947, and moved to Hillsboro with their four children. Walter worked for the MB Publishing House for only seven weeks before he died of the illness with which he had struggled for years. Widowed, Katie worked as a proofreader for the MB Publishing House, a tedious job she was glad to leave when she began a 24-year association, as both (mature) student and teacher, with Tabor College. Wiebe’s insight into Tabor’s philosophy echo her opening chapter on MBBC. She describes Tabor’s tendency to align itself with the evangelical constituency rather than with neighbouring Mennonite colleges and deplores the low level of literary skills and academic standards compared to Canada. She also comments on racial prejudice, faculty rivalries, and competition between academics and athletics. More positively, she felt privileged to be part of Tabor as it “emerge[d] from its isolation” and “experienced strong growth” (135).

The book’s title refers literally to Wiebe’s youthful dissatisfaction with the name ‘Katie’ but also functions as a metaphor for the maturing young woman’s desire to find an identity, develop her gifts, have those gifts acknowledged, and find a fulfilling career within the patriarchal establishment of the MB church. This quest becomes the book’s main theme and Wiebe articulates in vivid detail the cost of the struggle. When Wiebe was first at MBBC, she was expected to be the self-effacing ‘handmaiden’ to the President and later, when she was married, she wrote articles to which her husband signed his name. “Wives lived in their husband’s shadows,” Wiebe writes, “praying these shadows would keep growing” (78). As a widow she felt, or was made to feel, powerless. It was through writing and speaking – skills she had to learn – that Wiebe found her voice and learned to speak up and speak out against the marginalization of women. In 1966, in “a daring venture into the feminist arena,” she reviewed Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* for the *Canadian Mennonite*. That same year she challenged church leader Marvin Hein to give some thought to women in the planning for a general MB conference. “He confessed

they had never considered the women at all – but would rectify the matter” (120), Wiebe notes. Although she was an experienced and willing speaker for a variety of audiences, she was asked to preach only once in the Wichita, Kansas MB church where she had been a member for fifteen years. Mennonite women owe a debt of gratitude to this foremother who tackled women’s issues before most of them knew the issues existed. In finding her identity and her voice, Katie Funk Wiebe has made it easier for other women to do the same.

Sarah Klassen
Winnipeg, MB

Kirsten Eve Beachy, ed., *Tongue Screws and Testimonies*.
Scottsdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2010. pp.
311. \$19.99.

This anthology of literary reflections on the *Martyrs Mirror* encompasses a broad range of genres including poems, autobiographical essays, opinion/editorial essays, short stories, a homily, a translation of a hymn from the *Ausbund*, and a series of ink drawings that reinterpret Jan Luyken’s iconic image of Dirk Willems helping his would-be arresting officer out of the icy river into which the pursuer has fallen (one of the less gruesome depictions of martyrs found in the original edition of 1660). Many of the entries were previously published elsewhere and the value of this book is in bringing these pieces together into a single text.

The various compositions are arranged thematically around eight words: book, fire, water, wounds, tongue, memory, enemies, and heirs. Most of the selections are literary reflections on how this large book from the seventeenth century has shaped the religious and cultural experiences of twentieth-first-century Anabaptist descendents. A few of the pieces engage the historical context of the *Martyrs Mirror* in a literary way. The editor chose not to include historical analysis of the *Martyrs Mirror* but does suggest a number of texts for those who are interested in that kind of engagement.

The quality of the pieces included is very good. Among the many notable poems is Sarah Klassen’s “Salt,” whose brief lines are as incisive a critique of the executioner’s actions as any essay could be. David Waltner-Toews’s “Tante Tina and Little Haenschen: How Rudy Wiebe Saved the Communists” wonderfully mimics English as my grandparents spoke it. Reading the poem I felt transported back to my childhood and my community of German-speaking Mennonite

immigrants. Two short stories are particularly good. Jessica Penner's "Morus Rubra" plays with Low German and Latin words with equal ease at the same time that it reflects thoughtfully on death and loss. Rudy Wiebe's "Tongue Screw" is a gentle delight, imaginatively presenting the execution of several women from their children's point of view. One boy, Jan, witnessed his mother's imprisonment and execution, yet remembers nothing and must rely on others' accounts to know what happened. As an older adult, Jan attempts to find meaning in this pivotal but unremembered event. Like Jan, the reader pauses to consider how twenty-first century children of the martyrs find meaning in stories that we do not remember personally but which have shaped our lives nonetheless.

Essays by Stephanie Krehbiel ("Staying Alive: How Martyrdom Made Me a Warrior") and Julia Spicher Kasdorf ("Writing Like a Mennonite") are provocative and potentially controversial. Krehbiel observes that for some Mennonites the stories of martyrs do not function as history but rather as folklore, myth, and archetype. Krehbiel does not think that the martyr archetype is useful because it advocates accepting the violence that others commit against us and imagines defenselessness as an appropriate response to that violence. She wants Anabaptists to recreate the archetype into one that emphasizes internal empowerment. Kasdorf also examines the martyr heritage and ponders the effects of the Anabaptist impulse to absorb the violence of the world into individual believers' bodies. Painful experiences from Kasdorf's own life bear witness to the damage that is done by silently accepting what 'the world' does to you. Like the martyrs whose tongues were literally screwed to the top of their mouth to prevent them from speaking at their executions, their descendents find it difficult to speak about the costs of martyrdom.

This book should be read for the many other similarly thoughtful and stimulating poems, stories, and essays that space does not allow me to mention. The collection as a whole both validates Anabaptist literary work and encourages continued output. If I have a tiny quibble it is with the editor's failure to engage James Lowry's concern that without an appreciation of the historical context of the *Martyrs Mirror*, present-day writers might "read their own contemporary ideas back onto the martyrs – ideas which might be very strange, even antagonistic to the martyrs themselves" (23). I give Beachy *kudos* for raising the issue but would have liked to read a more detailed response to what seems, to a historian at least, like a valid concern.

Patricia Janzen Loewen
Providence College

Reviews of History

Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*. Winnipeg MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2010. pp. xi + 296. Softcover.

Storied Landscapes is the fifth entry in the excellent “Studies in Immigration and Culture” series from University of Manitoba Press. The book examines the creation, transmission, and transformation of identity by several ethno-religious groups on the western Canadian prairies. Swyripa contrasts the experiences of immigrants with their descendants, and compares the ethnic groups to each other. The focus is on Ukrainians, Mennonites, Icelanders, and Doukhobors, but also included in the discussion are Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Finns, Poles, Romanians, Jews, Mormons, and a few others. Ties to their countries of origin, relationships with the Canadian state, and the influence of the prairie land itself – both physical and emotional – are explored. Symbolic ethnicity, collective memory, commemoration, and places of memory are some of the historical theories and interpretive tools with which Swyripa engages. In the process, she argues for “the importance of ethnicity and religion to prairie identity, especially the little-explored intersection between ‘ethnic’ and ‘mainstream,’ as well as the importance of the prairie West to ethno-religious identity both within the region and nationally” (4).

The first chapter offers a fascinating look at the immigrant settlement process, focusing on the role of collective memory in crafting a common identity as an ‘imagined community.’ Chapter Two describes the religious traces left by immigrants on the prairies, who shaped the land through their “Christianization of the landscape” (44) as they assigned place names, erected shrines and churches, and established cemeteries. The third chapter examines how a sense of ethno-religious identity was transmitted to subsequent generations and analyzes the similarities of the various groups’ founding stories. While the majority of these stories envisioned the prairie West as “a Promised Land,” there were nonetheless “qualification, feelings of guilt and betrayal, and detractors” (107). Chapter Four broadens the discussion to a consideration of these processes beyond the prairies and across Canada. Not only are the national narratives of these ethnic groups discussed, but also how these groups constructed their stories to fit into an existing narrative of Canada as a nation state. Chapter Five considers the transnational identities of these ethno-religious groups and the role played by serial migration to Canada in maintenance of

some of those identities. Symbols of ethnicity, ranging from Icelandic festivals in Gimli Manitoba to the giant fibreglass pyrogy in Glendon Alberta, are the subject of Chapter Six, while the seventh chapter discusses efforts to preserve and commemorate the pioneer landscape. The final chapter discusses the transformation of the prairie landscape itself as these groups commemorated their histories, simultaneously celebrating and re-creating their identities through the erection of cairns and the preservation of pioneer graveyards.

The focus on the rural experience of these ethno-religious groups limits the book's scope and thereby makes the ambitious nature of the book (comparison of more than a dozen different groups!) more manageable. It may be argued, though, that the urban experience of at least some of the ethno-religious groups under consideration was also significant in their (re)negotiation of identity. The book also would benefit from greater engagement with the recent literature on collective memory.

Swyripa challenges some of the earlier assumptions or myths of prairie and frontier history, arguing that, in the Canadian West, the pioneer experience was not monolithic, nor was successful settlement the result of brave individuals confronting the wilderness. The settlement experiences of immigrants to western Canada were diverse, and the role of community was crucial as they strove to establish lives in a new environment. Perhaps the greatest strength of *Storied Landscapes* lies in its nontraditional approach. This is not a typical comparative ethnic history, in that the focus is on identity and collective memory rather than on the settlement process. Religion is not treated as an adjunct to the immigrant experience but as central and inextricable. Indeed, one of the book's key arguments is the inseparability of religion and ethnicity for the groups under examination.

Academics and lay readers alike will find the text engaging; like the ethno-religious groups she discusses, Swyripa knows how to tell a good story. She ably argues the importance of the prairie West for the development of the Canadian nation state, and her insistence on the indissoluble connections between religion and ethnicity for the groups examined here is likewise convincing. Swyripa has produced a remarkable work that should appeal to a wide range of readers.

Janis Thiessen

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and University of Winnipeg

Jacob J. Rempel, *Consider the Threshing Stone: Writings of Jacob J. Rempel, A Mennonite in Russia*. Trans., David J. Rempel Smucker and Eleanore (Rempel) Woollard, edited by David J. Rempel Smucker. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2008. pp. xv + 179. Softcover.

Jacob Rempel was a 1920s immigrant from Russia who served on a hospital ship during World War I, experienced the horrors of the Civil War and Machno period, and became an organizer for the emigration of Mennonites from the Molochna area in the 1920s. *Consider the Threshing Stone* is a collection of his writings, which the editor has organized into three chapters supplemented with an introduction, a biographical sketch, and appendices that provide additional information about the Rempel family and other names that appear in the account. The editor has also annotated the memoir with generous footnotes that together with photos and maps elaborate, explain, and provide context and corroborating sources for the narrative.

The first chapter of the memoir is a translation of Rempel's memories of his childhood and early adulthood in Russia before World War I. He describes growing up on the Tiegenhof estate located north of the Molotschna and east of the Chortiza colony near present day Zaporoshe, Ukraine. This excerpt of his writings focuses on school and church life and was written in 1964, some sixty years after the events it describes and forty years after Rempel came to Canada. Rempel describes life on an estate where Ukrainian peasants were workers and cooks and Mennonites were owners and managers. However, as the editor points out Rempel takes pains "to indicate his positive attitude toward the Russian people" (5).

In contrast to the account of his childhood from the vantage point of old age, the second chapter, which describes his service on a hospital ship during World War I, has a much greater sense of urgency and immediacy. Although the translation is a composite of accounts written in 1918, 1936 and 1966, Rempel's narrative offers the reader a window on what it was like to be a medic performing alternative service during World War I. It is striking how much time was spent in idleness, waiting for something to happen. The chapter also conveys the growing sense of animosity towards Germans as the war continued and particularly after German U-boats torpedoed a sister hospital ship.

The final chapter paints vivid pictures of the memories of the horrors of the Civil War, famine and Machno period. Although unclear when the memories of this time were committed to paper, the stories seem to have been written to be published in some form in the Mennonite periodical *Der Bote* in the 1960s. For reasons not made entirely clear, the editor

has chosen to include translation of original typescripts instead of the published versions from *Der Bote*. Not surprisingly, this portion of the memoir is narrated as tragedy. The murder of five members of the Thiessen family who were relatives of Rempel's first wife, the death of his wife and two daughters, his own illness and the difficult work of organizing the emigration follow wave upon wave in his memory.

David Rempel Smucker and Eleanore (Rempel) Wollard have made an important source for the Russian Mennonite story accessible to future generations, for both family and historians. The small book pays careful attention to detail and the exhaustive additional research places a small-scale story firmly within its larger context. A tantalizing thought by the editor that as Rempel committed his memories to typescript they "helped form his pattern of meaning" (3), begs for more analysis. To what extent was Rempel's narrative of the relationship between Mennonites and Russians on an estate informed by the context of postwar Canada? What are the dynamics of meaning in a story that is first told in 1918, then in 1936, and then again in 1966? The wish for more is, however, an acknowledgement that the translators and editor have made available to us an important new window on Russian Mennonite life.

Hans Werner
University of Winnipeg

Rod Janzen and Max Stanton, *The Hutterites in North America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. pp. 373. Hardcover, \$47.50.

Scholars and the public alike find Hutterites fascinating and intriguing. Hutterites are communalists who live by a theology of economic sharing, and yet are excellent business people, able to compete successfully with the best in a capitalist business world. In dress, worship, and lifestyle, they are traditional, honouring the ways of their elders, and yet they are also very modern, using the latest technology, including computers and the internet.

This book by Rod Janzen, a distinguished scholar and a professor of history and social science education at Fresno Pacific University, and Max Stanton, a professor of anthropology and geography at Brigham Young University, Hawaii, opens up for readers the intriguing and fascinating Hutterite world. The two authors spent two decades researching and visiting Hutterite communities, and meticulously recording the life, beliefs and views of many Hutterites. They spoke to

old and young, men and women, leaders and non-leaders. The result is an unparalleled insight into Hutterite life.

The book that had for years been the standard history and introduction to the Hutterite story was *Hutterite Society* written by John A. Hostetler. Hostetler's book provided an excellent history of Hutterites from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, followed by a sociological study of contemporary Hutterite life. The book by Janzen and Stanton does not redo Hostetler's historical section, but focuses on Hutterite life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Hostetler's study was based on a limited number of colonies within two Hutterite groups, the Dariusleut and Lehrerleut, whereas Janzen/Stanton visited many more colonies, including those in the two Schmiedeleut groups. So, this study is more comprehensive, and includes analyses virtually up to the present.

Another scholar who has written about Hutterites is Donald Kraybill. His first book, *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren* was published in 2001, and his second book, published two years later, was entitled *Who Are the Anabaptists? Amish, Brethren, Hutterites and Mennonites*. Kraybill's strength is his understanding of the theological motivations of the so-called 'Old Orders,' and he thus assists readers to see the internal consistency of their life and beliefs.

Janzen and Stanton build on these studies, and take their place as major interpreters of Hutterite life and faith. Their extensive and intensive research allows them to discuss the subtle, and not so subtle, differences between Hutterite groups and differences within groups. The authors portray the significant changes happening in many areas of Hutterite life. They show that Hutterite communities are not static, but ever changing. They provide insight into Hutterites' motivations for communal living.

This book by Janzen and Stanton includes a sensitive and careful discussion of the four Hutterite groups. This is no easy task, since relations between the two Schmiedeleut groups are still strained. In their analyses, the authors discuss beliefs, education, life patterns, identity, governance, economics, populations, social changes, relations to outsiders, and more.

With this study by Janzen and Stanton, Hutterites, who number almost 50,000 people in nearly 500 colonies in Canada and the USA, have been provided with an honest and sympathetic interpretation. Readers will be able to see more clearly Hutterites' deep faith in God, and their firm conviction that in communalism they are faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a witness to the world around them.

John J. Friesen
Canadian Mennonite University

Martin W. Lehman, *Roots & Branches: A Narrative History of the Amish and Mennonites in Southeast United States, 1892-1992. Volume 1: Roots, 1892-1969*. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2010. pp. 307. Softcover, \$23.95 (U.S.) / \$27.45 (Canada).

Roots & Branches is the latest addition to the extensive historical literature on Mennonites in various states, provinces, and regions of North America. In this volume, Lehman examines the story of Amish and Mennonites in the "Southeast United States," which he defines primarily as Florida, with brief treatments of Georgia and South Carolina.

Lehman is no stranger to this story, since he served as a minister and bishop in Florida for many years. By his own admission, he is "more a storyteller than a historian," and James Krabill notes in the foreword that Lehman's account is "more anecdotal than analytical." It is important to recognize this when approaching Lehman's book, since it really is a collection of stories rather than a clear historical analysis of Amish and Mennonites in the southeastern United States.

Lehman begins his narrative with the arrival of the first Mennonites in Florida in 1892 and an evangelistic tour by John S. Coffman through the state in 1895. The story then jumps to the 1920s, when Amish and Mennonites first began arriving in Florida in significant numbers. He gives full chapters to the founding and development of the Mennonite Mission in Tampa and an Amish/Mennonite settlement in Sarasota, both of which took shape in the 1920s. The book then follows a decade-by-decade narrative of the various settlements and congregations established by Amish and Mennonites throughout the region.

Like many regional histories of Mennonites, this one suffers occasionally from the author's lack of training in historical method. Too often it is little more than a recitation of who did what and when in each congregation. Fascinating stories do emerge from out of this recitation. The Amish and Mennonites in Florida and nearby states struggled to create an identity in a region where they were a tiny minority. Some of them struggled to balance the desire to remain "plain" while at the same time evangelizing neighbors for whom such expressions had little meaning or were even a hindrance to outreach. Perhaps most difficult of all was the delicate process of reaching out to African-American neighbors in a culture that opposed such inter-racial contact. All of these subjects deserved more focused analysis, and yet the author seldom does more than hint at their significance.

The book also provides less context than many readers might require. The cast of characters in the book is complex and often

confusing – Lancaster Conference, EMBMC, MCC, VS, Conservative Mennonite Conference, and numerous others. Rarely are the relationships between these groups explained, and only the most “insider” readers will have any hope of keeping straight the various characters.

One of the difficult tasks Lehman faced in writing this book was being both the author and one of the most significant historical figures in it. Whether as a pastor or bishop, Lehman figures prominently in the narrative throughout much of the book. Since he is not writing a memoir, it is understandable that he would not want to refer to himself in the first-person, and yet it is jarring when Lehman consistently uses the third-person to describe his own role in the story, without more adequately acknowledging that he is actually writing about himself.

Roots & Branches does a commendable job of providing the descriptive framework of a little-known part of the North American Mennonite story. It is a pity that the book does so little to provide a conceptual or thematic framework.

Kevin Enns-Rempel
Fresno Pacific University

Theron F. Schlabach, *War, Peace and Social Conscience: Guy F. Hershberger and Mennonite Ethics*. Scottsdale and Waterloo: Herald Press, 2009. pp. 721. Hardcover, \$39.99.

For some decades now, Goshen College professor Theron F. Schlabach has carved out a well-deserved reputation as one of the preeminent historians of the Mennonite experience in Twentieth-century America. Now, in this weighty biography of the leading Mennonite Church (MC) scholar and ethicist Guy F. Hershberger (1896-1989), Schlabach has completed what may be regarded as his magnum opus and the fitting culmination of a sterling scholarly career. Hershberger taught history and sociology at Goshen College from 1925 through the middle 1960s and throughout that time assumed major positions of church leadership. He was thus positioned to guide his church’s thinking on major ethical and institutional decisions across the broad span of the twentieth century. In tracing the development of Hershberger’s thought, Schlabach has produced what may stand by itself as a milestone in the intellectual history of twentieth-century American Mennonites.

Given Schlabach’s focus, he dispenses with much exploration of his subject’s family background or childhood, managing to cover his birth on the first page of his first chapter and his marriage eight

pages later. Hershberger followed a trajectory that was typical of many in this emerging second generation of Mennonite intellectuals: a bookish childhood, a stint as a country schoolteacher, training at Mennonite colleges and then a doctorate. He had barely begun teaching at Goshen in 1925 when MC peace leader Orrie Miller recruited him to help write peace literature for the denomination's youth. This plunged Hershberger in what would be a delicate lifelong dance with MC fundamentalists, a process that Schlabach claims was central to his consciousness (509). Schlabach traces the ensuing development of Hershberger's thinking in four central themes which comprise the heart of the book.

First, there's Hershberger the ethicist. Schlabach first explores this arena through the vehicle of Hershberger's intellectually leading role in his church's creation of the alternative service arrangements with the US government. Especially during the World War II years, Hershberger steadily expanded his church's rationale for such programs in key articles and speeches and especially also in the pages of his major book, *War Peace and Nonresistance*, which quickly emerged as a classic in US Mennonite peace thinking. Schlabach does a masterful job of setting Hershberger's thinking in its larger historical context and documenting the nuances in its development over time. Already by the 1930s his thinking came to rest upon several central ideas: that "by withdrawal, at least from political life, Christians become truly relevant" (pp.59) and that Christians should focus on "*doing* justice" (103) instead of demanding it. Such concepts, the author claims, were "at the heart of Hershberger's life and message" (105).

Schlabach's intensively analytical approach led him to deviate from the strict chronology common to many biographies. For instance, in this section as in succeeding ones, he follows his subject's thinking on the theme in question through to his elderly years before returning to pick up the threads of other major themes, in this case returning the narrative back to the key decade of the 1940s for a second major thread, a portrayal of Hershberger the institution-builder. In heading key MC committees like that on industrial relations, Hershberger soon came to function as a leader of an effort to reinvigorate a Mennonite commitment to agriculture, the Mennonite Community Movement of the 1940-1960 years. Out of these efforts, Schlabach shows, he began to rethink traditional MC attitudes towards matters like litigation, and to in effect serve as the intellectual midwife of emerging denominational agencies like Mennonite Mutual Aid. Through these processes, Schlabach documents how, while fundamentally rooted in older, two-Kingdom conceptions, Hershberger's thought began to edge more towards advocating justice instead of just doing it. The emerging US civil rights movement seems to have been an especially central

fulcrum in this intellectual shift. It is this elastic and adaptable aspect of Hershberger's thought that dominates Schlabach's exploration of his last two major themes: Hershberger's agile defense of Biblical pacifism, especially against Reinhold Niebuhr and his followers, and his engagement of critics closer to home, brilliant MC theologians like John Howard Yoder and especially J. Lawrence Burkholder.

It is only in this last area where this magisterial biography may receive slender and gentle criticism. In his preface Schlabach pledged insisted that he would not read his subject's life through a golden and heroic lens, and he stayed true to his word. Periodically he offers thoughtful criticisms of Hershberger's thought: his oversights, limitations and inability to perceive the "unintended outcomes of the institutions or programs he advocated so tirelessly" (516). Schlabach admits, for example, how the Mennonite communities Hershberger fought so hard to preserve were limited by considerations like patriarchy and race. Even so, repeatedly his subject somehow seems to come out on top of nearly all the major arguments. Such faint apologetics appear with all the depth and artful subtlety that characterize this fine text. For instance, Schlabach admits, in Hershberger's tenacious defense of his ideas against people like Burkholder "sometimes he let that tenacity carry him too far" (393). Burkholder himself testified that he received this tenacity as a sharp rebuke from an eminent senior scholar. Even with Schlabach's carefully crafted treatment of the episode, it hardly seems fair for him to dismiss its essential outlines as "mainly folklore" (378).

Given the magnitude of Schlabach's accomplishment here, it also hardly seems fair to close this review in even slightly negative tones. Readers will quibble with one or another aspect of Schlabach's argument, but they cannot get around the central importance of his book. For nearly three-quarters of a century, Guy Hershberger's intellectual vivacity set the parameters for his church's thinking on critical matters like peace and social ethics. Two decades after his death, he has found a biographer worthy of that contribution.

Perry Bush
Bluffton University

Tobin Miller Shearer, *Daily Demonstrators: The Civil Rights Movement in Mennonite Homes and Sanctuaries*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. pp. 360. Hardcover, \$65.00.

Tobin Shearer has written a much needed history of Mennonites in the Civil Rights Era. In this thoroughly researched and detailed account is a work that explores the significance of mid-twentieth-century American Mennonite social action at the intersection of race, non-violence and American culture. Shearer grounded his book in primary sources, denominational periodicals, and oral history interviews. The middle decades of the twentieth century were pivotal in American history and the Mennonites were no exception. What was a crucible for the larger culture was also one for small religious groups like the Mennonites who experienced the added pressure of navigating the pressures and issues of acculturation and a history, if idealized, of separation from society.

The book traces the decades surrounding the World Wars and the Cold War and the responses Mennonites made to racial injustice, Jim Crow laws and the growing civil rights movement. Over the course of eight chapters, Shearer works out his thesis that civil rights demonstrations while obviously taking place on the streets were also made “in the intimate settings of homes and churches...challeng[ing] racial segregation in a less dramatic way.” (viii) He teases out an impressive variety of observations from his source materials into the complex and contradictory nature of Mennonite race relations. Shearer pieces together in detail how Mennonites demonstrated less-so in public marches but more-so in the private spaces of living rooms and the religious spaces of church. Especially effective is his unpacking of the conundrum nonconformity and non-resistance were in relation to racial egalitarianism. Issues of remaining outside the cultural mainstream and maintaining a non-coercive ideal of non-resistance were forced by the righteous cause of civil rights, to which Mennonites agreed. However, they were caught seemingly off-guard as to how to interpret such growing large-scale responses as the march. Were public demonstrations forms of violent coercion? It is significant to the study of mid-twentieth century American religious history, civil rights history, and Mennonite history that these questions are raised. Shearer also does us well by expanding the understanding of civil rights demonstration to include private and church spaces so as to reveal the sincere tensions Mennonites faced, and furthermore, as source material goes, Shearer’s great contribution is to include the experiences of women and children via oral history interviews.

Throughout the book, Shearer stays true to his intended purpose and builds upon the theme of demonstration and disruption consistently. Despite the importance of this study and the topic itself, there are a few points that raise some questions. Shearer's research is impressive and the focus of his book clear, however, there are times where important observations are made with minimal evidence, as in the example of simply equating Mennonite anxiety over adolescent sexuality to racial prejudice. There most likely was a strong racial component in their concern over having teenagers visit homes in the Fresh Air program, but there may also be in that anxiety a general fright over teenager power, sexuality and rebellion common in the mid-twentieth century (83). This is not to say Shearer is not revealing something important, but his point could use a larger historical context with a view to multiple aspects of human behaviour. At times it appears that Shearer over-interprets his material. For example, using the examples of Fresh Air host families asking their young visitors many questions about their lives to simply indicate nothing other than racial prejudice or discomfort is not entirely fair without considering the possibility of hospitality and general curiosity, or investigating (if possible) the perspective of host families in retrospect (70).

Furthermore, while there is some depth given to the main civil rights actors in this monograph, church leaders such as Bishops or plain-folk rural Mennonites hosting African-American city children or conservatives in general tend to be treated as flat uncomplicated characters. For example, shifting the language of "restraining" potential demonstrators from disrupting church services, to language of "pummel" and "slug in the face" creates potentially unfair bias against those negotiating complex times who are also in positions of responsibility (202, 220).

These concerns aside, Shearer has done us a critical service by placing Mennonites solidly in civil rights history, with care given to understanding the "demonstrations" in living rooms and church pews as genuine, disruptive, and effective. Shearer is especially persuasive in the latter chapters where he creatively and astutely draws in interracial marriage, challenges of integrated Mennonite congregations and interracial dialogue along such issues as financial support and the Black Manifesto. The book concludes and Shearer makes his case for these more intimate forms of demonstration. Along the way, he shows us contradictions in white Mennonite religious thought and practice in relation to race. Ultimately he tells a story of evangelically inclined white religious people who were challenged and however imperfectly faced the challenge their African-American friends, neighbours and co-religionists put before them. He also tells a story of African-American Mennonites who created spaces for themselves and

challenged the racial status quo in homes and churches, places they desired to be.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in questions of the North American Mennonites, race-relations, civil rights, and cultural tensions as a small once ethnically-defined conservative religious people explores its religious commitments in the context of significant public change.

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John E. Sharp, *A School on the Prairie: A Centennial History of Hesston College, 1909-2009*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009. pp. 503. Softcover.

Hesston College today is a junior college with approximately 425 students who are enrolled in an array of two-year liberal arts, industrial, professional and religious programs. It began in the fall of 1909 as an Academy (high school) and Bible school which also offered some sub-academic (preparatory) instruction and a four-week Special Bible Term. Twenty-one students enrolled in the first term and were taught by three faculty members and a student assistant for the sub-academic department.

In 1915 some first-year college-level courses were added, and during the following years additional college course were added until, in 1919, the college offered a four-year Bachelor of Arts degree. In 1925, however, the college abandoned its four year program and became a two-year Junior College offering courses in liberal and fine arts, Bible, music and technical, industrial and professional training. In 1952 the Academy (high school) was transferred to the Hesston Common School District.

Enrollments, finances and capital projects fluctuated significantly over the years. After reasonably steady enrollment increases to nearly 200 students in the late 1920s, there was a near collapse in the early years of the Great Depression necessitating draconian faculty and staff reductions and a sharp curtailment of all but the most basic expenditures. Enrollments increased somewhat erratically immediately after World War II, and then very rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s to a high of 694 students in 1978-79. However, that was followed by a disconcerting decline and eventual stabilization below a targeted 500-student enrollment level. The many difficult adjustments to enrollment fluctuations are discussed in considerable detail by the author.

A cover photograph of Green Gables, the first large and for many years the signature building on campus, appropriately illustrates the detailed attention devoted to the construction of college buildings and infrastructure. That discussion is closely linked to acknowledgements of generous benefactors. Senior promoters, administrators and faculty members are also described in considerable detail. Discussion of student life is less extensive although athletic activities and achievements receive considerable attention.

The early chapters pertaining to the establishment of the college are thematic, but after that each chapter covers a decade. The chapters consist of numerous short half to three-page sketches or descriptions, supplemented by numerous photographs. That works reasonably well when dealing with individual promoters, administrators, key faculty members, the major buildings and specific events. The scandal resulting in the removal of the college's first President is discussed objectively and in adequate detail. But the short, often chronologically limited sketches do not provide adequate coverage of broader issues and themes. As a result, the manuscript reads more like a published set of research notes offering bits and pieces of historical information drawn from college and conference archives, publications and interviews which have not yet been fully integrated into a coherent narrative.

On the important issue of accreditation, for example, almost nothing is said about accreditation, or the lack thereof, when the college introduced its four-year college program. However, when it reverted to a two-year junior college status it had to meet new and apparently more rigorous accreditation requirements, which are not further identified. Separate accreditations for the college's nursing, education, aviation and perhaps other professional programs are mentioned without comprehensive documentation of conditions that had to be met or which courses were given credit at various other institutions.

Discussions of the curriculum usually include little more than a listing of courses offered. There is an excellent discussion of the overall objectives of the college's innovative integrated Foundations Studies Program introduced in 1970. The various courses are listed but it is not clear how the content of courses in specific disciplines changed. J. D. Charles, the college's first science teacher whose name adorns its large Hall of Science and Fine Arts, passionately denounced what he called the fallacies of the theory of evolution. Was that still how science was taught in the "God and Science" component of the Foundations program? Charles was also a staunch defender of distinctive Mennonite dress codes and repeatedly warned about the evils of secularism.

Some cultural changes are described by the author but it is not clear how they influenced the teaching of "Man in Time and Society."

Heston's relations with other colleges and universities, including the two neighbouring Mennonite colleges, are mentioned but not discussed in any comprehensive way. Thus, readers are informed that the merger in 2002 of the two conferences sponsoring Heston and Bethel Colleges respectively did not significantly alter Heston's administrative relations with key conference agencies. However, the reader learns little about the integration of programs and courses offered at the two colleges beyond a discussion of collaboration between two fine arts professors.

The conclusion, which merely introduces and then quotes in full a lengthy prayer at the opening of the Friesen Centre for the Visual Arts, does not do justice to the author's success, albeit in bits and pieces, in giving texture and flavor to the Heston College experience. Readers gain insight into the responses, in every decade, of supporters, faculty, students and staff to ongoing opportunities and challenges despite financial and enrollment fluctuations.

Helpful appendices list the names and years of service of the college's presidents and deans, the construction and subsequent modifications or demolition of the main buildings, enrollment fluctuations, and all faculty and staff in 2009.

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Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration: Global Mennonite History Series: Latin America*. Trans. and edited, Arnold Snyder. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2010. pp. 362.

This volume represents the third in the planned five-volume "Global Mennonite History Series." Unlike the preceding two volumes – Africa 2003 and Europe 2006 – this one has a single author and one versant in most of the main languages spoken by the Mennonites in the almost two dozen countries represented, namely Spanish, German and English. Unfortunately, the readers learn little about the author, but it becomes clear that despite the title, "Mission and Migration," the book is more about the former than the latter. Indeed the book is a veritable encyclopedia of the myriad mission initiatives in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Prieto's approach to mission history is multifaceted. The book is organized chronologically, but is mostly geographic in orientation, with most countries covered in specific chapters. A methodological template

ensues as each chapter begins with an intricate and informative historical overview of how European forces took hold of a particular region, often beginning in the sixteenth century, and then how the political and economic bones of a particular country were formed. Next come the first signs of Protestantism, for as Prieto posits, “Mennonites came to Latin America by entering doors already opened by other ‘Evangelico’ (Protestant) groups.” (4) Then come the seemingly endless train of North American Mennonite missionaries. Prieto leaves no stone unturned as even the smallest mission organizations of North America – the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, the Church of God in Christ (Mennonite), the Conservative Mennonite Conference – are examined. After the first converts are made, the first executives of the North American mission organization come, followed by the first church building, the first indigenous leader, and the first national church organization. A blizzard of precise organizational detail is a hallmark of this book. For one authored by a Latin American, the coverage given to North American ties – the individual missionaries, the mission organization, the MCC and MEDA and CPS workers, and even multiple Billy Graham crusades – may be surprising.

A central strength of the book is its frankness in discussing conflict, but without being obsessed by it. At times mission organizations are shown to have been opposed by hostile local Catholic leaders, sometimes hampered by competing Pentecostal groups. The book is rife with schism, some theological in nature (the degree to which Pentecostalism was accepted for instance), some based on personality differences, others arising from debates on correct ecclesiastical structures of governance. Never far from the surface is the history of violence itself in Latin America as Mennonites were deeply affected by the many civil wars, the “dirty wars,” and even national wars. Graphic details recount the cycle of confrontation, arrest and torture at the hands of repressive regimes. Within the economic volatility of Latin America, economic struggle ensues as peasants confront landlords and church leaders wrestle with language of justice.

One of the more splendid accomplishments of the book is the natural way in which it incorporates the history of women into the narrative. Dozens of references to courageous women leaders recount them as prophetic, missional and innovative persons. In sympathetic tones these women confront power brokers, they organize without men, they shame men into action. Indeed the word ‘women’ accounts for one of the longest entries in the index.

Prieto makes a gallant effort to understand every cultural facet of the Mennonite experience in Latin America. The German speaking Mennonite colonists, for example, appear throughout the book. Even the most traditionalist Canadian-descendent Old Colony Mennonites

located in Mexico, Belize, Paraguay and Bolivia are noted, albeit given their large numbers, they are covered in rather cursory form. Nevertheless Prieto offers a respectful analysis: he presents Klaas Heide, an Old Colony Mennonite delegate to Mexico in 1921, as a man given to “gentlemanliness, calmness and intelligence” (31) and notes that native Bolivians consider the Old Colonists as “hard working and honest people....” (166) Prieto lauds the organizational acumen of the other more progressive German-speaking Mennonites. He even recounts the dark 1930s as some Mennonite newcomers from the Soviet Union flirted with Nazism and as those from Canada unwittingly helped unleash a major international conflict between their new homeland and Bolivia. He accepts the Low German culture and the German language as one of the features of a multicultural Mennonite presence in Latin America. Given the book’s mission emphasis, much more attention of course is given to the German speaking colonies’ mission work than to religious practice – footwashing, mutual aid, anti-modernity, nonviolence, egalitarianism – within the heart of the communities.

Indeed, the theme of mission outreach is one to which Prieto gravitates. He sees evangelistic outreach as the norm of a healthy church. At one juncture in his chapter on Argentina, he notes that “by the 1970s the energetic evangelistic efforts seen in the early 1970s had faded and there were efforts to address the problem.” (92) One of the underlying themes in the book is the expansion of missions, especially from the first rural missionary outposts into the myriad cities of the South – Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Asunción, Chihuahua, Mexico City. He also captures the heartfelt religious piety of the missionaries: he describes the vision of David Helmuth in Puerto Rico as one in which “the Spirit of God was awakening the church from its slumber and passive peace testimony.” (191) And he knows the importance of radio and film in the process.

Significantly, Prieto does not draw borders as much as create bridges. This is an inclusive history. Indeed, the book ends by returning to the indigenous cultures with which it begins, including a reference to indigenous mythologies of creation and a critique of early missionary slogans that dismissed the natives of Latin America as “pagan.” In fact Prieto seems comfortable with the idea of syncretism, exclaiming at one juncture that the “experience of the Holy Spirit meshed well with the traditional religion of the Tobas.” (20) Nor does he create two opposing “gospels,” that is, an evangelical and an Anabaptist one; he clearly embraces Anabaptist values and gives full coverage to groups seeking peace and justice in a region where history has tended to rob them of both.

Every reader has a wish list. The side bars are in much too small a font to be useful for readers over age 40! Readers will wish for more

story and less detail. The photos are disproportionately missions photos – baptisms, assembled congregation and church leaders. But overall, here is a pioneering work that draws together the complex and multiple strands of the Mennonite story in Latin America, and by a leading voice from Latin America itself. That the translator and editor, Arnold Snyder, has deep Latin American roots himself, adds to the eloquence and insightfulness of the text. The ultimate strength of the book is that Prieto is insistent that the Mennonite community is not a staid and permanent one, but evolving and being “worked out” within a context of expectancy.

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Abe J. Dueck, ed., *Celebrating 150 Years: The Mennonite Brethren Church Around the World*. Kitchener/Winnipeg: Pandora Press/Kindred Productions, 2010. pp. 391.

Commissioned by the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), *Celebrating 150 Years* explores the Mennonite Brethren experience on five continents in light of their sesquicentennial anniversary. Twenty-two authors from around the world present a comprehensive global history, which not only examines the emergence of Mennonite Brethren in southern Russia but also traces their subsequent movement through migration and mission. Today the Mennonite Brethren represent approximately 4000 churches in at least twenty-three countries.

These stories reflect the broad cultural diversity of the Mennonite Brethren, where the vast majority no longer trace their ethnic roots to the country of this movement’s birth. The strength of *Celebrating 150 Years* lies in the diverse perspectives of the writers, which highlight very different journeys. These accounts do not shy away from candidly portraying the struggles and challenges faced by Mennonite Brethren churches and conferences.

Each chapter offers a helpful awareness of the Mennonite Brethren experience, in part, because the global historical records have not always been easily accessible in North America. For example, Johannes Dyck’s poignant description of Mennonite Brethren’s struggle to survive within the former Soviet republics provides details about a time when the church was repressed and little information was available. Furthermore, while it is unlikely that anyone in China would retain a sense of Mennonite Brethren identity, Abe Dueck demonstrates there

can be little doubt “that there are Christians in China who can trace their roots to the work of the Mennonite Brethren” (127).

Despite the uniqueness of each particular national journey, a common Mennonite Brethren identity is discernable through shared experiences and convictions, which both shaped ecclesiological expressions and motivated missional engagement. Several themes run across the various stories, like the experience of suffering, the importance of education, struggles with church leadership, and a strong interest in mission. While writers sometimes highlighted attempts to contextualize a Mennonite Brethren theology, it would have been helpful to explore further how Mennonite Brethren have sought to articulate their shared convictions in the midst of their present diversity.

Although *Celebrating 150 Years* is not intended to be a formal academic history, it does provide a valuable resource for understanding the global development of Mennonite Brethren churches and conferences. Readers are left with the impression that Mennonite Brethren continue to face significant challenges within their various settings. However, despite their diversity, this book highlights that Mennonite Brethren also have much to learn from each other.

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