

# Book Reviews

## Reviews of Fiction and Poetry

Armin Wiebe, *The Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven Blatz*. Winnipeg: Scirocco Drama Series, 2011. 103 p. Softcover, \$14.95 CDN

If you missed Theatre Projects' premiere production of Armin Wiebe's debut full-length play, *The Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven Blatz*, in Winnipeg this spring, you missed some great theatre! Every minute was crackling with the kind of good-natured, surprising, heart-heaving comedic drama we have come to expect from Armin Wiebe's fiction, from his astonishing, feisty, sad, funny, prairie-inflected first novel, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* (1984), onwards. *Beethoven Blatz* is a tour de force, first class theatrical accomplishment, riveting and deeply satisfying to watch and experience. Kudos to Armin Wiebe and director Kim McCaw, who returned to his Manitoba roots to bring this play to the stage, in the city where he did so much to foster home-grown Manitoba playwriting and production before moving to Alberta in the mid-90s. This is a wonderful fruition of his farsighted prairie-based vision! Kudos to the talented cast and crew, who carried the formidable challenges of the script with such spiritedness and aplomb. Kudos to Managing Director Ardith Boxall and all the people at Theatre Projects who work with such commitment and smarts to bring consistently high quality new playwriting to the Manitoba

stage. And kudos also to Gordon Shillingford and Scirocco Drama, for promptly bringing new Manitoba plays to print so they can be read and enjoyed immediately and long after the theatre event – and hopefully restaged many times.

The play opens off-stage with humorous expletives uttered in *Plautdietsch*, the old Anglo-Saxon dialect still spoken in the Mennonite villages of southern Manitoba, where this play is ostensibly set, during the Great Depression of the 1930s: “Dusent noch emol eent!” Obrum and Susch, a young couple trying with difficulty to get established in farming on very little capital, are struggling to move an old heavy piano into the granary which serves as their temporary home. Obrum gently curses the heaviness of the piano, Susch complains that her “stick roses” are getting damaged by the truck’s wheels. “What want you with such a thing here on the farm?” she asks, with a mixture of impatience and wonder. “What wants a man with a rainbow in the sky?” Obrum lyrically responds.

And there you have it, a small capsule of the play’s premises, and its interesting, hilarious, and inspiring reach. For the topic of the play, unlikely as it may seem from these humble circumstances, is no less than the nature and scope of eros and desire, both in their aesthetic and sublime aspects as impulse for high-minded artistic expression and yearning for spiritual companionship, and their more earthy aspects as hunger, passion, drive, for food, sex, intimacy, children. The damaged, out-of-tune piano, which can nevertheless produce moments of sublime music, from bits of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* to prairie mourning-dove-coo-inspired original compositions, becomes a focal point and metaphor for the human body in community, the social site of these intersecting drives and desires.

In the deft hands of Armin Wiebe, the sublime and earthy aspects of eros are not contradictory or impossible to reconcile: they are deeply implicated in one another, in a beautiful, sexy, *dringent*, teasing dance of contradictions and contraries. (*Dringent*, a favourite word in the play, translates as “urgent,” “passionate,” not so much “driven” as “driving” – a nice rewrite of Freud in the Mennonite timbre.) Even though desire in its many aspects leads to potentially conflictual and even dangerous conundrums – there is a frightening moment near the end of the play where everything threatens to fly apart into jealousy, anger, finger-pointing, vengefulness – there is ample love and sensitivity and good humour available to embrace everyone’s fears and misgivings, and gather them into a loving, inclusive, comedic, good old-fashioned village embrace. (Or rather, just-outside-the-village embrace: Wiebe is not unalert to the whispers of gossip and censure that emanate from the village proper regarding the unconventional shenanigans that go on in this marginal household. In this sense the

happy ending represents a precarious, hopeful proposition more than resounding fact.)

The play's action revolves around the anguish of childlessness in this aspiring, spirited young couple, whose vision of a life of farming is bereft without the possibility of children to share in the project. Obrum's rainbow-in-the-sky idea of bringing a piano to the farm, and along with it, a live-in high-minded out-of-pocket displaced "Russian" pianist and composer, has another more devious motive, as we gradually come to realize, of providing the pretext for a hoped for discreet intervention in his own childless situation, a covert "gypsy in the attic" solution to his own infertility and familial aspirations. The play intimates that this kind of arrangement was not unknown in the Mennonite villages, and may have been more widely practiced in communities of various kinds, in the days before fertility clinics, than is generally admitted. (My own informal investigations of such matters in conversation with various people after seeing the play leads me to agree.....interesting – no, mind boggling! No wonder there was a certain degree of consternation in the audience at the public scrutiny of what would have been a whispered reality at most!)

As the situation develops, there is much room for funny, sad, happy moments of misunderstanding and engagements. The play takes us from the heat and bother of threshing season, early morning blueberry picking, hungry threshermen, poison ivy and itchy hay, through the howling winds and isolation of prairie winter. The characters play their parts with an openness and an air of innocence that betokens honesty and good-naturedness rather than blind naiveté, though the depth of their good natures are seriously tested before the play's end. The dialogue is crisp. There is not a single unnecessary word or false note in it. The humour is perfectly pitched throughout. The action is tightly woven, sparkling, lively.

Blatz, played with a perfect mix of sublimity and wildness by Eric Nyland in the Theatre Projects production, is a hilarious incarnation of the slightly mad artist, his head in the clouds, listening for divine inspiration, yet timid and somewhat lost in the face of practical matters. He is a haunted man, having arrived recently from Russia, with the grief-stricken memory of his beloved Sonya, who was ostensibly murdered by "the anarchists," (as so many Mennonites were during the aftermath of the Russian Revolution), and whose departed spirit still serves as his muse. He reminds one of the slightly mad film-maker Peter John Friar in Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, playing a similar unlikely role as serious (and also politically haunted) artist amidst a more practically-minded people, in Jewish working class Montreal in the 40s – though Wiebe's prairie-based treatment of the subject is characteristically gentler and more optimistic.

Blatz is saved from madness, from flying off into the clouds of his skewed fantasies and longing for the departed Sonya, by his unlikely patrons, Obrum and Susch, who provide him with shelter, admiration, and – love. Susch becomes the present incarnation of his muse, her hot pulsing presence discreetly overlaid with phantasmic memories of Sonya – in exchange for his sexual services while Obrum is away on a construction assignment. One such moment is raucously, hilariously, unforgettably enacted right on stage, in an unlikely coupling on the piano bench, led by the impatient hot-blooded Susch, and colluded in by the stunned but not unwilling composer. (At least it was raucous in the Theatre Projects version. The script suggests the scene could be more demure given a different set of players.) Blatz, it turns out, is much more than a nostalgic immigrant forever looking back to a lost homeland and lost people. His importation of Beethoven and the turbulent Romantic spirit of 19<sup>th</sup> century German music to the prairies is transformed and softened by Susch's attentions, and the humble tickle of wet grass under bare feet, dogs barking, cows mooing, and mourning doves cooing, and results in the kind of homegrown gentle comedic art whose birth we are witnessing in this play, before our very eyes.

The most complex character, however, is neither Blatz nor Obrum, the good-natured husband who must balance his personal sense of dignity in this complex situation across deep inner contradictions, but rather Susch. As the mother-in-waiting, she is at the very center of the play, and the subject of the other characters' longing, including that of Teen, her girlfriend and the village matchmaker and midwife. (Teen indulges her own discreet homo-erotic fantasies and occasional intimacy with Susch, and yet sets them generously aside much of the time to help her admired friend achieve her wish for children, and earlier, for a young husband like Obrum, instead of the dreaded other prospect, the unattractive Pastor Funk.) Susch was played in Winnipeg by the extraordinarily talented Tracy Penner, who managed to make her a wide-eyed, hot-blooded, open-hearted, earthy wonder, who knew exactly what she wanted and how to get it, and yet how to remain graciously at the center of everyone's affections and desires. "What? A muse that has desire also!" Blatz exclaims in surprise and recognition. The happy comedic ending of the play is mediated largely through her warm, empathetic presence and vision: the miraculous possibilities attending the expectation of a new baby shared generously here with gathered community with all its foibles and multiple investments and needs.

Armin Wiebe has always been good at writing women characters, managing to simultaneously call up and dispel the cultural stereotypes of Madonna, Earth Mother and Lady, milkmaid and whore, without falling into any of the hazardous de-humanizing traps these figures, with their troubling historical baggage, entail. The women in his fictions are

strong, earthy, practical, powerful, opinionated, going after what they want, but at the same time, attractive, soft-hearted, and deeply human. Susch and Teen are two such characters. They are fully engaged agents of the action, fully in possession of their own desire and understanding of things, and generously sharing their warmth and knowledge and love with the world that revolves to such a large extent around them. They are not gorgeous, but they are sexy and inspiring in their full-bodied, full-spirited, loving presence.

Armin Wiebe is perhaps our most accurate Mennonite literary writer in capturing, in this way, so much of the essence of traditional egalitarian, comedic thinking, in his fictions. Traditional Mennonite weddings, as you may recall, did not feature a giveaway of the bride. Rather, the young couple walked up the aisle together, to make vows to create a lifelong practical partnership. "Love," also, was never conceived of in the sentimentalized way of the Western European romance tradition, with associations of "sickness" and "blindness" and "falling" into a regressive state of infantile repression or bondage to the other's will. Peasant life, lived in close proximity to animals and earth, was unsentimental, practical, humourous, and sexually frank. People were not prudish about sex or love, or for that matter, about deep feelings. Women were considered valuable and essential contributors to the family and village economy, and presided benevolently, for the most part, over their households. Husbands were expected to join the church of their wives, and relocate to their villages. You can see vestiges of an older matriarchal society in Mennonite village life – and how interesting to see these aspects of the heritage celebrated so prominently in Wiebe's writing.

In a corner of the simple granary room that serves as Obrum and Susch's temporary home, with nothing but sheets hung up between them and the mad pianist and his tinkling and booming piano, sits a *Brommtopp*. This strange object is a traditional Mennonite instrument, a large drum of somewhat mysterious origins, made with stretched cowhide and sporting a large horsetail fastened to the hide, which vibrates in a spooky loud mournful hum when pulled with wet fingers. The *Brommtopp* was played in traditional mumming rituals in the Mennonite villages on New Year's Eve (as Wiebe depicted previously in *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*). The spooky *bromming* of the *Brommtopp* typically played accompaniment to long, rowdy bawdy songs bestowing wishes of fertility and good will on the villagers, performed by a gang of lusty lively young village men in costumes. The costumes usually included cross-dressing, as well as parodic representations of people from different races and nations.

The *Brommtopp* serves a different function here, as musical counterpart to the imported piano, representing the "low" music

of the prairies, and the cows and the barking dogs, bare feet on wet grass (a repeating trope in the play, denoting a tender poeticism in the earthy sensibility of the villagers), and occasionally being performed in counterpoint with the piano. But there are beautifully interwoven echoes of the ritual and carnivalesque aspects of the *Brommtopp*, in Obrum's need to wear a dress while threshing, due to a thick rash of poison ivy on his legs, and in Teen's song bestowing good wishes upon the extraordinary little quintet at the end of the play while strumming the horsetail drum. By the end of the play, Obrum is "wearing the pants" again, order has been re-established, differences and upsets have been creatively absorbed, new life has been created and embraced.

And notice how different a family configuration this is from the typical triad at the end of the English Victorian novel, of the bride and groom presided over by the bride's father, and the mother missing! Neither configuration is particularly stable. Both are centered, after all, around the emergent potential of new life and all its volatile surprises. But the social model being proposed here is egalitarian and communitarian, in contrast to the hierarchical paternalistic model of the English nuclear family. One thinks of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, with its carnivalesque overturning of strict couple conventions in order to bring new vitality to the gathered community. It is surely unrealistic to imagine an ongoing communal arrangement such as Wiebe's characters flirt with at the end of *Beethoven Blatz* (even though apparently we do have utopian communitarian social models buried somewhere in our history). In McCaw's production there is the hint that Teen and Blatz may overcome their antipathies toward each other and become friends and possibly a second couple. Nonetheless, the magic of the midsummer night's dream has happened, the social order has been upset and renewed, and beautifully transformed.

And finally, a brief word about Armin Wiebe's use of "buggered up language," so cleverly perched on the cusp of a crudely anglicized *Plautdietsch* with a little High German sprinkled in. His brilliant creation of a hybrid literary dialect which can adequately hold the cultural contradictions and complexities of the Canadian Mennonite sensibility (not so different from the way it was often spoken in jest in the villages until recently) has been much celebrated and commented upon in relation to his novels – straddled as we have been between several cultures, remembered landscapes, languages and origins, part urban intellectual reform movement, part traditionalist peasant tribe. I will add only, here, that it adapts brilliantly to the stage. Some theatergoers I talked with afterwards complained that the performed dialect of the actors was exaggerated in its faux *Plautdietsch* inflections. But surely that was partly the point! Language, including the cherished mothertongue, gets a welcome send-up in Armin Wiebe's writing, along

with so many other elements. How can we learn to appreciate and care for each other better, more, in this hybrid, mixed-up age, unless we can toss our battered icons and traditions in the air and catch them, dancing, inviting new combinations of old patterns and habits, enjoying the magic of new birth and its miraculous possibilities while embracing who we were, and who we are becoming, inflected by circumstance and desire, and above all, by the generosity of good-humoured affection, tolerance, gentleness, forward-looking forgiveness and love.

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Miriam Toews, *Irma Voth*. Toronto: Knopf, 2011. 255 p. Hardcover, \$29.95 CDN

*Irma Voth*, the latest novel by Governor General's Award-winner Miriam Toews, is a lovely mess of a book. Set in Campo 6.5, an isolated Mennonite colony in northern Mexico, the novel begins in the aftermath of much of the action relevant to its plot: it opens six years after the Voth family fled the Canadian prairies for Mexico, one year after the eighteen-year-old Irma shocked her family by secretly marrying a Mexican, and just days after that marriage has fallen apart. Ostracized from her family by an intensely conservative father, and abandoned by Jorge, her young husband, Irma takes a job as a translator for an eccentric Mexican director who arrives on the colony determined to film a movie using the local Mennonites as actors. Irma's involvement with the dysfunctional film crew further infuriates her father, and when her younger sister, Aggie, insists on joining the film, the Voth sisters are forced to flee the colony and try to make it on their own in Mexico City. The wide-ranging story has a vast cast of characters clamouring for attention, a jarringly uneven pace, and risks overreaching in its themes, and yet the result is deeply affecting, hugely entertaining, and ranks with some of the best writing of accomplished Toews' career.

As will already be clear to many of her readers, *Irma Voth* is a return to familiar territory for Toews. Like Nomi Nickel in *A Complicated Kindness* (2004), Irma's coming-of-age narrative is set against the backdrop of a stifling Mennonite community, and, like Hattie Troutman in *The Flying Troutmans* (2008), Irma responds to a crumbling family by hitting the road flanked by a younger relative who offers a caustic commentary on the shortcomings of the adult world into which they have suddenly been thrust. *Irma Voth* adopts the perspective of a precocious teen narrator employed in these earlier

novels, as well, and its plot has the same frantic pace that is pushed forward by the same staccato dialogue, and it walks the same dizzying tightrope between comedy and tragedy. Indeed, this latest novel sits firmly within what is fast becoming the author's personal genre, and while readers who grew weary of the *a-little-too-wise-beyond-its-years* teen angst in these earlier works will find much to chafe against here, in it Toews wields one of the most distinct—and, for many, one of the most entertaining—voices in all of Canadian literature.

Toews' decision to return to Mennonite country is perhaps the larger surprise, given how insistent she was in her claim to be finished writing about Mennonites following *A Complicated Kindness*. Much as the village of East Reserve in *Complicated* is a thinly-veiled recreation of Toews' hometown of Steinbach, Manitoba, however, her decision to set *Irma Voth* on Campos 6.5 was inspired by her unexpected opportunity to star in Carols Reygadas' movie *Silent Light*, which was filmed on a Mennonite colony in northern Mexico in 2006. The Mennonite colonies in Mexico have long been neglected territory in Mennonite Canadian writing, but Toews' novel doesn't really attempt to address this gap. There is no effort to sketch the historical context for the colonies, for example, and there is little focus on the shape or structure of the communities in which the characters live. While *Irma Voth* is nowhere as dismissive of its Mennonite context as is its fictional film director, who claims he chose the colony as a setting because the Mennonites' unique dress and language would be so strange to his viewers that they become nothing more than "props, essentially, for pure emotion," in this novel Toews is more interested in using the Mennonite colony as a backdrop for an exploration of the Voth family's dramatic story.

Few authors can propel a plot through dialogue as effortlessly as Toews, and while *Irma Voth* has several twists that effectively carry the action along, the best writing in the novel comes in the countless poignant misunderstandings that drive the novel forward. Much of Irma's courtship and marriage to Jorge consists of dueling monologues, for example, and Irma routinely mistranslates the director's requests to his Mennonite actors, so that their Low German lines will have little relationship to the Spanish subtitles—not that it matters, given that the director himself claims to hate both narrative and meaning. The miscues on the film set reflect the novel's larger examination of the performative nature of personal identity: nearly all the characters are self-consciously wrestling with the parts they find themselves to be playing, be it in the film, in their families, or in their ostensibly faith-based community. While Toews has raised similar questions before—just think of the Mennonite teenagers in *A Complicated Kindness* dressing up as more traditional versions of themselves to work at the town's heritage village—here she attempts some big answers,



including an extended argument for the redemptive possibilities of art. This potentially clichéd theme is given a power that comes from the specificity of the Mennonite context in which the novel is set, and one that highlights the problem of meaning that runs throughout the book. It is against her father's fervent insistence that art is a lie—“films [are] like beautiful cakes, filled with shit,” he says—that the film at the centre of the novel, along with Irma's attempts at life writing and Aggie's turn to painting their family's past, become believable as urgent and necessary escapes into a different kind of truth.

In contrast to the often tightly structured settings and casts of her previous work, *Irma Voth* shows Toews reaching for a larger canvas. The novel begins in the claustrophobic isolation of the colony and moves into the chaos of one of the world's largest cities, a shift that nicely inverts the Mennonites' history of migrating to isolated corners of the globe, and which Toews presents as a rebirth for the Voth sisters. The move offers Toews fertile ground to explore a set of large issues, including the possibility of forgiveness, the effects of patriarchy, and the question of how to live genuinely, without simply performing the expectations of others. The perhaps too-convenient solutions that arise to each seemingly intractable problem of the girls' flight to the city are not fully redeemed by the novel's overarching sense of the surreal, however, and the shift in setting also requires the reader to leave behind a memorable cast of characters for a much thinner set midway through the book. Still, some of the most reserved and effective writing of Toews' career lies beneath the clamour of the Voth sisters' adventures. The novel provides just enough of the suffering endured by Irma's mother, for example, and offers just enough insight into the humanity of Irma's father, to reveal that Irma and Aggie's struggle against the limitations of their Mennonite community are battles that their parents have tried to fight as well, and which their father, at least, appears to have lost.

Here, then, is another tale of teen angst and adult hypocrisy from Miriam Toews, another Mennonite novel written with pithy dialogue that will leave its readers wondering if the tears on the page are from their laughter or sadness. And yet this is also the most ambitious of Toews' recent novels, one that takes larger risks, and, as a result, offers readers new rewards. While it is true that the novel is a return to familiar territory for Toews, we should be thankful she covers it so brilliantly; *Irma Voth* is required reading.

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## Reviews of History and Social Sciences

Harry Loewen, *Cities of Refuge: Stories from Anabaptist-Mennonite History and Life*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2011. pp. 344. Softcover, \$29.95.

*Cities of Refuge* is a sequel to an earlier work by Loewen, *No Permanent Home*, published in 1993. This new work is a collection of short stories tracing the history of Mennonites from their early beginnings in the 1520s in Zurich through to present day Canada. The chapters are short and there are no footnotes, although a summary of sources used for each chapter is included at the end of the book. While it is possible to read the work as a continuous narrative, it has been written in such a way that each chapter may be read on its own. Loewen argues that throughout their roughly five hundred years of history, Mennonites have had an ambivalent relationship with cities. Cities have variously provided reprieve from persecution, as well as acted as sources of affliction. With urban centres as the backdrop, Loewen takes the reader on a rollicking ride through five centuries of history told through stories of intrigue, persecution, romance, philosophy, art, and a sometimes wavering commitment to nonviolence, all underpinned by a steadfast faith in the God of Menno Simons.

Loewen writes from a confessional perspective and his own Mennonite faith informs the tenor of the text. Scripture verses are peppered throughout. *Cities of Refuge* is meant to edify and encourage the reader; story after story shows Mennonites remaining steadfast in the face of adversity. For the most part Loewen paints a tidy picture of Anabaptist history; one in which Mennonites were the friends of famous artists and philosophers and where they remained firm in their faith even if it meant being burned at the stake in sixteenth century Zurich, or tarred and feathered in Germanophobic World War I Middle America for refusing to purchase war bonds (317). Loewen even denies the connection between the Mennonites and the Muenster debacle of 1534-1535 (57).

At times Loewen's link to cities seems somewhat tenuous. The work reads like a disparate collection of Mennonite curiosities, bound together by a common thread of enduring faith in spite of persecution. When Loewen deviates from the trope of the stalwart believer, blameless in the face of mistreatment, the work is at its finest. Where the account becomes grittier is where it shines. Loewen's re-telling of an alcoholic Mennonite, John J. Kroeker, a renegade MCC worker and former member of the SS, who smuggled Soviet Mennonites into West Berlin, is one of the most compelling anecdotes (201). Loewen's

recounting of the tension in the Russian Mennonite communities about the *Selbstschutz* during the Communist Revolution provides a nuanced account of a people deeply divided about the defensibility of the doctrine of pacifism (209). Loewen also includes anecdotes about Dutch Mennonites collaborating with the Nazis (194), all aspects of Mennonite history often omitted from more conventional accounts.

While *Cities of Refuge* will surely prove a valuable resource, it is not without its faults. Some of the accounts feel slightly indulgent—for both the author and the Mennonite reader; several chapters are devoted to establishing connections between Mennonites and famous people from the past, from Rembrandt and Spinoza (113), to Peter the Great (139) and Khrushchev (241). The colourful accounts will undoubtedly provide the reader with interesting fodder for Mennonite dinner parties. An example of this is the chapter about Mennonite Conscientious objectors spending two years building a top-secret prototypical aircraft carrier out of ice on a remote lake in rural Alberta (249). At certain points *Cities of Refuge* feels a little like “Ripley’s Believe it or Not: Mennonite Edition.” The stories are captivating, occasionally surprising, and sure to elicit a few raised eyebrows. Despite the lack of footnotes, which at times can prove frustrating for the curious reader, it is nevertheless evident that the narratives have been meticulously researched, and excerpts from the text would make interesting supplemental reading for any Mennonite Studies course.

By Loewen’s own admission, the history that he provides is Eurocentric; an account that pays scant attention to the growing global Mennonite diaspora. He does, however, achieve a higher level of gender equity. Several narratives centre around Mennonite women, one particularly powerful example is that of Katharina Ratzlaff Epp, a celebrated *trajchtmoaka*, or folk doctor, who had attended medical school in Soviet Russia, but did not graduate because she refused to join the “Atheists’ Circle” (299).

This work is important because of the personal dimension that it adds to a history with which many Mennonites are already familiar. Many of the anecdotes are inspiring, a few are unexpected, and when taken together they augment existing understandings of Anabaptist life throughout the ages. *Cities of Refuge* is a pleasure to read, equally so for the individual with virtually no prior knowledge of Mennonites and the veteran Mennonite history enthusiast, a rare achievement for any book. What emerges from the myriad stories of persecution, persistence, collusion, generosity and greed, is a subtly nuanced picture of Mennonite life through the ages.

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Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. pp. 384. Softcover, \$38.00.

With this highly informative volume, Professor Jantzen takes a major step in correcting the relative neglect, at least in English historical literature, of this period of Mennonite history in central Europe. While a number of German studies have addressed significant issues of this stressful century in German Mennonite history, none has done so with the analysis and *Sitz im Leben* perspective that Jantzen demonstrates.

Few issues posed greater challenges for Mennonites than did royal land policy, since acquisition of more land came to be tied to acceptance of military service, even if in a noncombatant form. Some rulers such as Frederick II were more elastic in their interpretations of this demand, but his successor adopted a more rigid policy resulting in many Mennonites embarking on an exodus to Russia; later also to North America.

Relations between Mennonites and other churches, especially Catholic and Lutheran, long remained a source of friction, especially when some members of these “official” churches wished to join a Mennonite church. Elder Donner, from the large Orlofffelde congregation, welcomed persons from other denominations, and argued that Frederick II’s support of “freedom of conscience” should cover religious choice as well as response to the state’s demand for military service. When authorities objected, Donner lamented, “Our religious freedom has been stolen.”

The issue of military service presented strong challenges for Mennonite leaders. Churches in the western part of the realm often took a more latitudinarian position in this matter than did the churches in West Prussia. In the latter area, the intensity of the “anti-Mennonite” sentiment led some officials to denounce “crimes” of those who used church discipline against those who joined the military. However, when Mennonites presented the king with a substantial donation during the Napoleonic wars, royal favor increased dramatically.

Jantzen notes that views in some western parts of Prussia were markedly different from those in West and East Prussia. Churches in the west were more open to mixed marriages, inter-confessional cooperation in missions and the relaxing of denominational barriers. Also, by the time of the end of the Napoleonic era, participation in the military was largely left to the discretion of the individual; many Mennonites in the region no longer made an issue of this question. Later,

in a speech given in the Frankfurt National Assembly the Mennonite delegate from Krefeld, Hermann von Beckerath called for an end to Mennonite exemption from military service. His position, however, was vigorously opposed by other Mennonite leaders, especially those from churches in the Vistula delta.

The issue drew significant attention outside Mennonite circles, as Janzen demonstrates. The playwright Ernst von Wildenbruch, with his *Der Mennonit*, launched a vigorous attack on Mennonites for their refusal to bear arms to defend a land that granted them extensive religious and economic rights. When Mennonite leaders tried to ban the play from the Royal Theater in Berlin, Emperor Frederick III refused to approve the request. Jantzen compares this confrontation with that of the much more serious and nationally divisive Kulturkampf. Then, in a fascinating examination of Theodor Fontane's criticism of German militarism at this time, Jantzen boldly rejects the dismissive views of prominent historians who suggested Fontane was living in a dream world.

The nineteenth century also brought considerable broadening of Mennonite theological and social views. Bible societies from elsewhere were welcomed by Mennonite leaders; missionary efforts were given a similarly warm reception. In 1826 Mennonites in Danzig, and Heubuden founded a specifically Christian school, and in the following year Mennonite leaders played a prominent role in establishing the interdenominational Danzig Mission Society.

Jantzen has built his analysis on a wide range of published sources as well as a rich selection of archival documents. In the latter category numerous unpublished records enrich the study. One such document, Donner's *Chronik*, written in sometimes abbreviated eighteenth-century German script, deserves an annotated translation.

For anyone wishing to understand the Mennonite saga in eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany, this volume is indispensable.

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Calvin Wall Redekop, *European Mennonite Voluntary Service: Youth Idealism in Post-World War II Europe*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2010. pp. 132. Softcover. \$14.95.

Many readers will be familiar with the variety of Mennonite-sponsored voluntary service programs: Mennonite Central Committee's

International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP), the latter's Serving and Learning Together (SALT), MCC Quebec's Harmony program, the North American Mennonite Voluntary Service program, Germany's International Christian Service for Peace (Eirene), to name a few. Calvin Wall Redekop's discussion and analysis of the Mennonite Voluntary Service program that developed in Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II, gives welcome background to what he has identified as a "narrow slice" of what has become a "worldwide voluntary service movement." (13). Redekop's portrayal of the idealism with which he and other young people invested during the program's nearly twenty-five years (1948-1972) deepens our understanding of the philosophy behind voluntary service which has so impacted modern culture, and which for many Mennonites has become a rite of passage.

A volunteer himself in the early years, similar to so many, Redekop's two-year stint shaped his life. This book, then, is a retrospective look with fond memories to be sure, but it also provides a welcome sociological analysis. In an "attempt to come to grips with the termination of MVS" (14) just under twenty-five years after its inception, Redekop has both charted this program's history and analyzed its transformation into a thriving worldwide phenomenon that stands alongside other faith-based and secular volunteer enterprises.

In six short chapters, Redekop has covered the antecedents and development of Mennonite Voluntary Service European-style, its expansion and diversification, its termination and transformation, ending with a recap of the program's vision. He set the stage by identifying Pierre Ceresole, a Swiss pacifist of the early twentieth century, with the original vision of voluntary service as a peaceful alternative to military intervention. Although the European momentum soon waned, American initiatives during World War II and its aftermath would see Mennonite Central Committee's vision for voluntary service include the rebuilding of a Europe devastated by war. Experience through Civilian Public Service, the momentum built up by the strong force of women volunteers, and the idealism prevalent in American Mennonite colleges, resulted in scores of young Americans and Canadians volunteering in overseas work camps. This vital force helped reawaken volunteerism among Europeans and the work camps became international.

Redekop's discussion of the "continued development of European voluntary service" (29) identifies places, and the names of a variety of the volunteers including the MVS directors during these years, all the while underscoring the immense gratification experienced by those who served. His narrative is rich with anecdotes drawn from both his personal experience and a wealth of reports and letters from the time. Take, for instance, this excerpt from the *MVS Newsletter* (1955):

“Picture, if you can 25-30 young men and women from eleven nations living and working in a war-gutted four-story brick building in the heart of beautiful Vienna, that city of cities with its own very special atmosphere.... We had torn down brick walls, cleaned the brick, hauled out the rubble, leveled the floors, and cemented.” (47)

As significant as this work was, Redekop went further. Applying his training as a sociologist to the narrative, he has offered helpful analysis of why, despite its “unqualified success,” (79) the program was suddenly terminated. He then developed the expansion of MVS into a global expression through MCC and a variety of other organizations. The book concludes with an articulation of the European MVS vision and its meaning in its post-war context. A helpful appendix completes the study, listing the work camps by country and numbers of volunteers.

My major critique regards the editorial errors that deter from the excellent content. Otherwise, I highly recommend this book as a solid addition to memoirs that have appeared in recent years: Peter and Elfrieda Dyck’s *Up from the Rubble* (Herald Press, 1991), Robert Kreider’s *My Early Years: An Autobiography* (Pandora Press, 2002) and *Alice Snyder’s Letters from Germany* (Pandora Press, 2009). Redekop has offered something unique in this literature telling the story of those who volunteered in the rebuilding of Europe post World War II. While acknowledging his bias, he has gone beyond memoir. Indeed, Redekop has provided a great service in his analysis both of the movement itself, and its significant role in spawning the contemporary worldwide Mennonite Volunteer enterprise.

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Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, *An Amish Paradox. Diversity and Change in the World’s Largest Amish Community*. Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xvi + 356 pages. Softcover, \$30.

In *An Amish Paradox*, Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell bring long overdue attention to the Holmes County region of Ohio, home to an Amish population of approximately 30,000 or 1/7 of the Amish population of the United States. Established in 1809 by Amish settlers from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, the Holmes County settlement (which actually spans six counties, including Wayne, Stark, Tuscarawas, Coshocton, and Ashland) is quite different from the

better-known Amish community in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Within its borders are some of the most technologically progressive Amish affiliations, including the New Order Amish, as well as the most traditional or conservative, including the Swartzentruber Amish and the Andy Weaver Amish. In this well-written and accessible work, Hurst and McConnell help the reader understand the internal and external forces that have shaped Amish life in the Holmes County region. Focusing on “border work,” “the redefinition and defense of cultural boundaries that goes on at cultural margins (22), *An Amish Paradox* explores a myriad of ways in which Amish groups have come to experience modernity and tradition.

This border work is evident in the very landscape of the Holmes County settlement. In their first chapter, “Discovering the Holmes County Amish,” Hurst and McConnell take the reader on a cultural tour through the center of the community. The geographic introduction this provides prepares the reader to explore the interaction between various Amish affiliations and between the Amish and their non-Amish neighbors. While this first chapter briefly discusses the European roots of Amish life and the pattern of Amish immigration to North America, Hurst and McConnell focus on the Holmes County settlement, highlighting its central role in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Amish division that resulted in the formation of the “Old Order” and in subsequent conflicts over technology, education, and resistance to the draft. While noting the commonalities that bind the different Amish groups, the authors lay the groundwork for the discussion that will carry throughout this work of the diverse ways in which Amishness is realized

The second chapter, “The Origins of Religious Diversity,” explores more deeply the divisions that have helped to shape Amish life in this community. The authors’ in-depth exploration of the history of the four major Amish divisions—New Order, Old Order, Andy Weaver, and Swartzentruber—lays out the importance of doctrinal difference, church organization, changing social conditions, and personality in creating the borders that separate each group from the others. Recorded in personal letters and handed down in family stories, this history of divergence and change is not easy to follow. Keeping straight who did what in the hearsay account is often difficult. Yet Hurst and McConnell have managed to tell the story in a way that clearly illustrates the issues.

For outsiders, the most obvious differences between Amish affiliations are found in the technology they accept and their economic interaction with non-Amish society. For example, while the ultra-conservative Swartzentruber Amish eschew most technological innovation, the New Order Amish have accepted telephones and fax machines. However, in Chapter 3, “Coping with Church Schism,” the



authors make it clear that the different groups are not so easily categorized. Exploring in depth how the different affiliations vary in their attitudes towards mission work, Rumspringa (the “running around” young folk engage in before deciding whether to be baptized), and excommunication and shunning, the authors effectively demonstrate the complicated interaction between social engagement with the outside world, technology, and the raising of children to be Amish in a particular way.

Subsequent chapters explore this interaction in far more detail. In Chapter 4, “Continuity and Change in Family Life,” Hurst and McConnell look at the impact of changing patterns of work and consumption on family and home, childrearing, and gender roles, and in Chapter 5, “The Changing Landscape of Learning,” they explore the increasingly diverse ways in which the Amish are educating their children. Both of these chapters emphasize how Amish lifestyles are changing as affiliations interact differently with each other and with non-Amish society. While the Swartzentrubers limit their children’s exposure to the world, restricting education and limiting employment options, many Old Order parents send their children to public schools, and New Order Amish parents are increasingly homeschooling their children, this last an educational approach that breaks with tradition and emphasizes family over community. Chapter six, “Work Within and Outside Tradition,” further explores the impact of the shift away from farming and how affiliations differ in the types of employment permitted members. While more progressive groups increasingly turn to manufacturing, the most conservative invest in land so that their children can keep farming. The result is diverging lifestyles, a growing technological divide, changing social relations, and even, as demonstrated in chapter seven, “Health along the Life Cycle,” different choices about health care and preventive medicine.

The paradox of Amish life in the Holmes County settlement is that the Amish have had to remain involved with non-Amish society in order to maintain a separate identity. In the final chapter, “Stepping Back and Looking Forward,” Hurst and McConnell explore the relative importance of community values versus individual self-interest in decision-making. The Amish, they find, feel more connected to others than do their non-Amish neighbors, and they suggest that a highly structured community life, clear limits on life choices, and accountability to fellow church members combine to provide the Amish with a sense of security as they confront change and adversity. In short, the authors argue, the Amish have resources that their non-Amish neighbors should envy. *An Amish Paradox* is based on careful fieldwork and draws on a range of Amish, ex-Amish, and non-Amish informants. Clearly, Hurst and McConnell know

their subjects well. It is unfortunate that they were unable to draw more informants from the most traditional of the Holmes County Amish groups, the Andy Weaver and Swartzentruber churches. For example, in Appendix A, "Methodology," they note that only one of the thirty women they interviewed was Swartzentruber and only two were Andy Weaver Amish. In contrast, sixteen were Old Order and eleven were New Order. The authors acknowledge the difficulty in meeting with conservative informants and were, in the end, able to talk with "more than two dozen individuals from the Swartzentruber and Andy Weaver affiliations" (291-292). But they do not note how many of this overwhelmingly male sample were from either, nor do they note which Swartzentruber subgroups were represented. As a result, and despite the authors' best efforts, conservative viewpoints are frequently less represented or are presented by outsiders who may not be sympathetic, including ex-members. Because, as this work makes very clear, affiliation is important and results from—and results in—particular responses to internal and external variables, the picture of Amish life in Holmes County may be somewhat incomplete. Moreover, and, again because of the importance of affiliation, it would have been useful if the authors had consistently identified the affiliation of those quoted. For example, what is the affiliation of the Amish bishop who worries about small businesses (262) or the respondent who is open to interracial marriage as long as it is between church members (268)?

Despite these limitations, *An Amish Paradox* draws our attention to both the values that unite Amish communities and the forces that divide them. This important, engaging text is a useful resource for all who are interested in Anabaptist history and culture, ethnic minority groups in America, and social change and identity construction.

Karen Johnson-Weiner  
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Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, *New York Amish: Life in the Plain Communities of the Empire State*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. \$24.95 USD.

"New Yorkers, Know Thy Neighbors" directs the headline of Cornell University Press's promotional material on *New York Amish*. This phrase aptly sums up Karen M. Johnson-Weiner's reasons for writing the book. As a graduate student in upstate New York, twenty years ago, I was intrigued with the waves of Amish families moving into the state's

southern tier. At that time, Johnson-Wiener was already immersing herself in Amish culture and Anabaptist history in an attempt to understand these peculiar people moving into her home state.

The book is directed primarily at New Yorkers. The author intends to foster understanding between the Amish and their new neighbors. She asserts that the Amish bring positive change and contribute to their local communities. Johnson-Wiener focuses on small cottage industries and in certain areas, revival of farming, to reinforce her argument that when the Amish move, they bring economic prosperity along with horses and buggies, quilts and baked goods. A more detailed explanation including perhaps state surveys of agricultural productivity and income generated by small business would help solidify Johnson-Wiener's case for the Amish.

Johnson-Wiener is concerned mostly with the post-World War II migrations from Pennsylvania and Ohio, although her research reveals that the Amish first migrated to New York in 1831, arriving in Lewis County from France. Since World War II, the Amish have moved primarily from large settlements in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Many of the families were attracted by low land prices. But not all Amish groups sought lower land values. As Johnson-Weiner makes clear the Amish are not a monolithic group. Their identities and culture, including migration patterns, varied. Some Amish families left because of disputes with home churches. Home churches were seen as making too many accommodations to the world, "crossing the line" as it were, and losing their Amish distinctiveness. For example, among the diverse groups migrating to New York were various factions of the Swartzentruber Amish, known as adhering to a particularly traditional or conservative *ordnung*. The Swartzentruber Amish left Ohio to escape busloads of tourists, high land prices and the influences of what they perceived to be worldly Amish churches.

Reinforcing the point about diversity, the book is divided into regions, areas that have an Amish presence. Each regional chapter is supplemented with nicely rendered maps and pictures. The chapters reviews the reasons for moving to that particular region, the extent and size of the Amish community, how the various Amish groups in the region interact, or conversely, decide not to interact with one another and, finally, how they interact with their non-Amish neighbors. Although the book is written for a popular New York audience, many of author's arguments will inform the work of academics as well.

The author presents an interesting case of immigrants that in spite of their staunch resistance toward assimilating into American culture have been embraced by their non-Amish neighbors. Many of Johnson-Weiner's chapters contained references to local press who were delighted that the Amish were coming and hoped for economic

renewal. This reader was struck at the contrasts between the Amish and Latino experience in America. Popular imagery of both groups contain interesting parallels. Amish speak English, but it is not their primary language, not unlike Spanish-speaking immigrants. Both groups foster economic activity and tend to start small businesses that initially cater to their own people before attracting outsiders. In my area of Washington, DC, Salvadorean pupuserias are as commonplace as quilt and gazebo shops in Lancaster County. Could the Amish experience provide a blueprint for acceptance by the broader mainstream culture even when the subgroup is plainly resistant to assimilation? American acceptance of Amish and resistance to Latinos might be a matter of race or perhaps perceptions of social welfare needs. These questions are beyond the scope of Johnson-Wiener's research and yet, given the fact that the Amish do not educate their children beyond the eighth grade and expect to be treated as outsiders, even persecuted for their way of life, perhaps this is an area for future research. A focus such as this would also engage in questions beyond those associated only with Amish thereby making her research all the more relevant to scholars studying other ethno-religious groups.

*New York Amish* is the result of a career focus spanning decades. Johnson-Weiner draws on over twenty years of participant observation research along with interviews and archival materials in the United States, Canada and France. The extensive and detailed knowledge exhibited in *New York Amish* should secure Johnson-Wiener's place as a foremost authority of the Amish and as a cultural interpreter for them. Most academics writing about Amish hail from either Mennonite or Amish background. They were raised in the culture and have an instinctive knowledge. As an outsider, Johnson-Wiener's thorough treatment and immersion in Amish culture represents a remarkable achievement.

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Mary Neufeld, *A Prairie Pilgrim: Wilhelm H. Falk*. Altona MB: Author, 2008. pp. 461 pp. Photos, tables, 8 appendices, bibliography. Softcover.

*A Prairie Pilgrim: Wilhelm H. Falk*, as Jack Heppner writes in the Foreword, is above all a love story: "It's about a daughter's love for a father she truly wants to know" (xi). The life and work of Wilhelm

Falk, the first bishop of the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church—the later Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference—is described and evaluated from this perspective, while at the same time it is interwoven with events and the lives of many other persons related to the Falk family, the Rudnerweider Church/EMMC, and the larger church and community. I found it helpful to read this book in conjunction with other histories, notably Jack Heppner's *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/EMMC, 1937-1987* (Winnipeg, 1987).

The book is developed chronologically in twenty-three chapters, focusing particularly on the personal and family life of the author's father and the Falk family. In the first two chapters Neufeld traces the Russian background of her grandparents, then the pioneering years in Manitoba and the founding of their young family, with the birth of Wilhelm in 1892 as the eighth of nine children born to Heinrich Falk and Justina Unrau Falk. The further chapters deal with Wilhelm's own family, particularly poignant chapters describing his two marriages—his first wife, Sara (Friesen), died in childbirth at the young age of thirty-five, leaving her thirty-eight year old husband with six children; Wilhelm remarried two years later and had eight more children with his second wife, Elizabeth (Schellenberg), who was half his age. The last chapters, finally, deal with Falk's retirement years, his decreasing health and chronic depression, and finally his death in 1976 at the age of eighty-three; his wife died two years later. The charts of Wilhelm's ancestors and descendants are helpful in providing an overview of the large family.

Intertwined with the life of the growing family, increasing attention is paid throughout the book to Falk's involvement in church and community. As Neufeld writes, "His community work and church-associated projects reflected his belief in mutual aid . . . He had to find ways to harmonize his roles of farmer, husband, father, preacher and community philanthropist" (108). In the church, Wilhelm was first active as one of the younger preachers in the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church but then became centrally involved in the emerging Rudnerweider Church in 1936, being elected the new church's first bishop in 1937. During his seventeen years in leadership—until his resignation in 1954—he was at the centre of many difficult issues, which included not only the internal theological and organizational issues but also the representation of the church to the outside world. One of the more difficult experiences in this regard was the church's need to address the question of military conscription during the Second World War; a staunch pacifist, Falk was a member of the *Ältestenrat* which gave direction to the Mennonite "boys" and was involved in the negotiations with the Canadian government which led to the Alternative Service program for conscientious objectors.

One of the darkest experiences in Falk's life is described in Chapter 19, "They wanted him out." He "resigned" (the quotation marks are Neufeld's) under pressure in 1954, and it is ironic that the man who was himself an active participant in the original Rudnerweider renewal movement later had to deal with the challenges of other younger leaders. The presenting

issues had to do with the form of church structure—centralized vs. local leadership—and the language transition from German to English. These were issues that other Mennonite churches

also had to deal with in the 1950s, even though each had its own special tensions; in this case, the familial relationships of persons in leadership added to the conflict. But underlying these conflicts was also the question of what it means to be a faithful church, a question that all participants took very seriously.

One of the "younger" church leaders in the Rudnerweider Church was Wilhelm's son-in-law, Ben Sawatsky, and even though the two men continued to be respectful of each other, the division ran deeply between them in their roles in both church and family. As Neufeld writes, "Family gatherings during this time were not pleasant events, and those of us still living at home witnessed the price our father was paying for the stress. It is still extremely painful to remember" (336). She notes that there have been differing interpretations of the conflicts, observing, for example, that her nephew, Walter Sawatsky, the son of Ben and himself a historian, has clearly got a different perspective of the events and the underlying dynamics from his father than she has—the discussion between them remains unresolved (330-335).

Neufeld also challenges Jack Heppner's brief description of the 1950s conflict and the role that her father played during this time. She felt the need to vindicate her father and has researched church records of the time and interviewed a number of people who were involved; yet it has been almost impossible to get full clarity about the issues involved, and this time remains a "fuzzy time period" (337). What does become quite clear is that while serious issues were involved, the participants at the time as well as those looking back at the experience were concerned to deal with the differences in a redemptive way—at the risk of pushing the issues "under the surface" and simply glossing over complex issues. It is a story that, ironically, can be found repeated in many other churches of the "peace church" tradition!

Falk's retirement years were filled with farming—which he had done throughout all the years of his ministerial leadership—and church-related assignments as long as he was able. His final years were difficult ones, and Neufeld forthrightly addresses his regrets about earlier decisions and also his bouts with depression before his death in 1976. The final chapter relates the last years of his widow—who

was twenty years younger than her husband and had played such a significant role in her husband's life for over forty years.

Mary Neufeld acknowledges that she has written this biography from the perspective of a daughter who cares deeply for her father (xxiii). It portrays a complex story in a very readable way and is enhanced by numerous photographs. While it includes several valuable charts and timelines, it seems to me that its greatest strength lies in the author's personal perspective, her passion, and her courage in addressing difficult issues in the life of the family and the church. Overall, it is an excellent addition to the growing number of biographies of significant church leaders who provided direction and guidance for Mennonite churches during the turbulent middle decades of the twentieth century.

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Barb Draper, *The Mennonites of St. Jacobs and Elmira: Understanding the Variety*. Pandora Press: Kitchener, ON, 2010. pp. 359 pp. Softcover.

Draper has produced a labor of love, an insider's heart-account, as she invites us to walk the fields and enter the homes of the Mennonites of the St. Jacobs and Elmira area of Ontario, Canada. She follows the pilgrimages that brought them here, and outlines their diverse expressions today.

The Mennonites of Ontario, like others worldwide, battle the headwinds of modernity and change. In the early nineteenth century, they were a minority group reprising the cultural patterns of their Pennsylvania and European ancestors—plain meetinghouse style, bishop and minister system, lay ordination, format of worship services, clothing styles, and especially communion as a form of social control. They intuited the dangers of the modern era—Enlightenment philosophy, the dark underbelly of the Industrial Revolution, the abortive and misshapen products of the Capitalist system, and the lifestyle practices foreign to Jesus' teachings. The words of the Christian Herr hymn speak for them:

Humility is the greatest virtue  
For all Christians' glory and honor...  
Humility is more than gold or money  
And what is highly esteemed in the world.

Yet in the late nineteenth century, some congregations began moderating the social shunning of non-conforming members, not wanting to shoot their own wounded. Women's prayer coverings, bonnets, and capes changed style, and in some congregations, disappeared. Children began attending public high school and women began working outside the home. Some churches switched to English, producing subtle changes in theology. Soon, some had only a patina of Mennonite-ness.

These changes provoked conflicts that soon savaged Mennonite unity. In 1889, the Old Order hived off, attempting to preserve the old ways. This break soon spawned groups even more conservative, such as the hermetic Orthodox Mennonites, who use no electricity or telephones and limit outside contacts.

Ironically, two anti-modern movements—Pietism and Fundamentalism—propelled many Mennonites into the maelstrom of modernity. Pietists rejected the worldliness and empty ritual of the established churches, urging a more interiorized Christian experience. Their hymns spoke of “spiritual,” personal experience rather than suffering and *Gelassenheit* (humility, submission, peaceful relationships in community).

My life journey has been from Fundamentalist to Mennonite, but in this book, I met many people traveling in the opposite direction. Some Mennonite leaders attended Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, a purveyor of Fundamentalism, and returned to Ontario to hold revival services and start Sunday Schools. They emphasized “personal testimony” over humility, and preached crisis conversion rather than a life of Christ-following. Only with the arrival of powerful leaders with Mennonite seminary training (such as S.F. Coffman) did the power of Fundamentalism begin to wane.

A few additions would clarify Draper's account. U.S. readers could wish she had defined several “Canadisms,” such as *United Empire Loyalists*, *Confederation*, or *17<sup>th</sup> line*. I strained to determine the books structure—was it historical or topological? The Table of Contents first groups the historical chapters and then the survey chapters, and yet the text itself seems to mix the two approaches. For academic use, the book needs an index. A tree diagram of historical divisions and a table comparing culture traits of the different groups would greatly help. A non-local reader desperately needs a map, at least of the St. Jacobs-Elmira area.

Sibling Anabaptists who read this—such as the U.S. Mennonites and Amish—will learn that their local stories are replicated elsewhere, and they will recognize familiar battles—conflicts over technology, dress, entertainment choices, and leadership.

Ontario Mennonites and their neighbors should appreciate Draper's narration of their deep history and her documentation of the mark of



the Mennonites on the Province. Today, most Ontario Mennonites work with the Canadian government on alternatives to the military draft. They lead the way in community service, establishing thrift shops, relief sales, and credit cooperatives. Even the more conservative Mennonites support organizations such as Mennonite Disaster Service.

Draper cites many other Mennonite writings, contemporary and historical, some unpublished. For instance, I learned much about the Old Colony Mennonites who left Canada to midwife new communities in Latin America, only to later return to Ontario. She documents the seduction of the Mennonites by broader Christian movements, and the strategies the Mennonites use to (partially) resist these movements, to maintain their historic strengths, and to interrogate the assumptions of the larger society.

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Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen, authors, and Laurence Neufeld and Monika McKillen, eds., *Woldemar Neufeld's Canada: A Mennonite Artist in the Canadian Landscape 1925-1995*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009. pp. 152. Hardcover.

*Woldemar Neufeld's Canada* offers an unparalleled look into the prolific and highly-regarded multi-disciplinarian artist's life and work. Beautifully laid out and remarkably detailed, the book introduces readers to Neufeld as a young German-speaking Mennonite boy in Czarist Russia, and follows along his rapid development into arguably one of Canada's finest landscape artists.

Divided into two major sections, the book contains a biographical account written by the foremost scholars on Neufeld's life, Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen. It quickly becomes evident that their great respect and adoration for both the artist and the man is what contributed to the overall feel of the book. Furthermore, there is familial feel to the book, owing in part to Neufeld's son, Laurence, served as co-editor. Gaining access to the diary of Neufeld's wife, Peggy Conrad, as well as family letters and photographs allowed the writers to get inside the mind of the artist, and to give evidential substance to speculation on his style, or for lack of a better term, 'trademark' subject matters.

Two particular core values of Mennonite culture are prevalent in Neufeld's work; hard work and an intricate relationship with the

land. As Tiessen and Tiessen point out, Neufeld never lacked for an inspirational Mennonite in his life, be it artist, friend or relative. While at times he was frustrated at their seeming lack of vision, going as far as to describe them as “plain-minded and thankless” (18), their perseverance and determination served as endless inspiration both artistically and morally. While Neufeld wrestled with the lure of what was stylistically popular in the art world, he was able to manipulate various ‘isms’, (cubism, constructivism and pointillism), into his own unique style. Early on in his career, the Group of Seven had defined an image of the Canadian landscape from which Neufeld tried to distance himself. His Canada was not remote, or static: “the natural world gave way to the human imprint of the makers and users of domestic, industrial, and other artifacts”. (15)

The authors carefully pinpoint influences and visually tie them to the over 200 colour plates. Neufeld’s fascination with bridges, for example, is attributed to his father’s career in Russia as an engineer. The plates feature in-depth discussions of the techniques used and subject matter explored, with the added weight of direct quotes taken from various interviews with Neufeld, as well as his own writings. Thoughtfully built connections between Neufeld’s artistic predecessors such as Bruegel and Dali, as well as his contemporaries, namely Homer Watson, and the Group of Seven, allow readers to contextualize the techniques and subject.

Certainly, the most intriguing aspect of the book is viewing the colour plates in chronological order, (with the exception of grouping his block prints at the end). Within the same year, Neufeld’s work could range from highly detailed ink and watercolours to his impasto oil paintings. At times, the only thing seemingly linking the paintings is the artist’s signature. What does remain constant was his devotion to documentation, or visually recording the locations in which he inhabited (namely Waterloo, Cleveland, New York City and New Milford). A more pleasing record of Canadian farmland and town infrastructure would be a challenge to find.

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Donald B. Kraybill, *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites and Mennonites*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. pp. xvii + 302. Hardcover, \$35.00.

Do you get your Old Order Amish confused with Beachy Amish Mennonite? Many people find distinctions between the 205 North American Mennonite-related groups and core beliefs confusing. In this concise encyclopedia, well-known author Donald Kraybill attempts to describe the four main groups who gain their spiritual inspiration from the sixteenth-century Anabaptist reformation.

This book is the result of a ten-year project by Kraybill, a distinguished professor from the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies in Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania. Originally conceived as an American research project, it soon grew to encompass all of North America. Today Anabaptists can be found in 17 of the 23 countries on the North American continent with 8,711 congregations, and an estimated membership of 809,845 baptized adults.

The succinct guide is intended for journalists, students, scholars, and others interested in understanding Mennonites, Amish, Brethren, and Hutterites in North America. The introductory overview includes a few tables and information on key terms. Throughout the book Kraybill places groups and practices on a tradition–assimilation continuum. Traditional groups assert moral authority through the community and find ways of separating themselves from society such as the way they dress. In contrast, assimilated groups are individualistic and blend into their surrounding culture. These two extremes impact religious rituals, church organization, leadership, gender roles, education, political involvement, acceptance of technology etc. It is not that assimilated groups have no tradition; rather they freely borrow from their surrounding culture rather than continuing with their natural traditions. Kraybill's framework is a refreshing departure from the common conservative-liberal model, equipped to describe practice and belief at the same time.

The encyclopedia portion is the largest part and is arranged alphabetically with helpful cross references to other entries. At the end of each entry is a short bibliography for more information. The entries cover theology, practices, groups over 5,000 members, and a few biographies and events. Overall, the book has a more socio-cultural approach than strictly historical. In choosing topics to cover, Kraybill attempted to keep in mind what people outside Anabaptist circles would like to know. A smattering of sample entries includes atonement, beards, cookbooks, computers, foot washing, Jacob Hutter, Mennonite

Foundation, jury duty, simplicity, shunning, World War II, and worship. The encyclopedia section is followed by a 35 page directory of current groups with 300 or more members organized geographically. A synopsis of the group's origins, size, and often where it fits on the traditional–assimilated spectrum is included. The last section is an 8-page table of groups large and small, organized geographically, and giving membership numbers. Finally, a 27-page bibliography and an index complete the book. The directory section would be greatly enhanced if the smaller groups only appearing in the 8-page table were also included in the directory. It is often these smallest groups that people know the least about.

The content is well researched, but a well-informed reader is often left wanting more. Researchers should remember the concise volume is intended as an overview or introduction to the subject. The cross referencing and bibliographic notes are helpful for further research.

One may wonder if there is a need for another encyclopedia after the five-volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (incorporated into the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) [www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org)), the four-volume *Brethren Encyclopedia*, and the projected Brethren in Christ encyclopedia. However in some cases, entries in these sources are dated and lengthy. Kraybill's book is current, compact, and easy to use, all in one volume.

So, next time you are vacationing in Jamaica, you can take along the *Concise Encyclopedia* in preparation to visit one of the sixteen local Mennonite churches. You can impress others with your knowledge about the origins and make up of the churches and their school, Maranatha School for the Deaf.

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Gene Stoltzfus, *Create Space for Peace: Forty Years of Peacemaking*. eds. Dorothy Friesen and Marilen Abesamis, Deerfield Beach, FL: TriMark Press, 2010. pp. xiii + 256, Softcover.

Gene Stoltzfus (1940-2010) is perhaps best known as a founder and long-serving director (1988-2004) of the Christian Peacemakers Teams (CPT). *Create Space for Peace* is a selection of his blog entries, speeches and letters. They are interspersed with testimonies and photographs celebrating Stoltzfus' life and contributions to nonviolent

activism. The present volume is co-edited by Stoltzfus' beloved widow and former Winnipegger, Dorothy Friesen, and Marilen Abesamis, a teacher at an all-women's college in the Philippines. Friesen helps to ensure the authenticity of the selections while Abesamis serves to remind us that Stoltzfus had sustained connections to peacemaking that predate the genesis of CPT.

Stoltzfus was born into a large Mennonite family in Aurora, Ohio. The family farmed and his father also served as a minister in the local church. Stoltzfus attended Eastern Mennonite High School and Eastern Mennonite College before graduating from Goshen Mennonite College in 1962. He spent the next five years working for the International Volunteer Service (IVS) in Vietnam, during which time a number of his colleagues were killed. In 1967, he helped organize a mass resignation from the IVS as a protest against the nature of the conflict. He returned to the US to lobby against the war in Washington, D.C. At this time he also completed a master's degree in Southeast Asian Studies at American University. By the fall of 1972, Stoltzfus was back in Northern Indiana, completing his Master's of Divinity degree from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, where he and Friesen were married in 1975. From 1973-76, Stoltzfus served as director of Mennonite Volunteer Services and continued his peace activist work. As we learn in this volume, he has worn many hats in addition to the distinctive CPT red cap. In fact, his overlapping commitment meant he almost missed his own wedding when a congressional tour of Cambodia that he was facilitating was unexpectedly extended.

From 1976 to 1979, Stoltzfus and Friesen served as joint directors of the Mennonite Central Committee programming in the Philippines. They lived very simply in the Philippines, including some time spent camped out in a derelict Church. The couple then toured the US and Canada, speaking on conditions in Philippines at Churches and Schools, before settling in Chicago. In Chicago, Stoltzfus spent five years as director of a centre that gave university students a semester-long experience of the reality of urban life for the less economically advantaged persons in the US. After the centre lost its funding, Stoltzfus spent the period from 1986-1988 working with various spirituality-oriented peace organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee and grassroots groups in the US and the Philippines.

By such biographical detail for the period prior to 1988, *Create Space for Peace* illustrates the wide variety of experiences which Stoltzfus brought to the table as the founding director of CPT, a post he held until his 2004 "retirement" to Fort Frances, Ontario. Although often citing retrospective insights from the experiences described previously, the majority of the writings collected in this volume were

penned this century. As a result, Stoltzfus carries forward his formative experience in a Mennonite pastoral context but at the same time emphasizes that the demands of his soul could not be met by settling in a small homogenous community. He felt that the early twenty first century was a good time to be a Mennonite because many people were interested in the nature of the denominational identity. As such, Stoltzfus argued that the time was ripe to share Anabaptist values of peace and justice worldwide. His reflections contained in this volume are thus grounded in numerous contexts. Insights emerge from time spent dialoguing during education and action initiatives in Columbia, indigenous communities in North America, the Philippines, Iraq, Vietnam, Cambodia, Haiti, Israel/Palestine, Mexico, Japan, the UK, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Canada and the US.

Sometimes, these opportunities for dialogue arose from Stoltzfus' physical appearance, as evidenced by *Create Space for Peace's* cover portrait, which mesmerized my young son. In this image, Stoltzfus displays an ample grey beard that became something of trademark during his time with CPT and into his "retirement". We learn that this beard was also a conversation starter in diverse contexts. Combined with Stoltzfus' body shape, it also provided an opportunity for creative non-violent action. On one occasion, Stoltzfus, accompanied by fellow peace activists, went into a Toys Us store in the US dressed as St. Nicholas. He and his colleagues then proceeded to use shopping carts to collect all the violence-themed toys as the manager, who eventually called the police, followed them around the store. The group then took the toys to the store's receiving department and asked that they be returned as defective indicating that violent toys were not the kind of thing that Santa Claus would allow to be delivered from his workshop.

Through such actions, the same man who embodied the CPT mantra by "getting in the way" of tanks in Israel/Palestine also attempted to get in the way of violence at home in Northern North America. For instance, he worked to heal racism and discrimination against aboriginal people near his home in Northwestern Ontario throughout his "retirement". At the time of his death, Stoltzfus was also planning to return to the Creech Air Force Base near Las Vegas where the US military flies Predator aircraft via remote control over Afghanistan. Perhaps Stoltzfus would have revived his "Scones not Drones" sign from an earlier demonstration to highlight the high cost to civilian life that accompanies high-technology warfare.

Throughout his life and in the reflections included in the volume, the influence of Stoltzfus' Mennonite faith is evident. His last blog entry, written the morning of his death, was motivated by an encounter in the Netherlands with an old edition of *The Martyr's Mirror* while on a speaking tour of Europe. The entry tied together Stoltzfus' readings in

his youth and retirement with his life's vocation to peace. In this essay, he sought to synthesize the ancient sense of a martyr as a "witness to truth" with reference to his work for peace, justice and an end to torture in the Philippines and Iraq.

Such a high quality synthesis, which is a recurring phenomenon throughout these writings, makes this volume valuable reading. It is well written and refreshingly crisp in its prose, a remarkable feat, especially given the complex subject matter covered. The nature of the text further allows Stoltzfus' creativity, spirituality and peace witness to be accessed by a diverse readership. As such, I will most certainly be using stories and insights gleaned from *Create Space for Peace* in my religion and nonviolence course next year.

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Leo Driedger, *At the Forks: Mennonites in Winnipeg*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010. pp. 473. Softcover, \$29.95.

When a handful of Mennonite families began to meet to worship in Winnipeg in 1906, there was no hint that the city would one day become a major hub of Mennonite institutional and cultural activity. Since mid-century, however, the population of Canadian Mennonites has shifted significantly from rural to urban areas, and Winnipeg, asserts sociologist Leo Driedger, is now home to more Mennonites than any city in the world. With *At the Forks*, Driedger, a prolific author, a professor emeritus at the University of Manitoba and a resident of the city for nearly fifty years, aims to describe what Winnipeg Mennonites are doing and how they became an urban people. He finds evidence of changing lifestyles, norms, and religious beliefs, but also of a continued commitment to Anabaptist values that has not only survived but been invigorated by the opportunities of the urban environment.

The book opens with a section titled "Heritage Remembered and Challenged," beginning with a short chapter that emphasizes the urban roots of Dutch Anabaptism and the experience of Mennonites in cities in Prussia, Poland, and southern Russia (Ukraine). After demonstrating that urbanism has always been part of Mennonite history, Driedger proceeds to discuss the urbanization of Mennonites in Canada generally, and its effects. The third chapter focuses on Mennonite beginnings in Winnipeg, describing the early Mennonite Brethren missions in the city's North End, the arrival of migrants from Russia in the 1920s and

after, and the inflow of rural *Kanadier*, especially after the Second World War.

Part II deals with Mennonite churches, schools, and media – institutions that helped Mennonites in Winnipeg put down roots and nurture their ethno-religious identity. The proliferation of churches is outlined chronologically and by conference, with an emphasis on factors influencing church growth (missions, migration, church planting, etc.). Driedger notes that the city's forty-five Mennonite churches include a diversity of theological beliefs and worship styles, and reports that growth patterns have recently leveled off, but otherwise leaves these subjects for future study. The chapter on schools argues that Winnipeg's Mennonite colleges followed a trajectory from education for church leadership toward education for the marketplace, and concludes from surveys of high school, college, and seminary students that Mennonite schooling fosters Anabaptist-Mennonite values and religious practices. The chapter on mass media argues that media access and use generally is associated with indicators of modernization and the weakening of distinctive Mennonite beliefs and behaviour. However, Driedger's description of the many Winnipeg-based Mennonite periodicals, and involvement with radio and television production, suggests that Mennonite media have also encouraged ingroup communication while providing avenues for engagement with larger society.

Part III describes Mennonite vocational activity. Driedger outlines important Winnipeg Mennonite entrepreneurial accomplishments and considers how Anabaptist principles have modified the individualistic ethic of capitalism. The chapter on professions finds that Mennonite professionals are open to the larger society and political action, and are more engaged with social problems than rural farmers. The chapter on service catalogues the many ways Mennonites have provided care for members of their own group and for others, from girls' homes in the 1920s for Mennonite domestic servants, to the establishment of Concordia Hospital and care homes for the elderly, to the various programs of the Mennonite Central Committee and the Mennonite conferences.

Cultural activity is the focus of the book's final section. Surveys and interviews conducted with Mennonite musicians, creative writers, and visual artists are the basis for some of the most compelling insights into the tensions within the Mennonite community. Leading Mennonite musicians express concern that Mennonite musical activity remain grounded in the church and oriented toward serving the religious community rather than individualistic expression. Mennonite writers, Driedger argues, display in their work a preoccupation with home – in its physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and intellectual



dimensions – and describe experiences of ostracism by the Mennonite community stemming from their critical perspective and rejection of aspects of Mennonite tradition. Mennonite visual artists reflect some of the same feelings of marginalization and discomfort with the perceived narrowness of Mennonite culture and beliefs. While many have left the church or no longer consider themselves religiously Mennonite, Driedger sees spiritual dimensions to their work, and evidence of certain Anabaptist values.

Driedger offers no clearly stated thesis, but beneath the surface his analysis is unified by the idea that Winnipeg might confirm the notion, suggested by Paul Peachey, that “the freedom and diversity of the city make it a better setting for the believers’ church than does the closed rural community” (44). Explicit engagement with this theme could have been provocative and fruitful. Instead, many chapters introduce different theoretical models and perspectives, which in some cases seem superfluous to the apparent purpose of the book. Chapter 2, for instance, complicates a useful overview of Mennonite urbanization in Canada by organizing it around a discussion of the author’s “Mennonite metro model” of urban dominance over rural hinterlands.

Greater analytical clarity would result from the definition of certain concepts, such as the process of modernization. The term Mennonite also calls for delineation. Evidently Driedger understands it as both ethnically and religiously defined, but the relationship between these two poles is unclear. Artists, for example, who do not consider themselves part of the Mennonite faith community are described as Mennonites because they self-identify as Mennonites culturally, yet references to demographic decline based on census numbers would appear to endorse a religious definition – or at least imply the validity of multiple definitions. The entire issue of Mennonite group identity, which Driedger has studied extensively, is sidelined in this book.

Other topics might have been explored (e.g., questions about Mennonite youth) but overall the book presents a well-developed portrait of the Winnipeg Mennonite population and its institutions. One of the book’s main weaknesses is that it recycles too much material from the author’s previously published articles and books, without doing enough to bring it up to date or to make it fit as part of a single study. Not only does this appear to have predetermined Driedger’s approach to several topics, but it also results in unnecessary repetitions and anachronisms (e.g., references to the General Conference and the *Mennonite Reporter*). A more rigorous editing process would have caught these errors, as well as numerous typographical mistakes, factual inaccuracies, and incorrect references and missing bibliographic entries. It is also important to recognize that most of the book’s statistical data on Mennonite attitudes, values, and behaviour comes from the 1989

Church Member Profile II, administered across North America, and that many of the interviews with Mennonite musicians, writers, artists, and business people are at least a decade old.

Despite its flaws, this book is likely to remain an important reference for students and researchers for years to come. Its clear organization, presentation of statistics, and comprehensiveness make it valuable resource.

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