

Book Reviews

Reviews of Fiction and Poetry

David Bergen, *The Age of Hope*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2012. Pp. 287. Hardcover, \$27.99.

David Bergen's most recent novel, *The Age of Hope*, begins with a firecracker of an opening line: "Hope Plett would certainly have married her first love if he hadn't died in a plane crash minutes after flying at a low altitude over her house." After killing off his protagonist's boyfriend in the opening sentence, Bergen takes the next three hundred pages to chronicle the remainder of Hope's eventful life, much of which takes place in the small Mennonite town of Eden, Manitoba: her abbreviated training as a nurse in Winnipeg, cut short in 1950 with her marriage to the indefatigable Roy Koop, owner of a car dealership in Eden; the birth and occasionally difficult youth of their four children; an ambivalent brush with 1970s feminism (in which she briefly mistakes Betty Friedan for her neighbor, Betty Friesen); a nervous breakdown and hospitalization in a mental health facility; and a late-life move to Winnipeg. The novel stands on well-worn ground in Canadian literature, both as a careful examination of the so-called "ordinary" lives of post-war women in small towns, and as an exploration of Mennonite life in southern Manitoba. Bergen is one of Canada's finest writers and more than capable of making such material his own, but *The Age of Hope* never approaches the rarified air of Munro or Lawrence, nor does

it manage to be as consistently captivating as Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* or as incisive as Birdsell's *The Agassiz Stories*. Bergen's latest novel is an engaging read and a compelling portrait of a complex figure, but it is not to be counted among his finest work.

The Age of Hope is separated into five chapters, each designated as a distinct "Age" in Hope's life. Bergen's decision to break the novel into clearly delineated sections – The Age of Innocence, The Age of Despair, The Age of Profit, The Age of Longing, and The Age of Hope – reflects the episodic structure of the larger narrative, which tells Hope's story through closely observed portraits of key moments in her life. At its best, this structure showcases how assured and restrained Bergen's writing has become, with sharply defined experiences etched through a pithy sentence or compact paragraph. For example, Hope's early romances rarely get more than a sentence or two, but in Bergen's hands, this is enough tell us much about both the failed suitor and Hope herself. Similarly, when Roy's once-prosperous car dealership goes bankrupt, Bergen lays bare the community's unspoken equation of wealth and piety through a series of perfectly crafted vignettes. In fact, many of the best passages in the novel – including a couple of lengthy and beautifully crafted sections in the uneven final chapter – are self-contained enough to stand on their own as short stories.

Like much of Bergen's fiction, *The Age of Hope* is marked by a number of metafictional elements. Hope's daughter writes a story loosely based on Hope's life, a fairly conventional story-within-a-story trope that Bergen uses to raise and address a set of concerns that might ostensibly be leveled at a novel about a 1950s Mennonite housewife: that her life is unremarkable, uninteresting, and thus unworthy of fiction, and so on. While these are rather dated and demonstrably false claims, they are foregrounded in such a way that they shine a light on what is, for me, one of the novel's limitations. Far from the "plain life" we are promised (or cautioned about?) in the opening pages, Hope's story proves to be packed full of events that would have been extraordinary in the life of a post-war rural Mennonite. There are boyfriends who die in plane crashes, abandoned children, and nervous breakdowns that result in shock therapy. There is adultery, abortion, drug-use, and jail time. There are Olympians, lesbians, and French lovers. Although none of these elements are presented sensationally, the novel's episodic structure serves to emphasize the exceptional nature of each event – a point underscored but not resolved by Hope's expressed fear that her daughter's account of her life "will be too episodic" because her "life was plotless." Novels certainly do not need to be dominated by plot, but the cumulative effect of this litany of storylines is to distract from Bergen's nuanced exploration of Hope's interior life, which is where the novel is at its most compelling.

Readers of this journal will likely be interested in the novel's exploration of Mennonite life, and indeed, *The Age of Hope* draws substantial aesthetic tension from Hope's attempts to negotiate a period of rapid change in Canadian life through her deeply conservative heritage. Moreover, Eden looks suspiciously like Steinbach: overwhelmingly Mennonite, fifty miles north of the border, east of Winnipeg, and with a booming automobile sales business. "Eden," of course, is also the name of a real mental health facility in Winkler, Manitoba, and by renaming Steinbach "Eden," and then naming his fictional mental health hospital "Winkler," Bergen manages to invoke (and playfully pathologize) both of the predominantly Mennonite cities of southern Manitoba. However, the Mennonite contexts and towns remain in the background of what is ultimately a psychological portrait of an individual, rather than a commentary on a community.

The Age of Hope novel remains an enjoyable and rewarding novel. It bears many of the hallmarks that have made Bergen's work so memorable to date, including the taut, deceptively simple prose that deftly weaves emotional worlds while evoking a palpable sense of place; the flawed but deeply human characters who wrestle equally with the mundane and the metaphysical; and a playfully self-conscious narrative. Unfortunately, the novel adds up to somewhat less than the sum of its parts.

Robert Zacharias
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Shirley Kurtz, *Sticking Points*. Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2011. Pp. 261. Softcover, \$18.95.

Shirley Kurtz's first novel delves into questions of faith, doubt and discernment. It portrays a woman's dogged quest to take ownership of her convictions.

Intended as the first in an occasional fiction series from the Dream-Seeker Books imprint of Cascadia Publishing House, *Sticking Points* situates itself firmly in Mennonite territory in both context and theme, and assumes an audience familiar with pacifism and prayer coverings. To some extent the story fits into the well-established genre in which a conservative Mennonite woman grapples with her people's beliefs or customs. Here, though, the protagonist isn't rebelling, but looking for theological engagement.

Anna Schlonneger constantly struggles with doubts. As a writer she has a terrible time silencing her inner critic – the voice that says *this*

is *crap* as soon as the words are on the page. As a Christian she longs for an unwavering faith, but constantly comes up against apparent contradictions in her church's theology and in the Bible itself.

As the novel opens, Anna feels she has regained her footing after her trials of the previous winter. After writing some well-received articles for her denominational paper, Anna had submitted a piece called "A Two-faced God?!" that described her difficulty reconciling the violence in the Bible, especially God calling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, with the command not to kill. The editor's rejection of the piece for being too emotional and melodramatic brought on a crisis from which it took some time to recover. Now she's trying to write a book about how she became mired in doubt in the first place and how she recovered. In the process she finds the old questions resurfacing, insistent as ever.

A strong point of this novel is its sense of place. Anna's rural, evangelical, somewhat conservative church community in what must be Pennsylvania (although it's never named as such), is real and recognizable. Food plays a large part in establishing the setting, and Kurtz describes it all in loving, voluptuous detail: garden produce, grocery-store hauls, holiday dinners, and regional specialties like red-beet eggs and grape pie.

Food is a source of satisfaction and pleasure for Anna. She cans tomatoes and tomato juice, she pickles hot peppers, she goes into rhapsodies over a really good baked squash. She wonders whether Cain might have pleased God if he'd put in the effort and offered up a really fine batch of chow-chow. But food is also a major trigger for anxiety. Anna obsesses over botulism in canned produce, *E. coli* on lettuce, and the risk of mad cow disease from hot dogs. She goes as far as to dump an entire batch of her pickled peppers because of a dubious concern over their safety.

Anna is a fully-formed, believable character, sometimes endearing but often exasperating for her obsessiveness and constant self-deprecating remarks. The narrative is candid and down-to-earth. Unfortunately, though, it's not as compelling as it could be. One reason is that the narrative structure works against a sense of immediacy for the reader. Too often, the development of Anna's thinking is shown, not through direct flashbacks, but through her re-reading and reflecting on stories she wrote many years before. Often, too, her struggle with the writing process overshadows her struggles with her faith.

In a few scenes we do get a more visceral sense of what Anna's going through, scenes that show just how unsettling it can be when Bible stories grab hold of one's imagination. Anna, alone in the woods, sees a glint of sunlight on a patch of wild raspberry canes and for a moment sees the ram in the thicket, the ram Abraham sacrificed in place of his son. This brings back her arguments with that story, to the point where

she fears the return of her old dilemma. A few chapters later, Anna and her husband, Wade, butcher a steer with some friends. The next day in church, Anna is unable to sing “When I survey the wondrous cross” because images of the soldier’s spear piercing Jesus’ muscle and sinew come too vividly to mind. I wished for more moments like this, and a bit less discussion.

A couple of narrative threads are not satisfactorily tied up. In the incident with the pickled peppers we’re led to expect that Wade will learn Anna’s thrown them out and will be upset, but he never does find out. There’s also a recurring conversation between Anna and Wade about a possible marital infidelity among their church friends. In the end Anna simply says she will stop being judgmental, but her statement feels abrupt and unsupported.

Anna’s questions do not get resolved. As she writes in an imaginary letter to her editor at *Gospel Truth* magazine: “So yes, now my quarrel with the Abraham-and-Isaac story is just the tip of the iceberg. My confidence in God’s higher purposes has only grown shakier.” (192) It’s not fair to say the book ought to have more of a resolution, because the whole point of Anna’s story is that the sticking points often remain sticky. Still, I finished the book wishing her character had developed just a bit more.

All the same, Anna does become bold enough to ask, if only to herself, whether any Christian shouldn’t “use the frail, God-given wits they were born with” (225). What’s more, she begins to write more easily – which may be as much of a resolution as any writer can ask for.

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Karl Schroeder, *The Sunless Countries*. New York: Tor/Tom Doherty Books, 2009. Pp. 335. Hardcover, \$32.99.

Karl Schroeder, *Ashes of Candescence*. New York: Tor/Tom Doherty Books, 2012. Pp. 381. Hardcover, \$30.99.

Maybe you believed you would never live to see the day when Mennonite, steampunk and space opera were used together in a sentence. Well, that day, like 13.0.0.0.0 in the Mayan calendar, has arrived. Karl Schroeder’s Mennonite credentials were examined in a 2007 JMS interview. And his five-volume tale *Virga*, which ends with these two books, merits both adjectives. Is this the end of the world, or the beginning of an exciting new era?

I cracked open the series' first volume, *Sun of Suns* (2006), with hopes raised to low earth orbit by Schroeder's 2005 gem *Lady of Mazes*. That novel explored the conventions (and info tech) that allowed diverse communities to use the same physical space simultaneously. It was a novel with a distinctly Canadian-urban voice, and one that provided food for thought as well as an enjoyable story. There were echoes of these themes in his new world of Virga, an air-filled but gravity-less shell built in a distant star system thousands of years in our future and the story's past. Virga was inhabited by descendants of its human builders, who had forgotten there was a universe outside their sphere of refuge. Their existence depended on the sphere's central fusion engine, called Candesce, but a series of artificial micro-suns supplemented its heat and light in the sphere's middle regions. Each micro-sun enabled a mini-nation of town-wheels, whose gravity was generated by periodic rotation. Social and political life in these floating, contending city-states was baroque in its complexity, but material life was relatively simple. Virga sheltered a non-computerized society that relied on swords and semaphores, simple combustion engines and pedal-power. For the uninitiated, this is the steampunk element: a mixture of neo-Victorian aesthetics and technology with contemporary mores and problems.

Despite the novelty of this setting and the skill with which Schroeder unspooled his story lines, I struggled to find engaging ideas and dilemmas amidst the non-stop action. This was a revenge quest, I thought after the first volume, a galactic romance after the second volume, and a mixture of both buried in layers of intrigue after the third. Though occupying a small stage, the series' characters were operatically sized. They included the teen Hayden Griffin who, grown up by volume four, became a famous sun-lighter, as well as his adversary Admiral Chaison Fanning and the Admiral's indomitable wife Lady Venera. Their stories were the focus of the early novels, and important threads in the final two. Aubri Mahallan, a woman seeking the key to control Candesce, possibly on behalf of mysterious forces from outside Virga, had a central role in the first novel, but the threat she represented wasn't explained until the third novel and not fully revealed until the fifth. Antaea Argyre, a member of Virga's fabled Home Guard, sought to defend her world, but also to find her sister. This comingling of the personal and the epic occurs in all of the series' plots and sub-plots.

Schroeder's Virga world is fantastic, but logically and scientifically coherent, as is the threat that wants to invade it. He respects this tenet of sci fi writing while avoiding the genre's hackneyed conventions, ones that made bad futuristic writing and space opera synonyms when the term was first introduced in the 1940s (Hartwell & Cramer, 2006). Schroeder's "screaming-cool steampunk tech," as Cory Doctorow calls

it on volume five's dust jacket, serves his story, rather than vice versa. The series is an education in celestial mechanics and a treatise on a possible future with artificial intelligence, but one mercifully free of information dumps. It is a swash-buckling adventure with reasonably complex characters, and one in which the world's fate rests in the hands of a history tutor, a young woman with the courage to talk to the unimaginably Other.

This tutor, Leal Heironyma Maspeth, is introduced in volume four, *The Sunless Countries*, where Schroeder's saga finally took a turn for the interesting. An inhuman voice terrifies travellers in the air-ways around Sere, a mini-nation adrift in winter, the dark and frigid zone near Virga's skin. Pushed from the precarious security of her university job by a government that decides historical fact in popular referenda, Leal encounters the voice and converses with it. By volume five, *Ashes of Candescence*, she has learned that it and Artificial Nature, which Aubri Mahallan acted for, come from outside Virga. Leal must convince herself and then other Virgans that the voice is a safer ally, despite its radical incorporeality, than Artificial Nature, which appears comfortably human. Along the way, Schroeder had me thinking about research that suggests humans now have more in common with ants as social beings than we do with other primates, and that the bacteria in us is what makes our lives possible. I also worried over the flowers he foresees in Artificial Nature: "Woe to the gardener tried to dig up a box tulip. At the first cut of the trowel their planetary mesh network would go on high alert. Tulip sirens would go off all over the neighborhood. Brain-hacked wasps would converge on you. The tulip consortium's AIs would harass you....Their shell companies and corporations would hire lawyers and sue you. If you made it indoors unscathed, the tulips would bomb the other flowers in your garden until you came out again and promised them reparations" (2012: 210).

Schroeder, who recently earned a Master of Design in Strategic Foresight (I'm not making this up) from the Ontario College of Art and Design, says his fiction is aspirational rather than an attempt to predict the future. "We seem to do everything about our future except try to design it....I believe that while warning people of dire possibilities is responsible," he writes, "providing them with something to aspire to is even more important" (Schroeder as quoted in Doctorow, 2012). His Virga tale, though a great story and a masterly bit of world-inventing, doesn't wind up with things that inspire me: Antaea Argyre might be the deity in a new religion, Lady Venera is traumatized by impending motherhood, Leal returns to university teaching, and Hayden Griffin lifts his face to the sun. The era of Mennonite, steampunk space opera needs to keep unfolding.

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Miriam Rudolph, *David's Trip to Paraguay, the Land of Amazing Colours*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2011. Pp. 32. Hardcover, \$22.

Lisa Weaver, with illustration and design by Julie Kauffman and Judith Rempel Smucker, *On the Zwieback Trail: A Russian Mennonite Alphabet of Stories, Recipes and Historic Events*. Winnipeg: CMU Pres, 2011. Pp. 72. Hardcover, \$25.

How will the next generation of children connect to the rich and complex story of the Russian Mennonite past, particularly now that many of the individuals who experienced the formative events of the early 20th century are no longer there to recount their experiences directly?

Two new children's books take very different approaches to this question, and both make significant aspects of Mennonite identity accessible to young readers. In *David's Trip to Paraguay, the Land of Amazing Colours/Davids Reise in das Land der vielen Farben*, visual artist Miriam Rudolph lovingly narrates and illustrates her grandfather's journey from his childhood home in Manitoba, the land of "ice and snow," to Paraguay, a distant place that beckons to the adventurous youngster. Winning the Best Illustrated Book category of the 2012 Manitoba Book Awards, this imaginative rendering of a childhood recollection is delightful in its celebration of the particular even as it engages universal themes of migration and discovery.

The trajectory of David's journey is conveyed through a simply worded yet evocative text – both in English and German – accompanied by Rudolph's illustrations. A sinuous, continuous train track leads to the ocean, which joins the mouth of the majestic La Plata River, from

which branches the earthen road that finally leads David to the place he immediately recognizes as his new home amidst the “intense green” and the “blossoming trees” of the tropical landscape in “PARAGUAY, the land where everything was colourful.” The idiosyncratically observed details, characteristic of a child’s perspective, express the beauty and magic of David’s world, and lend immediacy and veracity to the tale.

Rudolph herself followed the opposite trajectory to the one recounted here, moving from Loma Plata to Winnipeg, where she studied fine arts and established herself as a visual artist. Thus, her familiarity with the landscapes of Manitoba and Paraguay are unsurprising. The grand cities of New York and Buenos Aires are mentioned, but these are fleeting visions that soon recede on the horizon. Far more tangible for David are the flying fish in the ocean or the magical sights along the Paraguay River, including crocodiles, floating islands of water hyacinths, and “the dreamy city of Asunción with its whitewashed houses, the red tile roofs and a white palace.”

While David experiences his trip as a grand adventure, readers learn through the biographical notes that “the old steamer called the *Vandijk*” sank on its way back from South America. The images themselves also hint at a reality that does not form a part of David’s childhood understanding; in Puerto Casado he wonders at the exotic cacti that grow “as big as trees with dark red cactus pears and orange blossoms.” It is Rudolph’s deft hand which subtly pencils in the outline of a cemetery, far off on a hilltop, testifying to the typhoid that raged there.

Throughout the story David is firm in his conviction that he is “going the right way.” The trees and even the buildings function as directional signposts that seem to encourage him to keep moving *onward*, pointing him in the direction of his journey until he is contentedly nestled in the warm, glowing colours of the quilt-like garden surrounding the house that is his new Paraguayan “zu Hause.”

Rudolph brings her grandfather’s story to life with whimsical, pseudo-naive landscapes that unfold as the reader follows David towards the luminous, even flamboyant, scenes that render Paraguay as a kind of bountiful paradise, thereby deviating from the oft-told narrative of hardship at the end of this particular journey. Strikingly rich hues saturate the pages, depicting a vibrant southern idyll evocative of the magical realist tradition for which the region is known.

Lisa Weaver, Julie Kauffman and Judith Rempel Smucker assemble a delightful collection of images, citations and facts to create a composite portrait of Russian Mennonite identity in *On the Zwieback Trail: A Russian Mennonite Alphabet of Stories, Recipes and Historic Events*. The book does not claim to be definitive or comprehensive, but rather suggests, through its nonlinear structure, the variety and complexity

of Russian Mennonite experience. In organizing the content around the alphabet its creators entice readers to dip into this rich history.

Lisa Weaver, not herself a Russian Mennonite by birth, is an admirable guide who highlights many salient features of this cultural group. In the foreword she notes: "This alphabet sketch is both an invitation to enter, and an expression of appreciation for, the deep wells of knowledge carried by so many around us." Readers will no doubt find it difficult to resist taking her up on this invitation as they recognize numerous cultural touchstones of Russian Mennonite identity ("B" is for "Borscht" and "V" is for "Verenike," of course). The images and excerpts that accompany each entry are drawn from libraries, museums and heritage centres around the world, and reference an eclectic array of artefacts, documents, recipes, quotations, hymns and maps. These diverse bits and pieces, odds and ends, authentically conjure the flavour of Russian Mennonite being, even if readers may quibble over the contents just as they do over borscht recipes. Material drawn from several centuries' worth of history mingles and collides on these pages so that leafing through them feels akin to peeking into a cluttered kitchen drawer where the most essential, and at times unusual, items are kept.

Entries range from a number of unifying, inclusive terms such as "Anabaptist" and "Nonviolence" to the central figures of Menno Simons, Jacob Höppner, and Catherine the Great. Naturally, the culturally specific topics of the Dniepr, *Faspa*, Kroeger clocks, the Chortitza Oak and *Sängerfest* are all represented here. Accompanying these are several recipes for traditional foods, and texts of prayers and songs (the latter reproduced in English and German). The whole is seasoned with a healthy smattering of *Platt*.

The visually rich pages tempt readers of all ages to peruse, to pause, to delve and explore. Here are historic images, both familiar and new. The elegant calligraphy adorning a hand-drawn map of the Dniepr River appears, as does the handwritten Zwieback recipe of a Lena Woelke Rempel. Some entries blend historical facets of Russian Mennonite identity with its more contemporary expressions. The pages dedicated to "Nonviolence," for example, include both the Alternative Service in Russia and a March on Washington during the Vietnam War.

At its best, the book represents a gathering of ideas, objects, events and traditions that will incite readers to reflect and perhaps even develop their own personal alphabet ("A" for "Arbus"?). By necessity fragmentary and incomplete, the volume aspires to piece together in an accessible format a complex identity full of ambiguities, nuances and contradictions.

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Sarah Klassen, *Monstrance*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2012. Pp.118. Softcover, \$17.

In *Monstrance*, Sarah Klassen's new book of poetry, there are many ways of travelling and seeing the world and discovering what lies beneath the surface of things. There are trips and pilgrimages to faraway places. The Baltic. The Sea of Galilee. Egypt. The desert. Sometimes the reader is asked to wander into a museum in Vilnius, then trek through the lake region of Northern Manitoba. Songbirds reveal truths about nature. Artifacts reveal truths about the past. The potter's work reveals the truth about what's hidden inside inert matter. Surfaces lie. Nothing is what it seems. Everything exists behind the outer layers, the masks that are presented to the observer. But there are clues, ways of uncovering the truth. Perception is the key. Sometimes truth springs out through a sudden gust of wind, a relation that is noticed between the shimmering northern Manitoba landscape and a passing bird, the last breath of a dying friend in a hospital, the secrets hidden inside the walls of the home one inhabits, underneath the furniture, in what reverberates through the silences of dusk or dawn.

In *Monstrance*, animals and birds have as much a say in the uncovering of the meanings of life as the digger's hand might have in the unearthing of old bones or treasures. The central image of the book can be found in the potter's manipulation of clay, the cradling of the emerging forms. There is mystery at work here, something akin to the sacred quality of the monstrance itself, a vessel in religious services to contain sacred matter. In the process, hands, like those on the cover of the book, palms open, offer up vestiges of what has been transformed, remnants of what has existed and is about to take form. In the church service, the same offering takes place. As if by magic, the vessel of offering has been invested with sacred qualities.

The book is about discovery and revelation. Strangely enough, though, it is never in the simple observation of people, animals or objects that this revelation occurs. One can travel the world, trek up mountains, travel to the farthest reaches of the world, spend forty days and forty nights in the desert, camp out in winter in the deliriously cold reaches of northern Manitoba and learn very little about the relevance of the surrounding world, the past, nature itself, about the meaning of history, events, about one's own life. In fact, truth only shines out when one allows imagination to intercede. Observation and thought can do nothing more than take in what is presented or discovered. Mere facts are then recorded, processed. It is only in the offering up of what has been unearthed that the process of transformation takes place. Vestiges are nothing but inert things, as is the landscape, the sound of a dog

barking, the cry of a gull. Only the poetic eye can assemble the vestiges, the remnants, the echoes, the reverberations of wind, the dying breath of a woman, the pain felt by someone being tortured, the misery felt by a whole people in one part of the world, the fear experienced by an individual in other circumstances in another part of the world. It is from the perspective of the poetic imagination at work that things truly come to life, through the prism of the metaphor that everything is contained inside walls or landscapes or wide-open spaces or small enclosures. Only thus do they gain meaning, are they invested with significance.

Which brings us back to the monstrance, a vessel containing small, inert objects which, through sacred transformation and a system of belief which invests symbols with transcendent powers: all surfaces become openings, all matter is capable of freeing up the spirit, words and languages reverberate, free up the body and the mind, preparing them for the gift and for the sacrament of love.

Monstrance is an offering, one woman's spiritual journey, one that does not lead to a retreat or an island but, through awareness, opens her up more and more to the world around her and to the deep significance of her relationship to people, to objects, to what defines the big things in one's life as well as the small ones. Through her awareness of all that contains her, she finds as much meaning in a passing gust of wind as in a turning point in history, as much resonance in the hand caked in clay, in the act of creating an object of beauty, as in the shape of the created object. It is a book about what shines out when one travels as far as one can to the outer reaches of the world as well as to the inner reaches of the mind and body in order to find the remnants of what life is or, simply, to experience, good and bad, what life has to offer.

The book itself is an offering, a gift, something to be cherished, an object of beauty, a metaphor, an act of faith, words that reverberate, images that shine out, a beautiful object.

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Julie Cadwallader-Staub, *Face to Face*. Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2010. Pp. 95. Softcover, \$12.95.

"Death be not proud," John Donne wrote defiantly in his well-known sixteenth century poem, and in the twentieth century Dylan Thomas echoed that defiance, beginning one poem with "And Death Shall Have No Dominion," while in another he advised his father to "Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

Twenty-first century poets are no less preoccupied with death and loss: Julie Cadwallader-Staub's debut collection, *Face to Face*, is just one example. Her poems, however, although they constitute a wife's reflection on her husband's struggle with cancer and chemo treatment and his subsequent death, avoid defiance and instead celebrate life. While not passive in the face of suffering and death, the narrator refrains from rage and self-pity. Titles like "Grief" and "coma" are balanced, and arguably outweighed, by titles like "Hope," "Joy" and "Gratitude." Grief and courage come through as equally authentic. Fear is trumped by faith that is not merely a belief in the possibility of survival, but much more a conviction that life continues to have meaning even during the trying process of treatment and medication and even after the loss of a spouse. The poetry is as uncomplicated and genuine as such faith.

Cadwalladar-Staub's voice is mature and confident. She disarms her reader with domestic imagery deftly employed, for instance to steer the poem away from sentimentality:

Me with a paper-cut
 You with cancer
 It's hard to get any sympathy around here. ("Paper-cut, 16)

or to indicate the passing of time:

I hang clothes on the line
 ...
 marveling at how
 the man underwear disappeared
 and now it's been years; ("Empty Nest" 84)

In "Buffalo Don't Care" cancer cells are compared to a herd of buffalo under whose "stampeding hooves...nothing [is] left/ but silent, trampled plains." (28)

Domestic tasks – baking rhubarb pie, paying the mortgage, fixing the doorbell – and the natural world – bees entering flowers, the sun rising, lively chipmunks – provide the vivid, sensual images that inform the poet's work. They are also a source of distraction and even comfort for the grieving wife.

With their rural background and quiet reflectiveness, these poems evoke the writing of Jane Kenyon, the late American poet whose work Cadwalladar-Staub obviously knows and appreciates. In "Let Morning Come," she is responding to Kenyon's well-known "Let Evening Come," insisting poignantly and urgently that:

To the bulb aching in the ground:
 Now, now is the time for rising.
 Now, now is the time to flower. (65)

The narrator, no “Pollyanna on Prozac” (28), has her feet planted solidly on the ground and is able to hold reality and hope in tension. In the last section the heightened poignancy of “the woosh/ of death’s fist/ when it nailed the guy/ right next to me” (80) is followed, in another poem, by milkweed opening to release “enough gossamer to catch the imagination and be carried away/ enough seed to land, to catch hold, to root, to grow.” (87)

The poems do not strain for effect; frequently the lines flow with a rhythm as natural as breathing. The poet’s voice is surprisingly mature and confident for a first book. Embedded in the plain recounting of trips to the hospital and the children’s music recitals, the reader will find occasional bits of wisdom:

But if grief formed my bones,
 Love created my flesh: (“How I survive” 52)

Ending with the line, “Anything is possible in this world,” (94) this hope-filled collection will be welcomed most by those who have had similar experiences with suffering and loss; but the honesty and clarity of the poems will appeal also to a wide readership.

Sarah Klassen
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Becca J. R. Lachman, *The Apple Speaks*. Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2012. Pp. 94. Softcover, \$12.95.

In this finely crafted, confident first book of poetry, Becca J.R. Lachman takes the imagery of the apple, of the garden, of women’s voices and makes it fresh. A musician and composer, Lachman brings her disciplined ear to lyric free verse in poems that are distillations of language with an expansive reach. In her poem, “Mozart Hands,” Lachman describes the physical challenge of piano playing: “So swallow-boned, my hands have learned nothing/ except to want a little more” These hands serve as a metaphor for the poems in the book, which are both compact but resonant. Fortunately, the poems stretch more readily than the hands to fit “the so much” the poet “wants to do.”

The tenth book of poetry in the DreamSeeker poetry series published by Cascadia Press, *The Apple Speaks* is beautifully designed and produced, with a voice to match. In the age of digital books, this is an object that is a pleasure to hold in the hand.

The book's four sections interweave landscapes from rural Ohio to Monrovia, Liberia, where Lachman's parents served as missionaries for a year. Underlying this global expanse are the particulars of the earth – wild mushrooms and late summer apples – of relationships with grandmother, parents, husband and other poets – and of the multiple dimensions of a life of faith and service nurtured by relationships. "You wanted this world," her mother affirms in the poem of that title.

The collection opens with a short section that includes a single poem in three parts, "Preludes." These poems set up a musical framework for the collection and develop metaphors from the natural world, in particular birds and trees:

No one else stopped open-
mouthed to listen,
but the tree in the park
was singing that warm day

in November, full of wrens
as small as men's thumbs. . .

The second section opens with a poem that gestures toward the unspoken customs that form the walls and boundaries of Mennonite congregations, which members must learn through experience. "Portrait of a Grandmother, 1949," tells a story from the poet's grandmother's life. While visiting her fiancé's congregation for the first time, she wore a white dress to church, only to discover that everyone else wore black. "No one warned her/ that morning at breakfast. Not even him."

Probing her own formation in a Mennonite congregation and family, Lachman portrays music-loving parents – a father who holds her close to the "tremor of his voice box" and a mother who allows her to press her hands on the mother's bare feet "as she pumped the stubborn pedals." The poet shows how the braid of love, faith, and music has continued in her own adventurous life in such poems as "A Mennonite Learns Tai Chi" and "A Mennonite Reads Plath at a National Mennonite Convention." In "Talking Poetry with an Amish Bishop," dedicated to the writer David Kline, she reveals her commitment as a writer to probing her rural Ohio origins and faith as fertile ground for new poems.

The third section features poems about her parents' service in Liberia, that models an expansion of the kernel of faith and service.

“My Mother as Minister of Music” evokes her mother’s need to express her faith in music beyond that of the demure Ohio Mennonite hymns and bell choir.

In Africa, God is deaf – the singers must
shout louder! One voice over another! And my mother
wails. My mother juts her arms into
the rafters. From that acorn in her heart,
she grows winding tiara branches, white and sharp
and longing for the sky.

Her father, whose compassion for a collie trapped in a barbed wire fence was witnessed by the poet as a terrified child left in a car seat, is equally drawn by the call of service, but the extreme effort it has cost him is revealed in “My Father Eats MacDonalds.” Lachman includes a persona poem, “Liberian Man, Survivor” and a poem of witness, “The Girl on Somalia Drive” in this section. These explorations of the Liberian setting, however, are less compelling than the poems that evoke the longing and fears of the daughter left behind.

The fourth and final section of the book celebrates the poet’s craft, a new marriage, and once again the anguish of releasing a loved one to answer the call of service. Here the title poem once again evokes the longing of the one who is left behind.

I did not ask
for this garden. It’s all rushed green
and waiting for a man who won’t
be here to see its full bearing.
He’s left me for God.

In “The Piano in Barrancabermeja,” she imagines her composer husband, a Christian Peacemaker Team reservist, in Colombia as on their one-year wedding anniversary. But in “Liftable Garden,” the poet writes about an exuberant attempt she and her husband make to save their first garden from a hailstorm, “A new husband, a new wife, awakened/ by the world.”

The theme of music-making is echoed in Lachman’s disciplined, lean free verse, alive to the power of cadence and breath. Lachman scores her poems for reading, and an alert reader can sense the palpable rhythms of phrases and line breaks. At the same time, the poems are anything but predictable – rather, they are a contemporary idiom with a respect for tradition and sometimes a sense of humor. The poet’s love of juxtaposition is apparent even in the titles. For instance, “A Confessional Carry-In” has famous poets bring potluck items to

a self-invited dinner party. “ ‘ . . . My heart’s in that one,’/ Ginsberg points to an old crock pot/ that’s just half full.” Wendell Berry, David Citino, Emily Dickinson, and Sylvia Plath weave their way through the collection as muses, teachers, presences. The reader senses that Lachman carries their company with her, yet she creates music distinctly her own.

It is rare in contemporary Mennonite poetry to find a book so explicit about the Anabaptist call to service, to love one’s neighbor across the globe, and yet so finely crafted as art. Lachman’s work is evidence of a new generation of Mennonite poets who are shaping a poetry that offers an expanded vision of faith, of what it means to be in the world as a Mennonite and an artist.

Ann Hostetler
Goshen College

Cheryl Denise, *What’s in the Blood*. Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2012. Pp. 115. Softcover, \$12.95.

In her second collection of poems, Cheryl Denise offers a richly nuanced portrayal of her domestic universe. The themes reflect the tensions of living out the simplicity of Mennonite tradition within the modern world. This is not to suggest that the tenor here is primarily dour – indeed, there is frequent whimsy and joy here. While Denise’s concerns are often those of the domestic sphere – the symbolic resonance of food and singing abound – they are grounded in a deep sense of the spiritual.

The first poem in the collection, “Toil and Grace,” might easily act as a thesis statement for the text as a whole. The quietly liturgical rhythms of the poem (“We love with our hands,/rebuilding after hurricanes”) emphasize the moment of grace that arrives at the end, when “we gather to sing . . . our hands quiet and still for this hour,/ our voices so sure of grace.” This is a dexterous move with which to make the reader receptive to some of the darker material here, since, in the poem immediately following, the speaker must struggle with the burden of forgiveness in the aftermath of the tragic deaths in the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania in 2006. This is followed by a poignant reflection (“Diminished”) on the pathos of visiting a senior’s home, from which the speaker seeks to “escape.” Both are written with unsentimental but powerfully moving diction. Elsewhere, the poems grapple with grief for the loss of a baby lamb and condemn environmental destruction.

However, Denise also ponders the joyful, sensual side of experience. Like B.C. poet Carla Funk, she explores the rural Mennonite experience as one of food, singing, and earthy farm encounters. The poems celebrate “slices of dark bread rich as redemption” (“Saving Maynard”), “raisin pies with crimp crusts” (“Grantsville Stockyards”) and “my mother’s recipe for chicken corn soup” (“Butchers”). There are recurrent markers of Mennonite culture here – the sacred nature of food and its abiding connection to community. In “Wanting to Sing Hymns,” the speaker addresses the tension between what is *assumed* to be “in the blood” (perfect pitch!) and what in fact emerges in lived experience:

Sometimes, when I’m alone, I start the day practicing
do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do
As if I’m an authentic Mennonite
getting ready for a day of work and gratitude.

The speaker compares her presumed lack of authenticity to her father’s talent: where he entertains widely, her singing will remain private, never “a gift.” Another poem speaks of “turning wild sweet rhythms in the sun” (“Light Waking: For Darlene”) which inscribes with nimble precision the sheer freedom of dance.

Elsewhere in the collection the focus is on “what’s in the blood” in the family sense – the inescapable dance of family and intimacy, rendered here in subtle tones that hint at suffering without feeling the need for blunt description. The title poem is a fine case in point: in it, Denise’s speaker traces the challenges of faith through three generations, finally arriving at her own wedding in a “navy knee-length dress” that is at once faithful to the desire not to be “ostentatious” but also to her individualism in the face of the traditions of her forebears, Great-Grandpa Daniel Horst and Great Uncle Osiah, rebellious in their own way. Perhaps that is the implicit message of the poems here – “what’s in the blood” includes a healthy dose of skepticism in the face of tradition, and suggests that the Mennonite desire to be *in* the world but not *of* it may be balanced by the sensual pleasures of raisin pie, of “turning wild sweet rhythms,” and raising one’s voice to God. One phrase in particular powerfully evokes this connection: “Lick the fingers of God/ He has been stirring love forever” (“Ways of Being”). The sensual and divine coalesce in the image of a divine Cook, thus embodying the lifeblood of this collection – Denise’s sense of the sacred inherent in simplicity.

Tom Penner
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Victor Enns, *Boy*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Hagios Press, 2012. Pp. 103. Softcover, \$17.95.

Victor Enns's latest book of poetry *Boy* is a work of memoir. The photograph of his family that illustrates the cover page invites the reader to understand the book as personal and autobiographical. *Boy* takes as its territory that period of childhood from the moment of first consciousness to beginnings of adolescence where one's life is very much circumscribed by family, school and one's local community.

The poems take the form of sharply focussed moments, events or vignettes, most no more than one page. They convey a sense of looking back, and of being able only from the distance of adulthood to put into words what was barely understood or impossible to face at the time.

Boy seems to run on two energies: the sense of constraint, rules and boundaries and with it strong feelings of sin and failure; and a sense of desire that encompasses both sexual and intellectual curiosity – a desire to cross over the line. The boy in the book, like its author, grows up in Gretna a small, remote, religious town by the Manitoba-United States border. Books are the boy's escape. He also lives vicariously through his glamorous older sister who goes to university in Winnipeg and seems to be able to do all sorts of free-minded things like go out with boys of other faiths and read forbidden books.

The poems in *Boy* progressively move outward from physical dependence on the boy's mother, from his father's garden to his father's house (with its many rooms), to school, and the community and his eventual departure from Gretna. The book is full of references to God, the Bible and sin, especially in the early section. However, this language is most often undercut with scepticism and humour, as when he echoes John in "Learning to Read": "in the beginning/all there is/ is blur", or more pointedly in "Salvation": "I knew early on, my Messiah/ was the word...." He continues:

... I read
my way out of place
as small as the eye
of a needle and as full
of itself as a bag of dirt

Ironically or perhaps understandably some of the most lyrical and compelling lines in the poems have the resonance of the Bible and hymns, as in "The Golden Hour," which ends with "my breath calls water birds to this dry land" or when he describes the well as being "deeper than my father's soul" or when he refers to the juice of rasp-

berries as “sweet as the sin of television”, or more ominously when the boy remembers his Bible verses and “the fear of men/ on the water.”

The series of poems from “Beggar” to “The Shoes of the Fisherman” deal with the boy’s experience of sexual abuse and its aftermath. They bring out the boy’s sense of abandonment, which he understands as the consequence of previous sins, even if the speaker from his adult distance is able to joke “*but here is where/ we could really use/ a goat*”. It is clear to the boy that it is his mortal father not God who comes to rescue him when afterwards he rows too far out into the lake and can’t get home.

I really enjoyed the early poems that deal with the house, its garden and hayloft and the rooms in the house. It is interesting that the boy never describes his own room until much later when he claims the rec room in their new house as his own, as if he does not differentiate himself from his family and sees all the rooms as his.

The portraits of the mother and father in these early poems are very strong. In particular “Burn the House Down” conveys the strong connection the boy has with his mother, the desire he feels that seems to consume her in flame, and “Summer School” which evokes the quiet companionship he could have with his preacher father. All of the sister-muse poems are wonderful. “Johnny Cash”, one of the longer poems, unfolds in comic style the strange religion of a wild and seemingly independent Alberta cousin: “*let’s thank/ God for shotguns/ and Johnny Cash.*” Enns’ poetry fights any lyricism that one could associate with his religious upbringing by using humour, slang, lean lines and even at times prosaic language. In *Boy* he succeeds at recreating a sense of time and place about which he has complicated and conflicting feelings.

Jan Horner
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Hedy Leonora Martens, *Favoured among Women: The Story of Greta Enns*. Volume One of Two. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010. Pp. 425. Softcover, \$25.00.

An unusual blend of biography, fiction, history, and poetry (the author calls it a “biographical novel”), Martens’ depiction of the first 39 years of Greta Enns, born in a Mennonite village in Ukraine in September 1902, comprises both pre-war contentment in the relative security of familiar village life and the trauma of war and revolution and more war: family separations – some manage to leave for Canada,

some can't – random imprisonments, endless poverty shading into outright starvation, and loss of religious freedom, not to mention all other freedoms. The first portion of this story comprising the almost idyllic, self-contained Mennonite community life of Greta's early childhood and the subsequent lawlessness and violence following the Revolution will be familiar to readers of Mennonite history and literature; Mennonite experiences from the early 1900s to 1929 have been the substance of numerous memoirs and novels written both by those who escaped before the borders closed and by their immediate descendants.

Stories of what happened to the Mennonites in Russia after 1929 have emerged more slowly, the probable result of years of no communication from those who lived in the Soviet Union and then a reluctance to speak the unimaginable. Hence, the question with which I began reading *Favoured among Women* – do we need yet another telling of this story? – vanished the moment I read the heart-rending account of Greta and her husband's Heinrich's failure to board the last train that would have led them ultimately to Canada. The remaining two-thirds of the book details circumstances and experiences that I, for one, had read little about and had heard of only in fragmentary, reluctant speculation about family members who had been left behind. Martens' detailed re-creation of what followed 1929 is important, both historically and psychologically. This biography, though necessarily personal and particular, begins to fill in a huge gap for the larger Mennonite community, now quite comfortable and prosperous in Canada. We need to know more about these other Mennonites; their story is a crucial part of our identity as well.

One of Martens' greatest achievements is to contextualize historically all of Greta's story. Despite her mostly happy childhood, Greta's reality includes the early death of her father, the often miserable lot of orphaned children or stepchildren, the clear class distinctions among Mennonites, the gratuitous cruelty of school-teachers, even the perpetual fear for the fate of those not yet *betjeat* (converted), and the growing certainty that outside forces will destroy the insular life of Mennonites. Short excerpts from historical documents fill in, succinctly and often with excruciating irony, the historical context for Greta's disappointments and successes, both often perceived as random. To read a note by Stalin, gloating over his industrial achievements, just before watching Greta fry gophers for supper because her husband Heinrich can't find anything else to eat enlarges our perspective by narrowing the focus to a few children's faces, thin and apathetic from perpetual hunger.

To Martens' credit, and to Greta's, whatever theodicy the biography/novel achieves is provisional only. While Greta clings

to the belief that God is loving and cares for his people, she admits that she can make no sense either of the brutal war or of unintended consequences of decisions made with good intentions. The faith of individual Mennonites and of others is awe-inspiring, especially when demonstrated not so much through persistent hope for future restoration of peace and prosperity (although that is awe-inspiring enough), but far more through equally persistent compassion for others, even their enemies, sometimes including fellow Mennonites whose desire to survive overcomes their will to do good. (And therein lies the tantalizing beginning of at least one novel that I wished had been written.)

One of the problems here is too much material, gained through numerous interviews and extensive reading. The requirements of biography – chronological faithfulness to Greta’s experiences and the inclusion of seemingly all memory snapshots – result in abrupt shifts in emotional tone; life did include both watermelon and *rollkuchen* picnics and nighttime interrogations, often the prelude to indefinite imprisonment, but the frequency of these shifts makes identification with characters difficult. Just as disorienting for the reader is the mere handful of familiar names that apply to dozens of people (e.g. three Johann Neufelds in one immediate family), most of them very briefly sketched. Family charts and individualized nicknames help somewhat but do not prevent frequent confusion. The fictional technique of Greta as centre of consciousness does, however, develop emotional identification. It’s impossible not to feel Greta’s fear and grief as families and communities splinter into fragments, ever on the move. The result is a gripping and generally coherent narrative, although the book is definitely more biography than novel.

What worked very well were inserted snapshots of the present, in which Martens enters the story herself to reflect on her own role as researcher and writer and to compare her own circumstances with Greta’s in a similar time-frame. These brief juxtapositions between Greta’s terror-filled (or starvation-dulled) awareness of her plight and the author’s own comfortable and pleasant existence in Canada heighten our agony over Heinrich and Greta’s failed bid to emigrate to Canada. Canada becomes a Shangri-la, an earthly heaven that might be flawed (even in Canada people can fall ill and die) but is eminently desirable. What does not work as well is Martens’ own poetry, intended to add emotional intensity to the historical context. I found the poetic format of stanza and line breaks distracting, since the words felt awkward in each other’s company, as if trying too hard to be poetic. Martens’ prose, on the other hand, is controlled, masterful, often more poetic than the poems in the choice of words and sense of cadence.

Favoured among Women is an important book, historically. One hopes it will open the way for fiction that explores the deeply troubling moral questions Mennonites faced under Stalin's tyranny.

Edna Froese
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Tricia Gates Brown, *Jesus Loves Women: A Memoir of Body and Spirit*. Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2011. Pp. 267. Softcover, \$15.95.

Jesus Loves Women is an unflinching and provocative memoir by Tricia Gates Brown, with intertwined themes of spirituality and sexuality.

It is the candid narrative of a sensual woman who is raised on the West Coast of the US in a pious, fundamentalist home and community with strong patriarchal overtones. We watch her experience the erotic energy of sexual awakening, and chafe in a traditional marriage to an emotionally controlling husband. Leaving the marriage, she embarks on single motherhood. She soon remarries, moves to Scotland, earns a PhD in New Testament studies, and teaches at a Christian college in the US. After meeting a Mennonite couple, she joins Canadian Peacemaker Teams and participates in several social justice missions. Around this time, Tricia realizes that her marriage has grown empty, and she divorces her second husband, a good man. She is now physically unwell, living on the edge of poverty, and feeling shame-ridden, lonely, and broken. Longing for wholeness, she comes to some painful realizations about herself, and enters a very dark night of the soul. Along the way, there are sexual liaisons, unwise relationships, and a deep, pure friendship with Brother Martin, a Trappist monk. One is reminded of Leonard Cohen's moving lyrics, "There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." By the end of this memoir, the light *does* get in. Tricia experiences God's complete and unconditional love and grace, and comes to understand the non-separateness of spirituality and sexuality – that God is profoundly alive in nature and in the body.

This memoir can be read as a courageous archetypal journey or, more precisely, two intertwined journeys. There is the journey of the sensual Lover: it begins with sexual intimacy as Tricia's drug of choice and ends with self-forgiveness and complete self-acceptance. Then there is the journey of the spiritual Seeker: it begins with Tricia's experience of alienation within a patriarchal Christian context and

ends with her feet firmly planted on a contemplative Christian path. She comes to understand that Jesus *does* love women “in all our human fallibility and imperfection as well as in our God-like goodness and sensuality.” And that Jesus loves women because we don’t close down our hearts even when it hurts to love.

There are also intimations of a third, more subtle journey, that of the wise Fool. Here, Tricia becomes utterly transparent and mirrors our fallible humanity back to us. “By openly sharing the secrets we typically hide, she invites us to give ourselves the grace God does and to journey toward unreserved living and loving,” writes Susan Mark Landis, former Minister of Peace and Justice for Mennonite Church USA, in her cover blurb. We are also invited to examine our own conceptions of what is spiritual. Why do we not consider sex spiritual? Are we so dead from the neck down?

This memoir may indirectly point to the overt and subtle ways that Christian churches (read Anabaptist-Mennonite) subvert the wholeness and self-actualization of their people. It begs the question: what will it take to understand and honour the full spectrum of spiritual development, to remove the ceiling on growth, and to nurture wholeness? If we consider spirituality a line of development that proceeds in stages, as theologians James Fowler and Evelyn Underhill do, then earlier stages that exhibit conformist, traditional, conventional, or ethnocentric tendencies constitute a relatively unripe spirituality. A post-conventional Christianity would be considered more developed, even though it might look less so to conventional eyes that focus on right theology, right belief, and right behavior. In such a thorny context, how might churches help Christians evolve to post-conventional stages of spiritual development and beyond? And further, what would it take to revive a contemplative or mystical dimension within post-Reformation churches, Anabaptist-Mennonite churches included, and re-introduce the path of direct experience and union with God?

These are not idle questions, at least not to the numerous people of Anabaptist-Mennonite background who frequent a Benedictine monastery near Winnipeg, for Centering Prayer. (The Benedictines, like Brown’s Trappist monk, are a contemplative Catholic order.) We often rue that our Anabaptist/Mennonite forbearers threw out the contemplative/mystical baby with the dirty bathwater of Catholicism during the Reformation. There is a longing for a missing limb, for a deeper spirituality, for a more intimate experience of God. Like Tricia, many find it in the contemplative path, which is not readily available in their churches. This memoir, then, offers readers a bridge to such a path.

This book is not a quick read. Though readable and accessible, the writing is somewhat uneven. At times, it feels self-absorbed and the

narrative slows to a crawl. And at times you feel like a voyeur watching a slow train wreck. This memoir comes most alive when the author evokes the world around her with vivid sensory detail and relates her experiences with Canadian Peacemaker Teams. Considering the author's academic credentials, this book is refreshingly unburdened with academic or theological verbiage. Fortunately, the author does not use her intellectual prowess to armour her heart, which remains largely undefended throughout. There is no victim mentality, blaming, or bitterness in these pages. Only clear-eyed tenderness.

It is interesting that this book is published by Cascadia, an Anabaptist-Mennonite publisher whose authors "offer creative visions and bridge conflictual stances." Even so, the author of this memoir acknowledges that she may be in "creative tension" with many Christians and her publisher around the issue of sexuality, a position she characterizes as *nuevo-traditional*.

Jesus Loves Women is a thoughtful book that will appeal to those who wish to break free of shame, reframe their sexual missteps, or transcend religious piety with grace.

Edith Friesen
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Lee Snyder, *At Powerline and Diamond Hill: Unexpected Intersections of Life and Work*. Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia, 2010. Pp. 262. Softcover, \$14.95.

Lee (Kropf) Snyder, born into a conservative Mennonite family in Oregon in 1940, could never have imagined, she says, that her future would include the presidency of a Mennonite university. Hers was a childhood dominated by the rhythms of farm life and the "plain white church" at the intersection of Powerline Road and Diamond Hill. Career aspirations did not occur to her. She attended college for a year, but at 19 she married her high school sweetheart, Delbert (Del) Snyder, and soon after, began a family.

Some ten years later, however, following an assignment with Mennonite Board of Missions in Nigeria, with Del pursuing doctoral studies and their two daughters in school, Lee Snyder found herself back at college. Her husband's appointment in mathematics at Eastern Mennonite College (now Eastern Mennonite University) took the family to Harrisonburg, Virginia. Snyder continued to study, earning a Master's degree, then held various positions in the academic dean's office of Eastern Mennonite. Following doctoral studies, she served as

EMU's academic dean from 1984 to 1996. The next ten years, she was president of Bluffton University in Bluffton, Ohio.

At Powerline and Diamond Hill seeks to explain this somewhat unusual trajectory. The question, as Snyder puts it in her preface, is "How does a farm girl, whose parents had little opportunity for education and whose community proscribed a very limited role for women and distrusted education, end up a university president?"

She begins with the "places" that formed her: her family background, the ryegrass farm in an Oregon valley, and the Mennonite church and community where "God was the main thing." From her mother, she gained an appreciation for domestic pleasures and so-called women's work, and from her father, curiosity and a love of reading. Although theologically conservative, her parents proved to be both visionary and entrepreneurial: together with other Mennonite families, they moved their family to California for six years to run a mission on Sacramento's "skid row."

Further answers to the "how" question emerge: a supportive husband and companionable marriage, and various circumstances and individuals who gave Snyder encouragement and mentoring for next steps. It's also clear that she loved to learn and that her own experience of education's transformative power formed – and continued to inform – her enthusiasm for what educational institutions attempt to do.

Although Snyder is modest about her accomplishments and generally ascribes agency for her career moves to forces outside herself, her memoir reveals the flair, giftedness, and wisdom within her personality that must have suited the roles and responsibilities she was invited to accept. In high school, she was described as effervescent. She chose groundbreaking essayist Joan Didion as her PhD dissertation topic. She managed to leave behind the narrow proscriptions and "waves of guilt" of the Mennonite faith of her childhood without ever leaving the church. The church's expectations were "most burdensome" on women, she says, but she was "spared the poisonous discontents" associated with women's subordinate role even as she rode the wave of feminist change within the culture. In his foreword, Jeff Gundy speaks of the Bluffton president as a person with "freedom from ego and special pleading," and this description is confirmed by Snyder's writing.

Her journey wasn't always easy, however. Snyder had to overcome a "sick-in-the-stomach wrenching" panic around public speaking. She had a recurring dream of showing up at church without a veil or the right clothes and she underwent a dark time during post-graduate studies when she feared "going mad." She met challenges with gritty determination, but also valued help of a more mystical nature such as inner nudges and dreams. Most crucially, perhaps, she granted power

to her faith community. “[O]ne does not lightly say no to the church,” she writes. She also writes, “My whole life I have been saying yes.”

While Snyder’s stories weave together how a Mennonite farm girl became a university president, the strongest thread of this memoir is the surprise – even incredulity – contained within the opening question itself. She did not seek the place she reached, Snyder insists, nor necessarily want it. It was a gift.

It may be that she protests too much. Nevertheless, Snyder probes deeply and compellingly at concepts such as convergence, fortuities, fate, and call that are often taken for granted within religious and/or male contexts. She wonders, “Does one discover or create their destiny?” She is critical of “the dire callings and undeviating commitments of those who, without a trace of humility, felt singularly called and empowered by God” which she observed growing up in the Mennonite church. But she too is forced to embrace “callings” and “commitments” and to confront her singularity within “the mystery of providence” and a “plan” larger than her own. She does so with many traces of humility but also gains confidence with the audacity of “call”, quoting Henri Nouwen’s “we must dare to opt consciously for our chosenness.”

At Powerline and Diamond Hill is a rich, enjoyable book and a significant contribution to a small but growing library of Mennonite women’s life writing. While not the fuller life’s accounting an autobiography might provide – Snyder says little about being a mother, for example, her two years as moderator of the newly merged Mennonite Church, or the broader histories of EMU and Bluffton under her leadership as dean and president – what she offers is memoir which, with its thematic selectivity, provokes admiration for her pioneering contribution as a female leader as well as gratitude for her reflections on that particular journey.

Dora Dueck
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Reviews of History and Social Sciences

Susan L. Tollinger, *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Pp. ix-193. Hard cover, \$50.00.

Using the lens of visual rhetoric, Susan Tollinger’s *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia* is a close reading of Amish Country tourism

as expressed in three towns in Ohio, the largest Amish settlement in North America. Her purpose is to interrogate how Amish-themed tourism attracts and sustains the interest of more than four million tourists in Ohio each year and to explore the role of the Amish in these experiences. Through descriptions of systems of representation expressed in the architecture of inns, restaurants and shops, interior décor, merchandise, and experiences of tourists in the towns of Walnut Creek, Berlin and Sugarcreek, she compares and contrasts the narratives constructed in each setting and describes what each town offers as symbolic resolutions to white middle-class anxieties. Then she probes how the Amish are represented in the process.

After an introduction, Tollinger begins with a chapter that sketches Amish origins in the Radical Reformation and then describes the beliefs and practices of contemporary Amish. Chapter Two provides an overview of the historical development of Amish Tourism in the three largest Amish settlements (Lancaster County, PA; Holmes County, OH; Elkhart, IN) and places her study in the context of scholarship on tourism and on the Amish. The next three chapters each take up a different town. The analysis of Walnut Creek (Chapter 3) is structured by the themes of time and gender. Walnut Creek offers tourists an American Victorian experience where time slows down, families eat hearty, slow cooked meals and women create feminine private spaces of refuge and comfort in their homes. This glimpse of the late nineteenth century is portrayed as "... a time when all was right in America, when work was meaningful, families were well ordered and leisure was plentiful." (73) Tollinger argues that the Victorian theme of Walnut Creek reassures and encourages tourists "to imagine a future in which time is plentiful, gender is clear, and nation is good." (77) The visible presence of the Amish going about their daily routines appears to support a vision that a different kind of life is possible. Berlin, Ohio, (Chapter 4) elaborates themes of technology and innocence through encounters with a version of the American frontier featuring pioneers, with tools in hand, creating a new nation. Tourists also encounter a secondary theme referencing the 1950s, a time on the frontier of atomic and digital technologies. Tollinger argues that Berlin's themes "... advance the inspiring proposition that the future could be better than the present, that middle Americans could alter their status of subjugation to technologies and that they could engage their culture as its agents rather than its objects." (114) The Amish presence in Berlin stands as a living example of American pioneers who have tamed technology. Sugarcreek's rhetoric (Chapter 5) is organized around ethnicity and performance and is less encouraging and reassuring. Sugarcreek's identity as the Little Switzerland of Ohio is expressed through architecture and through the annual Ohio Swiss Festival celebrating Swiss

cheese and Swiss culture. Tollinger argues that tourists in Sugarcreek may face an “ethnic double whammy....If they identify with the local Swiss in costume, then they experience themselves as having lost their ethnic distinctiveness. If they view the local in Swiss costume as other, then they experience themselves as having lost their once iconic status.” (134) The presence of the Amish in Sugarcreek stands as a reminder that the performance of identity is about making choices to resist the ways of the world. The concluding chapter, “Nostalgia and the Power of Amish Witness,” summarizes how Amish Country tourism in Walnut Creek and Berlin creates a shared past that holds the keys for an altered future, while Sugarcreek’s reference to the past offers no means of recovery in the present. The Amish presence serves as proof that alternatives can work. While the visual rhetoric is designed to please and to encourage consumption, Tollinger notes: “What Amish Country Tourism cannot fully take into account are the ways in which the visible witness of the Amish challenge the very stories told by Amish Country tourism.” (144) The Amish, whose witness is their way of life, demonstrate that it is possible to live in ways that challenge the assumptions of consumer culture.

Tollinger’s work is a welcome addition to the literature on the Amish for several reasons. Research on the Ohio settlement is underrepresented in the literature, and insights into the largest settlement are a welcome addition. Tollinger’s analytical framework is also useful and provides fresh insights into both the function of tourism and the role of the Amish themselves in the mediation process. The book is highly readable and well documented, making it accessible to students and useful to scholars and those interested in Amish studies.

Diane Zimmerman Umble
Millersville University

Anne Konrad, *Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Pp. 368. Softcover, \$35.00.

Any reader of Mennonite historical literature is familiar with the genre of family memoir and its frequent genealogical excursions. Anne Konrad’s *Red Quarter Moon* is this but so much more. Drawing upon twenty years of research into her extended family’s odyssey of struggle in Stalinist Russia, Konrad has crafted a gripping piece of scholarship that immerses the reader in both the stories of her family and her own process of discovery. The result is a nuanced work functioning as a

memoir twice over, narratively integrating the author's own stories of travel, research and reflection with the voices of her family's past. Despite the frequent interjection of the author, her voice never overpowers that of her family members. The focus on themes of suffering and survival is powerfully preserved, with the author's personal reflections serving to direct the reader's attention to the enduring presence of the past. A third narrative layer is added through Konrad's frequent brushstrokes of historical background. Firmly rooted in archival and secondary sources, Konrad's historical context, far from being distracting, serves to illuminate the particulars of her family's experience in light of the general contours of the Stalinist period. Overall, a delicate, but highly effective, balance is struck between the various layers of Konrad's narrative.

Konrad has made extensive use of her family's correspondence between the Soviet Union and Canada to draw the reader into the psychological landscape of the years of terror, purges and war. These letters are buttressed by the author's interviews with surviving relatives. As the reader is guided through "the Soviet inferno," Konrad facilitates the stories of her family with a tact and sensitivity equal to the task at hand. The stories that emerge are frequently tragic, and moreover unfathomable for a reader raised in the relative affluence and security of Canadian society. This is an intensely personal history that vividly captures the experience of how average Mennonites navigated the long years of Stalin's rule.

Strategies of survival are a constant theme throughout the stories of Konrad's family. Interestingly, singing recurs as a frequent refrain. Repeatedly in times of crisis singing served to root the individual in something other than the pain of the immediate environment. For Konrad's family singing was both a gesture of resistance in the form of German folk songs and transcendence in the form of traditional spirituals. Family bonds as well compelled the survival of individuals. Despite frequent dislocations family members sought each other out across the vast expanse of the Soviet Union. Likewise, family members sought each other across the oceans, taking substantial risks by contacting relatives of "enemy" nations through their letters of correspondence and care packages.

Konrad's book does not skirt controversial issues such as the moral struggle generated by Nazi Germany's "liberation" of Russian Mennonites. By drawing us into the experience of those Mennonites persecuted in the years before World War II we can begin to understand how the German army would have been initially interpreted as liberators. Equally, Konrad communicates the horror of the average Mennonite when faced by Nazi atrocities and attempts at indoctrination. Konrad gracefully articulates the Mennonite experience of being both literally

and spiritually wedged between two equally horrific worlds during the years of war.

While this reviewer may wish to say that faith and the tenacity of the human spirit to survive prevails over all, Konrad courageously presents the reader with a more multifaceted narrative. For many of her relatives' faith, family bonds and the pure instinct for survival did bring them through their years of hardship. Yet surviving a "systematic tyranny... took its toll." (240) Beyond the physical scars endured, the spiritual strain of surviving in an environment where "evil lurked beneath the surface" (240) left wounds that reached far beyond the death of Stalin. The suicide of one of Konrad's relatives leaves the reader to question what type of "invisible mantle of trauma" (302) weigh upon the survivors of Stalinism.

From the nighttime round-ups of Mennonite men throughout the purges, to the tortures of the Siberian labour camps, to the devastation of world war, I could not help but repeatedly ask: Why? A partial answer can be found in Konrad's explanation of the Soviet's targeted persecution of German ethnics. The designation of many Mennonites as *kulaks* before the war and their demonization as German spies during the war, led to a disproportionate number of arrests and executions within the Mennonite population. Still other ethnicities were likewise targeted, and even ethnic Russians suffered enormously leaving us with the fundamental mystery of Stalinism, or even the question of evil itself. Faced with such enormous tragedy, the living are left with, as Konrad writes, "sad bits of memory coloured with an endless longing." (302) While Konrad concludes on a dark note perhaps a modicum of hope can be derived from the preservation of her family's story and her drive to give voice to those once "disappeared."

Sean Patterson
University of Winnipeg

Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace: Global Mennonite History Series, North America*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012. Pp. xvi + 399. Softcover, \$11.95.

This volume completes a nearly twenty-year global history project, in which writers on five continents – Africa, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and North America – researched and produced narratives of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and communities. North American-based historians John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder served

as the project coordinator and as the general editor, respectively, of this Global Mennonite History Series (GMHS), garnering the support of the Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee, as well as other Anabaptist-affiliated institutions and organizations. Transnational history is a relatively new approach for Mennonite authors and readers, and the entire GMHS project de-centers European and North American experience in recognition of historical, theological, and cultural developments among Anabaptist-related faith communities in the southern hemisphere. Previous books in this series, all intended for a global audience, appeared in 2003, 2006, 2009, and 2011. In this volume, co-authors Royden Loewen and Steve Nolt emphasize that the story of the Mennonites in Canada and the United States is largely one of immigrants arriving from a variety of cultural and national contexts. Once in North America, they argue, “most Mennonites had to contend with . . . the continent’s highly developed economy, its wealth and commerce” (xi).

The book’s broad scope necessitated some early, and no doubt, difficult choices for the authors regarding organization, thematic elements, and interpretive frameworks. *Seeking Places of Peace* unfolds chronologically, from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century migration stories to current patterns of congregational and community life. Despite the book’s chronological sweep, it concentrates primarily on twentieth-century transformations, which the authors characterize as a time of growth and success. Thematically, Loewen and Nolt, both social historians, address immigration, Mennonites’ land usage, urbanization, missions, family life, financial stewardship, worship, the arts, and emerging commitments to a global Anabaptist identity.

Within each chapter, the authors de-emphasize leaders’ roles, offering instead illustrative examples from the daily lives of women, men and children across time and place. The authors’ inclusivity – with material drawn from Amish, Hutterite, and Holdeman life in nearly every chapter as well as stories from among Mennonite Brethren, “Old” Mennonites, and General Conference Mennonites – is a feature of the book that will seem vexing to at least some North American readers. In matters of daily life as well as in broader theological understandings and practices, traditionalist Anabaptist groups and progressives have perhaps kept more distance from one another than this book implies. The authors know and acknowledge this in their discussions of diversity within varied North American contexts, and yet the animating question of the GMHS, (“what might we learn from Mennonite people’s experiences on a particular continent?”) drives the authors to, at times, imply patterns of commonality that sometimes strain credulity.

One of the strongest features of the book is its incorporation of primary source materials culled from archival collections and

historical centers across Canada and the U.S. Photographs of Mennonites and others in many places and settings undergird the stories visually, while references to material culture – from *Fraktur* to quilts and posters – enrich each chapter. A further organizational scheme, which helps to convey a sense of gender balance in this history, is the pairing of vignettes at the beginning of each chapter (the writings of a Russian immigrant woman in Kansas, for example, juxtaposed with the remembrances of a Guatemalan immigrant boy who arrived in Alberta more than a century later). These opening gambits emphasize the ethnic and racial diversity that has long characterized Mennonite life in the United States and Canada, despite the familiar story of European roots that also appears in these pages. Disappointingly, however, although the book provides broad contours of non-European migration into the United States (for example, the seasonal journeys of Mexican Mennonites seeking work in Canada), it offers only slim coverage of the dozens of Mennonite and related congregations established in the twentieth century whose membership reflects Latin American or Asian heritage. Nor does the book seek to address why, in recent years, some North American congregations and organizations have dropped affiliation with the broader Anabaptist/Mennonite world.

Readers on both sides of the Canadian/U.S. border will appreciate the authors' careful efforts to craft a narrative addressing national differences between American and Canadian Mennonite experience, while also contextualizing North American experience across centuries of migration, missions, service, and travel. Loewen and Nolt argue that at its core, the North American Mennonite story is one in which people "strove to follow ancient teachings on nonviolence, on living simply and in humility, on caring from the poor, on choosing leaders from within the local community, and on insisting that love was the crucial measure of a congregation's spiritual strength" (viii). Their assessment of how well Mennonites carried these commitments out is largely positive, although they report on instances of failure, such as the persistence of racism in Mennonite institutions. With this final and fifth book in the Global Mennonite History Series, readers interested in the centuries-long experience of Mennonite and related groups in the U.S. and Canada have a valuable new resource for considering the theme of Mennonite history in transnational perspective.

Rachel Waltner Goossen
Washburn University

Peter Martin Friesen, *Mennonites in North America (1874-1910)*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2012. Pp. xix + 211. Softcover, \$24.

In 1911 Peter M. Friesen published a massive work of history entitled *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)*. Though initially intended as a history of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, Friesen's work grew well beyond those bounds to include aspects of the entire story of Mennonites in Russia. To a lesser extent it also grew beyond the geographic boundaries of Russia. Tucked in the back, with separate pagination, was Part II: "*Die Mennoniten in Nord-Amerika*." Much briefer than the main section of the book and clearly based on more rudimentary research, part II of Friesen's book did nonetheless provide a glimpse of the Mennonite story in North America for his Russian Mennonite readership.

In 1979 the Historical Commission of the Mennonite Brethren sponsored a translation of Friesen's work under the title, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*. Many readers of the new English translation were probably unaware that it omitted part II from the German edition. The translators made no mention that it even existed, nor explained why they left it untranslated.

The omission was not corrected until 2012, when the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Hillsboro, Kansas, and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba, jointly published Jake K. Balzer's translation of part II under the title *Mennonites in North America (1874-1910)*. Now, at last, we have an English translation of Friesen's entire monumental work as the author intended it.

Like the main section of the book, Friesen's North American section focuses primarily on the Mennonite Brethren Church, but extends its reach to the larger Mennonite story as well. Friesen divides the North American story into three sections: section A focuses on the Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren conferences; section B on the "so-called '*Kirchliche*' Mennonites" who migrated from Russia in the 1870s; and section C on the "Old Mennonites" who were already in North America before the 1870s.

Section A begins with descriptions of all existing Mennonite Brethren congregations in North America at the time, followed by a brief description of conferences projects such as missions, publishing, and education, and then a very brief analysis of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. Sections B and C omit descriptions of individual congregations, but follow the same pattern of describing the conference structures, programs, and general character of the other Mennonite groups in North America.

One of the most striking qualities of this volume is how little of the content was actually written by Friesen. The vast majority of the text simply contains transcriptions of material written by others – sometimes historians such as D. K. Cassell, but also ministers, missionaries, and other lay observers of Mennonite life in North America. Clearly Friesen knew far less about the North American Mennonite story than he did about the Russian story, and so found it necessary to rely on whatever existing sources were available to him, and which he simply quoted at great length. These sources include not only historical accounts, but also missionary reports, college catalogs, funeral orations, and newspaper articles. His transcriptions of such an eclectic group of sources makes for an idiosyncratic history of North American Mennonites, to say the very least.

Friesen's treatment of the "Old Mennonites" in section C is by far the weakest. It is clear that he had little detailed knowledge of these groups, and his treatment of them provides no useful information that is unavailable today from other sources. But even the sections on Mennonites from Russia provide very little substantial content that has not been published elsewhere since 1911.

Friesen's description of Mennonites in North America certainly would have been beneficial for his intended readership of Mennonites in Russia, who had little access to published information about their North American counterparts in 1910. Unfortunately, it has little value for readers today, who can refer to a large body of published literature on virtually every topic treated by Friesen. The book is largely a historical curiosity, telling us more about Friesen's views than about Mennonites in North America. Friesen's views, of course, are already well known from the previous translation of *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, so this volume does little to further our knowledge even in that regard. It fills a little-known historiographical gap in the English literature, but offers little to the average reader seeking information on Mennonites in North America.

Kevin Enns-Rempel
Fresno Pacific University

Elizabeth Raid, *Howard Raid: Man of Faith and Vision*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2011. Pp. 266, includes appendixes and selected bibliography. Softcover, \$21.50.

This latest addition to the Mennonite Reflections series published through the Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonites Studies at Conrad

Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, adds to a growing collection of biographies and memoirs that explore Mennonite faith, practice, and experience. Howard Raid's story spans nearly all of the twentieth century and his most influential years coincided with the institution building that occurred among and within Mennonite bodies. He was, at various times, a farmer, teacher, pastor, business owner and consultant, columnist and historian. He is primarily remembered, however, for his long tenure in the business department at Bluffton College (now University) and for formative work with a variety of mutual aid organizations, including the establishment of Mennonite Mutual Aid in 1954 (now Everance). He was, according to the author, "Mr. Mutual Aid." (9)

Raid was born in 1912 in rural Iowa, baptized as an infant in the Methodist church and then as a believer into the Zion Mennonite Church (Donnellson, IA) in 1926. He was only fourteen when his father moved out of the family home, leaving his mother to function as a single parent to a set of children that ranged in age from 7 to 14. Through ingenuity, hard work and the assistance of relatives and friends the family found their footing. Raid was eventually able to complete a bachelor's degree, begin a teaching career, and then, after a short stint as a pastor, start the graduate studies that prepared him for his long tenure at Bluffton College. At Bluffton, he introduced a very successful Business Management Lab program through the establishment of the Bluffton Slaw Cutter factory. With his siblings, he established the Raid Brothers Construction Company. He also spent a short stint as President of Freeman Junior College (1967-69). Wherever he went, he matched personal drive with a strong sense of purpose and direction.

Raid's family experience of "working together for the common good," (46) may have been born out of necessity but it also became an ongoing theme for his life's work. Raid was either a founding member or longtime director of various mutual aid enterprises as well as other institutions of the church. Through his work and his writing he was an advocate for the importance of community and the need for mutual aid to support agriculture and the small businesses that sustain rural life.

This is a gentle and loving biography written by his only child, Elizabeth Raid. As is frequently the case, this works both for and against the book. E. Raid is most effective in relating the way in which her father's commitment to mutual aid grew almost organically out of his own experience as a youth forced to take on adult roles after his father abandoned the family. The church and community that surrounded his family helped them not only survive but also move into education, establish careers and serve as leaders in their churches and com-

munities. She is less effective at exploring the political and economic changes that impacted the institutions that Howard Raid spent his life working for. Readers hoping to gain a greater understanding of the shifts that impacted higher education, farming, or mutual aid will find the book occasionally descriptive but not particularly insightful. That said, the book celebrates not only a life of service but also a dedication to the idea that the communal practices of Anabaptist/Mennonite communities continue to be relevant for contemporary society.

Valerie G. Rempel
Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary

Nicholas A. Krehbiel, *General Lewis B. Hershey and Conscientious Objection during World War II*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2011. Pp. 201. Cloth (hard), \$40.00.

Nicholas Krehbiel provides a sympathetic reassessment of Gen. Lewis B. Hershey's stance toward pacifists and conscientious objectors during World War II. Appointed by FDR, Hershey directed the Selective Service for three decades until Nixon removed him in 1970. By then, Nixon was moving towards a volunteer military and Hershey, then seventy-five and the target of anti-Vietnam War protests, had become a political liability.

Born in Indiana, Hershey's personal background and military career shaped his views on conscientious objection. Although not a practicing Christian, Hershey had Mennonite ancestors and an understanding of Christian pacifism and conscientious objection – or at least objection based on traditional religious ethics. From his military experiences stemmed his commitment to conscription, to duty of draft-eligible men to serve the state, and to the citizen soldier ideal. To borrow from Krehbiel's original dissertation title, Hershey was a "protector of conscience, proponent of service."

During World War II, Hershey helped to create, administer, and defend alternative service from its opponents – pacifist and non-pacifist. By championing alternative service and enabling COs to serve the nation in civilian jobs, he helped to expand the notion of citizen soldier. Krehbiel approaches Hershey and conscientious objection from the perspective of the American military tradition rather than the American peace movement. By focusing on Hershey's record during World War II rather than during the Vietnam War, Krehbiel seeks to rehabilitate Hershey.

Krehbiel makes two main contributions. He has written the first book-length study of Hershey and conscientious objection during the Second World War. Other scholars have written about Hershey. For instance, historian George Q. Flynn, in *The Draft, 1940-1973* (1993) and *Lewis B. Hershey: Mr. Selective Service* (1985), offers a sympathetic portrayal of Hershey, but devotes limited attention to World War II. Filling this void, Krehbiel provides the most detailed examination yet of Hershey's relationship with World War II conscientious objection.

In addition, Krehbiel also seeks to counter the "negative" (2) treatment of Hershey and Selective Service by Mulford Q. Sibley and Philip Jacob in *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947* (1955). He seeks to counter their "overly critical" judgment of Hershey and their charge that Selective Service was too "restrictive" towards COs in Civilian Public Service (CPS), a program that provided alternative civilian service to objectors (167). Krehbiel contrasts conscription and conscientious objection in World War II with both the First World War and the Vietnam War. During the First World War, for instance, the draft law did not include an alternative service option and COs suffered often severe abuse in military camps and prisons. During the Vietnam War, antiwar activists condemned Hershey, who they viewed as an instrumental cog in a war machine that waged murderous war in Southeast Asia. In this context, Krehbiel correctly argues that the Hershey-led Selective Service during World War II adopted a "more tolerant, nuanced, and sympathetic" stance towards COs and alternative service than in those earlier and later conflicts (1). Like Flynn, Krehbiel views Hershey as tolerant and liberal in his dealings with COs during the Second World War.

Without doubt, Hershey was sympathetic to sincere traditional religious objectors, in particular those from the historic peace churches who embraced the opportunity to serve in CPS. According to Krehbiel, he was "instrumental" in the creation of the National Service Board for Religious Objection (NSBRO), an agency created by the peace churches to coordinate administration of CPS camps during World War II (161). He had a good working relationship with the peace churches, with NSBRO, and with NSBRO director Paul Comley French, a Quaker. However, Hershey was less tolerant towards radical COs, religious and secular, who challenged CPS policies and advocated social reform, civil rights, and civil liberties—and led protests in CPS to advance their agenda. Located in groups like the War Resisters League and Fellowship of Reconciliation, these radical pacifists, who represented a small minority of COs, denounced Hershey and his policies towards CPS. Krehbiel treats these radical dissident COs respectfully; however,

his research and focus is on traditional peace church pacifists and COs—and on their wartime relationship with Hershey.

Krehbiel's conclusions, he has presented a thoughtful case for Hershey and his significance to alternative service and conscientious objection in modern America. Krehbiel makes excellent use of Congressional hearings, diaries written by Hershey and French, and archival sources on Mennonites, Selective Service, and Lewis Hershey. The book is well documented and balanced in its judgments. In summary, by shedding new light on an important topic, this concise and well-written book makes a significant contribution to the new military history and to peace history.

Scott H. Bennett
Georgian Court University

Eunice Adorno, *Las Mujeres Flores*. Madrid: La Fabrica Editorial, 2011. Pp. 109. Soft cover, \$23.95.

Las Mujeres Flores (The Flower Women) presents eighty photographs of Old Colony Mennonite women in their kitchens, barns, fields and churches, by Mexican freelance photojournalist Eunice Adorno. The award-winning project out of which this book grew was inspired by the artist's first encounter with a group of Mennonite women in Mexico. In the single-page premise to her collection (17), Adorno describes the "shock" and "fascination" she felt upon finding these women, standing together underneath the shade of a tree, amidst rural Mexico's "indelible landscape." She notes that while the women were silent and withdrawn, their intent gazes towards the outside world together with their "elegant" though "cumbersome" flowered dresses, their black shoes and socks, shrouded them in curious mystery. Who are these women, what are their secrets and pleasures and how might we come to understand their "feminine way of life in the country"? It is with these questions that Adorno later journeyed into the Mennonite communities of Nuevo Ideal, Durango and La Onda, Zacatecas, Mexico, in search of the flower women.

The photographs (some beautiful, others strange, awkward, and even provocative and controversial) seek to document the "enigmatic," "extraordinary" lives of the Mennonite women and the "feminine universe" they have forged within their isolated, ethno-religious communities. This universe, Adorno finds, is certainly one "marked by the presence of religion," gender-based work divisions, patriarchal traditions, and one in which the women go about their daily tasks with

confidence and practicality. But, it is also one full of surprises, desires, laughter, colours and unexpected occurrences, flowers and flowered patterns.

Attempting to move onlookers away from “rigid and stereotypical idea[s] of a conservative life,” Adorno’s book points us to moments of intimacy; it exposes the bonds between people, distinct interpretations of beauty, and the peculiarity of life lived in remote locales. More specifically, the photographs tell the story not only of the relationships between the women themselves, but those that emerged between the artist and her subjects, over the years she spent in their presence and “spaces of refuge.” Though a language barrier meant the two parties were not always able to communicate in full, the Mennonite women shared their lives with Adorno by showing her their favorite photographs and treasured objects, their laundry lines and kitchen tables, their stocking feet and dirty dishes, and by letting down their hair for her camera. With their gestures and sentiments, the Mennonite women exposed Adorno to their routines, affections, and the moments of “tranquility and joy” in their everyday lives.

The collection as a whole yields an under-edited aesthetic, though it is light-filled and brightly coloured. It presents a careful synthesis of still life, portraiture and candid instants. The book opens with a scenic image of a dirt road, lined with telephone poles, leading into a dusty cloud, indicating entry into an unfamiliar and mysterious place. Beyond this road, and in the pages that follow, we the onlookers find the flower women enveloped by the artist’s rendering of their everyday.

The prettiest photograph in the collection is the untitled two-page spread of a laundry line in *La Onda*: here, fifteen flowered dresses, sensibly close-pinned to the line, blow in the slight wind beneath a vibrant blue sky, filled with wispy clouds (48-9). The most playful image showcases two school-aged girls, also in *La Onda*, jumping on a trampoline against the backdrop of a setting sun through the trees. Their bare legs, dresses caught in air, faces filled with laughter, and their messy hair, convey the light-heartedness of the moment (59). Other photographs simply introduce us to the commonplace: a older woman eating an ice cream cone while driving a car (37); the woman in *Nuevo Ideal* milking a cow (43); a mother and daughter washing dishes (91); a modest lunch set out for five (31); the tops of women’s heads – braided, coiled hair – bowed down in church (75); or, the woman shelling beans at the kitchen table (90). There are also more controversial photographs: the dead body of an elderly woman, wrapped in heavy plastic, lying in an empty room in *Nuevo Ideal* (94-5); the backside of a woman bent over to repair a tractor (36); or the woman on her bed, face-down, in a compromising position, while rummaging in the drawer below (62-3). The most memorable photograph is entitled ‘Maria twice a

week', in which a middle aged woman wearing a purple flowered dress stands with her hair down to her waist, kinked and out of its braids. She stares directly into the camera; her eyes suggest both vulnerability and strange fascination, in front of the artist (25).

Adorno's is one among many recent endeavors to photographically showcase the lives of Anabaptists who continue to live in sequestered agricultural colonies throughout the world; see for example the work of Larry Towell, Kelly Hofer and Carl Hiebert in Canada, Lisa Wiltse and Daniel Beams in South America, or Wim Klerkx in Kyrgyzstan. The work of these artists is inspired by a desire to satiate 'outsider' curiosity about anti-modern ways of life. They seek to attend aesthetically to a modern nostalgia for a life they will never fully know—one that for them, seems a simpler, idealistic existence of work, play, prayer, birth and death in a fecund rural settings. The efforts behind Adorno's photography are no different. She admits using this project as an opportunity to connect with her own "backstory"; as the daughter of conservative Christian parents, she seeks in the lives of the flower women part of her own life that was presumably never fully realized.

But, there is something about Adorno's photographs that stand apart from the detached, candid romanticism in the work of the above noted artists. We find it most notably in the astute eyes and sly smiles of the women staring directly into Adorno's camera. Adorno's portraiture – the relationship between artist and subject reflected in the women's faces – reminds us of what she so wisely states in her preface: "looking at these Mennonite women is also to be looked at by them."

Susie Fisher Stoesz
University of Manitoba

Yossi Katz & John Lehr, *Inside the Ark: The Hutterites in Canada and the United States*, Regina, SK: The Canadian Plains Research Centre Press. University of Regina, 2012. Pp. 432. Softcover.

The uniqueness of Hutterite communal life continues to fascinate scholars. In the book, *Inside the Ark: The Hutterites in Canada and the United States*, Yossi Katz and John Lehr have produced another fine study of Hutterites by employing a new perspective from which to view them, namely, by comparing Hutterite communities with Jewish Kibbutzim. Even though the authors indicate that the book is not a comparative study, they admit they are analyzing Hutterites from the perspective of the Kibbutzim.

Scholars have over the years provided various interpretations of Hutterite life. Robert Friedemann, in his book *Hutterite Studies* (1961), proposed a theological framework, suggesting that Hutterites are Christian existentialists. A few years later Victor Peters, a historian, published *All Things Common, The Hutterian Way of life* (1961), based largely on the Schmiedeleut. In the first half of the book he surveyed the Hutterite story over the centuries, and in the second he described Hutterites' way of life.

More than a decade later, John Hostetler, a sociologist, used a similar format in his book *Hutterite Society* (1974), to analyze Hutterite everyday communal life. He focused primarily on the Lehrer and Dariusleut, and largely omitted the Schmiedeleut. His historical survey of Hutterite history from the sixteenth century to the present still stands as the best coherent narrative available.

Other studies followed. Karl A. Peter's *The Dynamics of Hutterite Society: an Analytical Approach* (1987), pursued some of the "why" questions of Hutterite life and history, e.g. Why are they able to remain communal in an ever changing world? Why could they restore communalism after they had lost it twice? John A. Ryan's pioneering study of Hutterites' contribution to agriculture in Manitoba in *The Agricultural Economy of Manitoba Hutterite Colonies* provides a detailed insight into Hutterite life from that perspective.

In 2011, Rod Janzen and Max Stanton, one a historian and social scientist and the other a geographer and anthropologist, published a study more ambitious and comprehensive than Hostetler's. It included all three Hutterite groups, Schmiedeleut, Dariusleut, and Lehrerleut, and provided a fresh new analysis based on two decades of research and contact with hundreds of Hutterite communities.

Now we have this study by Katz and Lehr. Katz is a scholar of Jewish settlements, including the Kibbutzim, in Israel. Lehr is a geographer with research interests in Ukrainian settlements in western Canada, as well as of settlements in Israel.

The authors' research is based on the Schmiedeleut, the group of Hutterite colonies that is largely based in Manitoba. In 1992 the Schmiedeleut divided into two groups over the issues of higher education and leadership, among others. Group One, which is slightly smaller in number, remained with Bishop Jacob Kleinsasser, and Group Two, which did not accept high school nor university education, organized itself around a committee of elders. The authors state their study is largely based on Group Two Schmiedeleut Hutterites in Manitoba.

Katz and Lehr note that of all the attempts by various religious groups during the past 500 years to organize themselves communally, Hutterites are the only ones that have survived. They acknowledge the importance of religious motivation for the Hutterite communities,

but argue that it is not the only factor, since so many other attempts at communalism on a religious basis have failed.

In comparing Hutterites with the Kibbutzim in Israel, the authors point out that the ideology underlying the Kibbutzim is secular not religious. Although the Kibbutzim include fewer people (ca. 130,000) and have a much shorter history (started in 1909), they have demonstrated that a secular ideology can also sustain communal living. The authors do not engage in a comparative discussion of the two forms of communal living, nor the relative merits of the two.

The authors are, however, pessimistic about the future of Hutterite communalism, unless they can stem the number of those leaving. They predict the number of Hutterites and colonies will decline from their present numbers of about 450,000 people in 479 colonies. They suggest survival may include helping young people internalize their commitment to communalism more strongly, and utilizing more fully their human capital, especially that of women.

The most helpful analyses are in the area of geography, in which the authors discuss Hutterites' use of space. Hutterites use space to create distance between themselves and the outside world, with most colonies located off main roads in hard to see and find locations. They use space to create compact communities with houses arranged in circular or oval arrangements around common areas, like dining room, church, and washing facility. They use space to separate genders and re-enforce gender roles in seating arrangements in the dining room and church.

Other topics include law, religion and tradition, prosperity, education, leisure time, and role of women. The appendix includes interesting demographic charts around questions of age of marriage, number of children, and time between marriage and birth of the first child.

One of the most revealing aspects of the study is the inclusion of the "Ordinances and the Conference Letters of the Schmiedeleut 1762-2009." This document provides rich insight into the Hutterites' struggle to maintain identity, and to create space between community and the world.

This study makes a valuable new contribution to understanding Hutterite communities.

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Arthur Kroeger, *Kroeger Clocks*. Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village, 2012. Pp. xxv + 174, \$29.99.

Horologists take note! This richly illustrated and intriguingly quirky book on the history of the Kroeger clock supplies the reader with vignettes of Mennonite social history as well as a detailed description of the so-called Mennonite clock and an impressive catalogue of extant examples.

This book is divided into three distinct parts. In the first section the story of the Kroeger clock is traced back to its origins in the Vistula Delta (modern Poland) and the need for timekeeping pieces in individual family homes. A modernizing workforce required more precision than the cockcrow and church bells of the agrarian Middle Ages. Here the Mennonite clock emerged out of a need for an inexpensive option, as opposed to the pricey bourgeoisie mantle clock, for the peasant mill workers, dike builders and toolmakers. This section is dominated by the family history of the Kroegers, beginning with Johann Krueger who left West Prussia in 1803 to settle in Russia. While there is some discussion of clock making in this section the emphasis is on the details of everyday life – the marriages, births, and deaths of family members, the physical characteristics of houses and businesses, and the experience of war and banditry. This section ends with brief mention of other clock-making families – Lepp, Hildebrand, Mandtler, and Hamm.

The second section examines the clocks in detail. The hands, gears, chimes, pendulums and weights are discussed with helpful accompanying diagrams. For those less mechanically inclined the art on the faceplates of the clocks hold considerable interest. Although the typical clock was decorated with flowers or pastoral scenes, two clocks boast Biblical scenes. One depicts the story of Jephthah, who vowed to sacrifice whatever greeted him first when he came home after battle, which unfortunately turned out to be his daughter. This gruesome story was intended to remind Mennonites of the danger of making oaths. The other clock paints the story of king Hezekiah whom God rewarded by moving back the shadows on a sundial thus indicating the number of years that would be added to Hezekiah's life. The point of the story is that God is the Lord of time.

The third section is a list of the clocks which the author has purchased, repaired, or otherwise been made aware of. A photograph and a story accompany each clock either about the history of the clock or the process by which the author acquired the clock.

For the general reader the strongest sections of this book are found in the first two sections. Despite the fact that the majority of the information is about the Kroeger family there is enough historical context

to provide a satisfying sense of the broader Mennonite community. The grammatical structure of sentences is not academic and lends a casual story-telling feel to the book. Among these stories are sprinkled tidbits of information that had not been part of the tales of Russia that I had heard growing up. These varied as widely as learning that there were Lutheran villages near to the Mennonite villages and that women did not wear underwear back then, just long skirts (a point my grandmother never got around to mentioning).

The story-telling feel continues into the third section, however, at places it could feel a bit repetitive and occasionally perhaps better for a funny coffee-time anecdote. There were many descriptions of escape from Russia that while all harrowing and touching could have perhaps been reduced in number. A tale about acquiring a clock from an elderly Mennonite woman in Winnipeg is memorable in its unexpectedness. The author had accidentally entered the wrong room in a boarding house in order to meet someone selling a Kroeger clock. He recalls the shock he felt when he noticed that the room's primary decoration theme was extra large, brightly coloured brassieres.

In sum, this book is a must buy for anyone who is familiar with the clock. I am very much looking forward to passing this book around to my family members, as I know they will love to read up on this heirloom piece. There are many diagrams, illustrations, maps, charts, and pictures which make this book a visual delight and of interest to those who love clocks or good stories.

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