

Book Reviews

Leo Driedger, ed., *Ethnic Canada: Identities and Inequalities* (Toronto, Ontario: Copp Clark Pittman, 1987), 442 pp. Paperback.

Ethnicity continues to be an important influence, despite the homogenizing effects of modern society. Canada in particular remains a pluralist society; an ethnic mosaic with its traditional ethnic collectivities being joined by more recent arrivals. This comprehensive volume brings together the best of recent work on ethnicity to address the central questions of the extent to which ethnic collectivities continue to perpetuate and expand their identities, and the extent to which ethnic inequalities are a part of the social structure.

The volume is divided into five parts. The first part serves to orient the reader by providing broad perspectives on ethnicity. The lead article by Max Weber sounds remarkably modern, and suggests the continuity of the ethnic factor in society, as well as the acuity of Weber's vision. Other contributions examine the range of contemporary perspectives, with special emphasis on the Canadian situation. Part II provides a demographic overview of ethnicity in Canada. The first article, by Warren Kalbach, examines major historical trends in the growth and change of Canada's ethnic population from 1871. Two subsequent articles focus more specifically on urban ethnicity.

The third section of this collection focuses on more social-psychological questions related to ethnic identity. Arnold Dashevsky provides an overview of theoretical frameworks for the study of identity. Subsequent articles address more specific questions. One article: "Indian Cultural Diversity" by John Price, demonstrates the differences among the more than 50 distinct native cultures in Canada. Another, by Marcel Rioux, examines the historical development of ideologies in Quebec.

The final two parts of this volume deal more with issues of social structure. Part IV deals with ethnic stratification and conflict, while Part V examines "human rights" issues. One article in Part IV is of particular interest from the perspective of Mennonite studies. This is the article: "Minority Conflict: Ethnic Networks versus Industrial Power", by Leo Driedger. It describes how the residents of the predominantly Mennonite community of Warman, Saskatchewan, successfully opposed the giant Eldorado corporation over the construction of a uranium refinery in the area. The success of this community action is attributed to characteristics

of the community. It retains much of the closeness of traditional isolated communities, but also has members with contacts and experience outside the community. These members were able to act as links to the larger society, and lead the ethnic community in collective action.

In all, this is a very worthwhile volume. Professor Driedger has produced a collection which not only provides comprehensive coverage of a broad and complex topic, but also includes numerous excellent individual articles which can stand as contributions in their own right. There is also a good blend of theoretical and empirical contributions.

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J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth Century Anabaptism* (Scottsdale/Kitchener: Herald Press, 1987), 174 pp. paperback.

At a time when discussions of changes in name and orientation have reached the grassroots level, in Canada at any rate, this book may be a welcome and indeed necessary contribution. Written in a readable and comprehensible fashion, it tells the Anabaptist story in terms of most of the recent historiography and then proceeds to show how that story can be properly used for a contemporary understanding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. It is thus a twofold task that J. Denny Weaver attempts in this book, suggested by his title and carried out to a substantial degree.

The first part is the retelling of the history, which has become increasingly complex as the various "anabaptist" movements of the 16th century have been identified and examined in detail in recent years. Weaver must simplify of course but it is remarkable how he is able to maintain a story line that allows the reader to follow the crowded events of the Reformation period and sort out the strands that he will eventually weave (pun intended) into a coherent synthesis in his conclusion.

The book's chapters are subdivided by names and topics, describing the Swiss, South German and Low Country beginnings and developments and giving the lay reader a clear overview of a confused historical period. What perhaps is missing for such a reader is the general overview and context for the particular story, but that would likely be asking too much in view of the difficulty of the task at hand. For this there are other books and in any case, Weaver's historical account is the first part of a project which is spelled out in the fifth chapter: "The Meaning of Anabaptism."

It is in this concluding chapter (which appeared in *JMS*, Volume 4)

that Weaver's argument is made. Whatever the genesis, or indeed geneses, of the movement, it has been a recognizable Christian tradition which has always had the potential to be relevant to a given time and place. Its "regulative principles" have remained viable and continue to offer a particular critique to our age and our world as well. For the North American scene Weaver concentrates on the Mennonite community as an alternative to the mainstream culture. Says Weaver: "When Mennonite people or Mennonite groups have lost their identity as Mennonites, it has been not primarily because they adopted a new view of the Bible or reversed their position on baptism of adults, but rather because they have abandoned the idea that the church is an alternative to, rather than an integral part of the majority society." (23)

Here Weaver puts his finger squarely on perhaps the most dangerous development of North American Mennonitism, the increasing accommodation to the ethos of the surrounding "world". For him "becoming Anabaptist" is not something that can be accomplished by a change of name, as suggested by John Redekop's elaborate non sequiter, *A People Apart* (1987), but rather an ongoing struggle to seek what our spiritual forefathers sought, to follow the Jesus who taught reconciliation and peace. In urging this view upon his readers J. Denny Weaver is clearly exhorting them to a "serious conversation with our past" (141). This goes beyond the mere discipline of history and at the same time puts that discipline to good use.

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Fritz Senn, *Gesammelte Gedichte und Prosa*. Edited by Victor G. Doerksen. Winnipeg. CMBC Publications, 1987. Quality Paperback, 311 pages. \$17.50.

Even though the works of Fritz Senn have long been known to and cherished by a relatively small, though devoted readership, they have not been readily accessible to the reading public at large for quite some time now. The last significant undertaking to present Senn's work to a wider audience was made in 1974 when Elisabeth Peters edited a collection of some eighty poems under the title *Das Dorf im Abendgrauen*. The present new critical edition of Senn's work is therefore most timely in its appearance, as much of his work has been increasingly difficult to locate for the general reader. Most of his poems originally appeared in a wide variety of publications that are no longer available and all too many have been gathering dust over the years in various archives.

This new and beautifully executed collection of 161 poems and eight

prose pieces is most competently edited by Victor G. Doerksen. The volume features a foreword by Gerhard Ens, a concise but important introduction by the editor, and also includes facsimiles of manuscripts in the author's handwriting. Most informative editorial notes are also provided on the presented texts. In the final pages of this work the reader will find a short autobiographical sketch written by Fritz Senn himself in 1975 and a handy index of titles and first lines.

Gerhard Johann Friesen, who made a name for himself as a Mennonite-German poet under the pseudonym of Fritz Senn, wrote his first poems as early as 1913 and many of them appeared after 1934 in various publications such as the *Mennonitische Warte*. Fritz Senn is foremost a master in the creation of poetic images conveying his intense nostalgia for his old homeland — the Russian Steppes. In much of his work he evokes yearning visions of this old homeland and more often than not gives expression to a deep regret at the loss of this world and the treasured values associated with it. Repeatedly he shows the apparent homelessness of the Mennonite in the New World. His poetic images are inspired by the Bible and, of course, by the proximity of the farmer to his land. The plow, the plowman, and the patient, ever fertile earth are recurring images throughout his work.

The texts in this edition are presented in a chronological order. On the one hand such an arrangement permits the reader to witness the gradual development of the author. At the same time it shows most strikingly how the same images, themes and concerns continued to preoccupy the poet throughout his life. Despite this fact, it also becomes apparent that Fritz Senn always remained receptive to new impressions. One therefore also finds a number of poems dealing with rather topical subjects such as poems on Hitler, Stalin and Solshenizyn. Furthermore, the collection contains not only such better-known poems as the cycle "Hinterm Pflug" (1935-1936) but also many of the lesser-known works, as, for instance, the very early poems, the revealing poems written in the shadow of World War II, and Fritz Senn's important later poems. Also included in this anthology are quite a significant number of Low-German poems written after the death of the author's friend Arnold Dyck in 1970. The eight prose sketches, which are thematically very closely related to the poems, permit the reader fascinating insights into that lesser-known aspect of the author's work. One is indeed struck by the intensely lyrical quality of this prose. While these prose sketches do not really show Fritz Senn at his best, it is nevertheless appropriate that they have been included in the present collection, as they provide a more complete picture of the author's scope and variety of interests.

Victor Doerksen's editorial skill is commendable. Through his careful and sensitive consultation of the original manuscripts and typescripts he has ensured that Fritz Senn's works are now preserved in the form the

poet actually intended. He has also succeeded admirably in performing the challenging task of presenting the work of this important Mennonite author to the wider reading public and he has been successful in firmly establishing Fritz Senn's place in Mennonite-German literature for posterity.

In his introduction to the collection, Doerksen not only explains his editorial policy but also provides an informative brief introduction to the poet and his work. This section will be most stimulating to readers who are already familiar with aspects of Fritz Senn's work and it will prove absolutely essential to first-time readers in aiding them in their discovery and appreciation of important themes and images in this collection. The significant editorial notes on the individual texts provide the reader with the dates and places of the original publications. Important variants and other information essential in bringing the work closer to to-day's reader are also provided. Throughout this impressive collection Doerksen's sound scholarship and dedication to the author's work are evident.

This very important new edition, which features a generous print and layout and an attractive good-quality binding, is certain to spark renewed interest among both critics and the general reader in the work of Fritz Senn. While it will enable the many who are already familiar with this author to rediscover and see his work from a new perspective, this excellent new edition should also win the poet many new friends. The collection is of great importance to anyone interested in Mennonite-German literature and the Mennonite heritage.

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Bert Friesen, *Where We Stand: An Index to Statements by Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada, 1787-1982* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Mennonite Central Committee, Canada, 1986). Paperback, 300 pp. \$20.00.

This volume is a sequel to an earlier volume entitled *Mennonite Statements on Peace and Social Concerns, 1900-1978*, edited by Urbane Peachy and published by The Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace Station in 1980. Although these were initially projected as companion volumes, the final product is quite different in scope and nature. First, whereas the earlier volume contained excerpts from various documents and was therefore a resource in itself, the present volume is only an index with brief descriptions of the content. Secondly, the earlier volume included only subjects to which the biblical teaching on peace and nonresistance,

as historically understood, had been applied. Therefore, issues such as the use of alcohol, mixed marriages, and a variety of other subjects were excluded. The present volume utilizes "the broadest possible definition of what constitutes peace or social concern" (p. xiii).

The index covers over 200 years of the Mennonite presence in Canada. Since the first official Minutes only began in 1842, material for the earlier period is taken from a variety of secondary sources. The Glossary lists 43 different church bodies or inter-church agencies and thus the coverage is very comprehensive indeed. As such it will undoubtedly prove to be a very useful tool for all those who wish to do research on topics covered by the index.

The main index is arranged alphabetically by conference, then by each of seven different general topics, and finally by specific subjects. Each entry gives the date, micro page, source, and a brief description. There are obviously potentially serious problems with the latter because some documents range over a variety of topics. Nevertheless, the decision to publish an index rather than a very select number of actual documents was probably a wise one because the latter alternative could more easily result in distortion.

A very helpful secondary index gives a subject listing according to the Library of Congress subject headings. This allows for easy comparisons between different groups on their positions on various issues. Unfortunately there is no cross-referencing to the main index to enable the reader to find the description without a lot of effort.

It has often been pointed out that such official statements are very limited in their value because they do not necessarily reflect prevailing practices and opinions. While this is undoubtedly true, it must be remembered that because of the policy of most Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, the problem is not as serious as it is when, for example, papal bulls are used as a basis for a similar assessment in the Roman Catholic Church.

Because of its nature the volume is likely to be used more by those engaged in serious research than by church leaders, students, and teachers in a general way. A table of contents for the main index would perhaps also have helped to make the limited information more accessible to those who have a general interest in the subject.

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Helmut T. Huebert. *Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1986). Paperback, 405 pp., \$25.00.

A paucity of information is not always a detriment to a good historical researcher, but often an incentive to rediscover the story which lies behind the few obvious facts. An example of what can become the rich results of painstaking research is this book by Helmut Huebert (Winnipeg medical doctor) on the history of the Russian-Mennonite village of Hierschau. Very little was known about this village prior to this book. What was generally known was that it was intended to be a model village, founded upon the whim of Johann Cornies in 19th-century Russia.

To set the stage for the story of the village of Hierschau, the author begins where most Mennonite stories begin, by reciting the early Anabaptist story. Tracing the northern stream of Anabaptism, particularly the Dutch-Polish/Prussian lineage, he rounds out his analysis by focusing upon the Russian-Mennonite story. Considerable time is spent in setting the stage for the establishment of Hierschau by describing the development of the Mennonite settlements. With quick broad strokes he outlines the concerns, the people, and the relationship of the Russian Mennonites to their neighbors and the state government.

In instances where the story intersects with individuals of unusual stature, he deviates from the usual historical narrative and presents a biographical portrait of these important personages. Including many details, the author discusses at length such things as the mail, village life, daily chores, acts of God, machinery, farm animals, crops and buildings, and many others. What Huebert does in essence is to give us a full panorama of village life. Sprinkled throughout the book are maps, charts, tables and photographs, which note in greater detail than is possible in narrative the increasing sophistication of everyday Mennonite village life.

The methodology Huebert employs can become instructive and an inspiration to other historical researchers. Personally, as an archivist working among holdings of Russian-Mennonite materials, it has been most gratifying to observe the many avenues the author traveled to glean his materials.

First and foremost were, of course, the scattered newspaper and journal accounts of the village. Next came interviews with former inhabitants, genealogical resources, agricultural statistics and family histories. Together with numerous other resources these items were pieced together to give birth to a structured account of the genesis and development of the village Hierschau.

The good side of the paucity of information is that it forced the author to look more closely at the social and political context of the village. Often when information is readily abundant, the contextualization of the

story becomes narrower instead of broader. In this case the author had very little choice but to examine the background of both the Russian government as well as the Mennonite Commonwealth in order to set the stage for the formation of this village.

The negative side of the paucity of information is that to broaden the account the author felt pushed, at times, to rely upon questionable anecdotal accounts which, while of some interest, often does little to enhance one's knowledge of the village. As a result, at certain points, the end product is a potpourri of anecdotes, charts and lists with less attention given to interpretive narrative.

Nevertheless the book is well worth reading. It is obviously one of the best Russian-Mennonite village histories presently available, written within the Social History framework. Huebert has proved that by diligent research one can pull together bits and pieces of available information and develop a good, though admittedly uneven, historical account. We can only hope that some day researchers such as Huebert, will have the luxury of utilizing resource materials presently housed within libraries and archives of the Soviet Union.

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Peter G. Epp, *Agatchen: A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story*. Trans. and Edited by Peter Pauls (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1986). Paperback; 258 pages; \$11.75.

Peter Epp's novel *Agatchen (Eine Mutter)*, originally published in 1932, is unique among the novels dealing with Russian-Mennonite life toward the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most such novels, written by emigré writers — such as Gerhard Toews, Peter J. Klassen and Hans Harder — emphasize the dramatic, often violent, events and circumstances which brought to an end the idyllic life and world of the Russian Mennonites. Epp's *Agatchen* also deals with the passing of the traditional Mennonite life of wholeness and harmony, but the focus in this novel is not on the revolutionary overthrow of that world, but on the evolutionary, almost inevitable, changes brought about by factors beyond the control of the novel's characters.

In reading about the slow passage of time and the changes that result in the process, one is reminded of a nineteenth-century German-Austrian novelist, Adalbert Stifter (*Nachsommer*). According to Stifter, the gradual development in nature and in life, or the slow growth and gentle swaying of the grain in spring and summer are more interesting and significant than, for example, the violent upheavals in history or the

vulcanic eruptions in nature. Similarly Epp describes a world and human relationships and experiences which are subject to the natural laws of gradual development and change (On time and change in Epp's novel, see Peter Pauls' fine article in *Visions and Realities*, ed. by H. Loewen and Al Reimer, Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1985). Only Arnold Dyck, another Mennonite emigré writer, follows in his novel *Verloren in der Steppe* (1940s) a similar narrative technique.

This is not to say that there is little action and no drama in Epp's *Agatchen*. The novel does indeed include many stories, scenes and incidents about life and death situations, interpersonal, intergenerational and ideological conflicts, and even violence and bloodshed. But all these intense and painful human experiences are seen through the eyes of a mature woman whose deep faith and limitless love for her people and life enable her (and the reader) to know and understand much and to forgive all.

Agatchen, the eighty-year-old narrator, is realistically yet lovingly portrayed. She shares most of the characteristics, views, feelings and prejudices of her Mennonite villagers. She idealizes the old ways and dislikes the new, be it technology or political and religious innovations. She believes that German Mennonites should not marry Russian girls but find suitable partners among their own people. She is convinced that higher education, especially the kind that comes from outside the Mennonite colonies, is not only useless but also dangerous to the faith and traditional ways. But Agatchen's feelings and views are tempered by her disarming modesty and recognition that she may err or that she may not know all the facts concerning the views expressed. Above all, her many years of experience, wisdom, and loving heart help her to remain generous, understanding and forgiving in the face of human frailty.

Like many Mennonites who lost their physical and spiritual homes in the aftermath of the revolutionary upheavals in Russia, Peter Epp also was forced to leave his homeland and emigrate to North America in the 1920s. After his studies in Germany and Switzerland prior to World War I, earning a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Basel, Epp went to Bluffton College and later to Ohio State University where he taught Russian and German for twenty-five years. Epp did not become bitter about his and his people's loss of homeland as some Mennonites did. Instead, like another emigré writer, Dietrich Neufeld (*A Russian Dance of Death*), Epp in his novel *Agatchen* seeks to understand the Russian Revolution and the fate of Russian Mennonites within the context and development of history. The novel thus not only illumines a dark period in Russian-Mennonite history but also contributes to a better understanding of the Mennonites and their place within the Russian environment.

Peter Epp tells his episodic story objectively and reflectively, focusing on the inner conflicts of his characters rather than relying on external

action and stress for effect. By means of his matriarchal narrator the author is able to step back and let his main character tell the story as she experienced it. In describing the inner life of his narrator and other characters, Epp emphasizes those things which all human beings have in common. Moreover, by means of this technique Epp can resist the temptation to pass judgment upon individuals, groups and views — be they political or religious — he does not agree with. *Agatchen* is thus a novel not only about a Russian-Mennonite mother and her extended family, but also about universal human issues regardless of their time and locale.

We are fortunate that this significant novel found a most able translator and editor. As Al Reimer writes in the Foreword to the novel: "Dr. Pauls' translation is not only an accurate and sensitive rendering of the original, but indeed improves on it in the sense of tightening up its amorphous structure by removing minor inconsistencies and redundancies. This English version is, if anything, more readable than the original, but without losing any of its essential flavor or *Zeitgeist*."

Pauls has done what Al Reimer did with Hans Harder's novel *No Strangers in Exile*, namely modifying and improving the content and structure of the original where necessary so as to produce a better work in translation. In his Introduction to *Agatchen* Pauls explains what he did as translator-editor: "The reader who is familiar with *Eine Mutter* may notice some abridgments . . . Nevertheless, the translation strives to recreate . . . the same illusion of the slow passage of time, the leisurely but inexorable pace of events that the author tried to create . . . There are also instances in which the original version has been expanded. Occasionally, the narrator's philosophical musings have been elaborated to make them more consistent with her reflections elsewhere . . . The formal structure of the novel has also been modified slightly. The number of chapters has been reduced from twenty-nine to twenty-six. Each chapter has been given a title, in keeping with the episodic nature of the novel."

Some readers may question this "tampering" with an original text. However, in a work of fiction, it might be argued, a good story well told is more important than reproducing an exact original. Such a recreation of imaginative literature is especially necessary where the original story is generally well written but lacks some of the narrative art and polish of an accomplished writer. The translator-editor thus becomes a collaborator with the author. The result of collaboration is often an improved literary work, as happens in this novel. Younger, often critical, readers who no longer understand German and who will not read a work of fiction for its factual content only but look for literary value as well, will no doubt be grateful to Peter Pauls for offering them an improved Russian-Mennonite novel in English. (On translating ethnic literature, see Al Reimer's article "Translating Ethnic: The Translator as Critic, Editor, and Collaborator"

in *Annals 4 German-Canadian Studies*, ed. by Karin G. Gürtler and Friedhelm Lach, Vancouver: CAUTG, 1983).

The book includes a genealogical chart to clarify Agatchen's extended family relationships, a glossary of German names and words used in the text, and numerous photographs of buildings, implements and vehicles. The text is printed on quality paper and is relatively free of misprints. Both translator and publisher are to be commended for a work well done.

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