herself, is oddly dispassionate, given the series of tragedies and life crises that befall this family within the space of a year. The narrator's almost grim determination to chronicle the Wittenbergs' misfortunes overpowers the few moments of warmth shared among the characters towards the end of the novel. In successfully avoiding sentimentality, Klassen's third-person storyteller sacrifices narrative intimacy.

Lush descriptions of Joseph's garden, or a startling display of the northern lights, or a lovingly detailed account of a church Christmas pageant lend Klassen's prose welcome notes of intimacy and care, familiar to readers from her lyric poetry. Many of Mia's stories are deeply moving and vivid, in particular her imagined account of the train as it leaves Moscow with Maria and her surviving family members on board, or the description of family portraits by the bodies of dead children. At other times, Klassen allows a cliché to slip in ("winds of change"), or tries to teach the reader about Mennonite history or pacifism. The highlighting of Russian Mennonite vocabulary – *Zwieback* – is both distracting and unnecessary, even to readers unfamiliar with the diction. These are minor missteps. *The Wittenbergs* is a Mennonite family epic that embeds the key themes of Russian-Canadian Mennonite experience in the language and structure of both historical and contemporary fiction. Klassen, unlike her heroine, is sure to find a receptive audience.

Janice Schroeder
Carleton University

Dora Dueck, *What You Get at Home*, Winnipeg: Turnstone, 2012. Pp. 179. Softcover, $19.00.

As a Mennonite writer, there is something refreshingly different about Dora Dueck. The secret to success for many talented Mennonite novelists and short-story writers has been their audacity or shock value. Best-selling Mennonite fiction is often outrageously funny, pointedly critical and irreverent, infused with pathos, and heavily punctuated with sexual content. Perhaps the appeal, in part, is because this is in such contrast to what is generally expected of a people stereotypically known for their quiet modesty, mysterious apartness, and staunch religiosity. Dueck's writing is not within this genre. It is not at all outrageous, and is notably devoid of indignation or reproach. Rather than amusing or shocking us to attention, her strategy involves layers of perspective, with which she lures us to a place of empathy and new understanding. Her characters are so authentically portrayed that

it is easy to believe that Dueck knows these people – perhaps *is* some of these people. With this level of ease and confidence, overstatement is not necessary.

For Dora Dueck it is clear that words matter. In this collection of short stories she explores the power of words – words said and unsaid, words that cut and words that wouldn't, words that surprise, words that heal. She explores words in conversation, in explanation, in arguments and in compliments. There are words dreamed, words remembered, and in several cases words forgotten. Most of all there is an underlying and pervasive theme of words recorded – in diaries, in memoirs, in obituaries, in novels, in reports, and in history books. Often these passages appear in italics: stories within stories "like a nesting doll."

Dueck is telling us something essential about the nature of history itself – that there are spaces in our histories, and that people's stories, experienced and remembered, fill these spaces. She juxtaposes personal stories with words more officially recorded, in order to demonstrate the idea that the story, as told by the ordinary people who lived it, can indeed be more powerful and "true" than the dry bones of the obituary, the archival document or the history book – which often do not come close to conveying what matters most. The power of story, on the other hand, is clear. It can make you laugh and cry, feel empathy and better understand. In the story "Helping Isaac" a man who is haunted by the repressed memories of what happened to him and his family in Siberia hires a researcher, who finds the cryptic document that can perhaps answer the man's questions. But it is the researcher's creative, gentle storytelling that puts his mind at ease.

In many of the stand-alone chapters of the book, people compose their stories, correct their stories, learn their parents' stories, and search for the truth about their stories. In "My Name is Magdalena" an elderly woman attends a writing class to learn how to record her memoirs. In "Postponement" Shelley writes and practices how she will accomplish the difficult task of revealing bad news to her husband. In the story "In the Village of Women" a grandmother struggles to convey a long hidden chapter of her story to her grand-daughter, and how she maintained her dignity in a humiliating, socially unacceptable situation.

The stories are overwhelmingly of serious subject matter and, one could say, rather heavy in atmosphere. Yet, even when its theme is sadness, regret, betrayal, longing, or disappointment, a story well written is a thing of beauty, and there is indeed much of beauty here. In confident, deft strokes Dueck captures the essences of characters and their relationships to one another. The stories are overwhelmingly set in the "triangle" of Winnipeg, the Russian steppes, and the Paraguayan Chaco. This is reflective of the transnational immigrant

experience which is typical of so many Mennonites in Canada. The stories sympathetically convey feelings of loss, displacement, nostalgia and confusion over the meanings of home. The reader is challenged to consider whether life in the heart of Canada – with its stifling summer heat, long dark winters, and immigrant labor – is necessarily an uncomplicated fulfillment of the immigrant dream.

In the title story, "What You Get At Home," Lise is forlornly homesick and finds inspiration, relief and joy in an Anne Taylor novel she hunts down because it has the word 'homesick' in the title. She devours the book in one sitting through the night, and in the process of reading startling memories that she hadn't considered in years rise up. She uses poignant words to describe this joy of literary discovery: "how sheltering it could be, like a cave to her, people in a story and how they behaved and the twists of the plot; her curiosity wakened and satisfied. And everything safe and lit with words, safe against the dark and the shadows of the house, but never so bright that it made her self-conscious about how she might look in the glaring light…" In short, as she beautifully describes, it does "the good work a book can do." Dueck has similarly found the words that help readers to understand and to relate.

Frieda Esau Klippenstein
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David Elias, *Henry's Game: A Novella*. Regina, Saskatchewan: Hagios Press, 2012. Pp. 95. Softcover, $15.95.

"I try to stay neutral," says Henry Suderman, the narrator of David Elias's novella, *Henry's Game*. "Unlike my wife, I refuse to live in a constant state of decisiveness. It's inhibiting." Henry's game is chess and the novella is structured like a chess game divided into "Openings"; "Middlegame"; and "Endgame"; shorter sections are prefaced with definitions of chess moves such as "*[interpose] – the strategy of protecting a threatened piece, especially from a possible check, by blocking the attack with another piece…*".

Henry is married to Cheryl and they have two teenagers. He writes a chess column for a living; he analyses life like a strategist and is "usually two or three steps ahead of" his therapist. However, he rarely plays chess and as a boy seems to have learned the game from books rather than a mentor. In a rather sad comic scene the boy Henry tries to teach his grandfather the game before he has even played the game