The Queer Call of Wes Funk[1]

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The notion of being "called" to a specific vocation is a significant one in the Mennonite theological tradition. Whether this call comes directly from God in a scene similar to the call of Samuel (I Samuel 3), or whether it comes from someone else in the faith community,[2] narratives of call are a common trope. It is thus not surprising to encounter a Mennonite writer using the language of call when discussing how he became a writer. Wes Funk's 2014 autobiography *Wes Side Story: A Memoir*[3] includes two episodes that explain why Funk decided to begin writing. His description of how he fulfilled this call by writing his autobiographically inflected fiction places Funk's work into both the queer and Mennonite literary traditions, and creates a conceptual space where the two meet.

When describing how he was called, Funk, while attributing the call to supernatural forces, does not assign this mandate to God. He attributes it to two ghosts. The first of these apparitions is Funk's former lover Keith, who died of AIDS. Funk decides to visit a psychic during a time of questioning in his life, and – in Funk's account – she raises Keith's ghost, who tells Funk that he is "'supposed to write books'."[4] Funk's call to writing is repeated later, when he is browsing in a record store. He is mesmerized by a poster of The Doors' lead singer Jim Morrison, and "f[eels] a kind of enlightenment. [He] was supposed to write."[5] Funk's choice of words here is significant because he uses religious language, albeit

from Buddhism rather than Christianity, to describe his experience. Although he receives his call from a secular source, he is able to respond to it because he has a religious framework through which to interpret his revelation, namely the idea that some people do receive special calls to complete certain tasks.

Most readers will react incredulously to the sources of these calls. The sources are queer in the sense that they are weird and uncanny, and their unsettling nature will tempt many readers to dismiss the stories' veracity out of hand. After all, who wants to believe that psychics might actually have legitimate powers, or that pictures on the wall are going to start giving out messages? The hearing of voices is supposedly something that only the insane experience. Interpreting Funk's claims about his interactions with ghosts thus requires what Abram J. Lewis calls "a hauntological reading" which acknowledges the truthfulness of Funk's experience for him even if readers are agnostic about its possibility.[6] Traditional academic strategies are unable to make sense of his experience. There is no objective evidence to verify that it happened. Theological Mennonites will have theological objections to it because it does not fit within a Christian cosmology and secular readers will find it scientifically impossible. Therefore, all I can do is acknowledge its existence in the text and let other readers decide for themselves how to relate to it. Funk tells his ghost stories openly and sincerely, and leads his life afterwards with a sense of purpose that he gleans from them. The apparitional appearances are thus real in their effects whether they are or not in fact.

Funk's openness to experience and respond to a call makes the argument that it is necessary to participate in community and that it is possible for the community to give the individual instructions for how to live one's life. While Funk receives his call from the queer (Keith) and secular (Morrison) communities, his openness to the idea that he should take up a new vocation and write explicitly queer fiction in service to others is an act tinged by values from both the Mennonite and queer traditions. Kay Stoner writes about the similarities between these two communities, noting that they are both marked by long histories of oppression, and arguing that in working to realize their visions of social justice as "dissenting group[s]" they share community-building activities such as "potluck[s]" and "small group[s]." Even choosing to leave the homophobic Church for the queer community echoes the early Anabaptists' choice to leave the state Church, as both choices include a belief that a better vision of community is possible.[7] Casey Plett also examines the relationships between queer life and

Mennonite life, naming "[f]amily, community [. . . ,] the loss of family, the loss of community. Displacement, the destruction of stability" as themes in both Mennonite literature and queer literature.[8] Mennonites and queers share the experience of exile, and these experiences manifest themselves in literature. One way Funk raises this theme in *Wes Side Story* is by depicting how his call gives him a new community, the writing community, to go to once he leaves his homophobic Mennonite community behind. He then uses his position as a writer to acknowledge the influence that both the queer and Mennonite communities have had on him as he archives queer Mennonite experience in his novels.[9]

Aside from its uncanny aspects, Funk's call from Keith is a queer one because of their sexual relationship. Keith's position as a queer martyr as a result of his AIDS-related death adds an element of sacredness to his charge to Funk to tell stories of those on the margins honestly. In effect, he calls Funk to write so that he and others like him will not be forgotten. Funk completes this testimony in part by being open about his relationship with Keith and how it involved barebacking (i.e., anal sex without condoms) rather than the practice of safe sex.[10] Funk's willingness to seek pleasure for his body instead of feeling shame about its taboo desires, and, just as importantly, his willingness to narrate his pursuit of this pleasure rather than censoring himself, helps to claim legitimacy for these actions and works as a weapon against societal homophobia.

Funk's call from Jim Morrison also includes queer elements. It is prefaced earlier in the book by some of Funk's previous experiences with music. He explains that he realized "*[i]t was okay to be gay*" despite his homophobic upbringing when listening to openly queer musicians as a teenager.[11] Public gay role models helped Funk to accept himself, and by relating this story as well as writing his novels he works to act as such a role model for others, so his work is explicitly activist. He also writes that music "saved [his] life" several times when he was trying to find himself as a young man.[12] It is significant that Funk pays tribute to the importance of music and musicians in his life (much more so than he does about specific writers, in fact). Biographical theorist Hermione Lee contends that biography examines "the effects of a life on others,"[13] and Funk does this regarding his own life later in the book, but he must first explain to readers the influence others had on him so that he could get to a place where he could respond to his call to have that effect. Funk places his narrative firmly within the context of community, which is, once again, a queer and Mennonite move.

Morrison's image serves as a representation of these influences in Funk's life. The erotic way Funk describes him in the poster as though he is a Calvin Klein model, "shirtless" with "lion-mane hair" turns Morrison into a queer sex symbol, one so powerful that Funk gets The Doors' logo tattooed on his back soon afterward.[14] In light of Funk's transcendent experience this poster acts as a secular icon, a talisman for Funk as he tries to provide the kind of narrative model to readers that he finds in queer music. As Funk responds to his call from Morrison, he pays homage to the rocker in the title of his first novel, *Dead Rock Stars*,[15] which is about the owner of a record shop that is similar to the one where Funk encounters the poster. Funk explains in his autobiography that he had always been intrigued by musicians such as Morrison who died young.[16] He gives the protagonist of *Dead Rock Stars* this fascination as well.

Wes's Funky Body

Once he received his call, Funk wrote a book combining poems and short stories, as well as three novels before writing *Wes Side Story*.[17] Examining how he constructs his identity as a writer in the latter illuminates the activist elements in his fiction. *Wes Side Story* begins this construction on its cover. The title, aside from being a campy, and thus queer, musical-related pun, works as a polemical statement because Funk asserts he is telling his "side" of things, that his outsider perspective needs to be heard.[18] The cover image is a stylized frontal portrait of Funk's face by RoseMarie [sic] Condon that uses Funk's hair, glasses, goatee, and earrings to define his head rather than depicting his head itself, lending the image a ghostly quality that is appropriate considering his experiences with the paranormal. The portrait has Funk's name where his mouth would go, symbolizing how he speaks himself throughout the book. The portrait's inclusion of Funk's three earrings is important because they are a marker of his outsider status (more on this below) as someone who embraces countercultural movements, queer or otherwise. The cover image repeats on the book's half title page without Funk's name or the title, so there is just an emphasis on his face, which is significant: he is there, not just as an abstract concept held in language, but as someone who must be seen. In sociologist Arthur Frank's terms, this image helps to make Funk "narratable" by inserting a representation of him into discourse.[19] *Wes Side Story* writes Funk into being so that others will acknowledge his existence despite its

marginality. The repetition of the cover image on the half title page is also important from a Mennonite viewpoint because Funk is not worried about appearing prideful by showing himself twice. He asserts that his presence is important. He is called to share a message and demands our attention as he shares it. The third image at the beginning of *Wes Side Story*, which appears on the title page, is not of Funk, but of the title only in the same font as on the cover, but twice as large and with three stars around it. This image names Funk as "fabulous," as a "star," again playing up the campy nature of the book's title.

The cover's emphasis on Funk's corporeal self is continued throughout the book, often in explicit ways. For instance, he mentions masturbating to a photograph of Mick Jagger, and shares that his nickname for his penis is "Mr. Wiggly."[20] The matter-of-fact tone Funk uses when relating these details indicates that he includes them not to be titillating or salacious, but because he believes it is important to be open about the enjoyment of his body as a corrective to both Mennonite and broader North American society's policing of sexuality. Despite its commonality, masturbation is an essentially unseen, transitory act, so Funk's inscribing of it on the page epitomizes queer archiving because, as Ann Cvetkovich explains, "queer cultures" are often "ephemeral" and thus require innovative archiving efforts to preserve them.[21] Readers may feel that Funk's inclusion of such details is an example of over-sharing at best and scandalously sinful at worst. However, by including them he insists that all of queer life should be visible, even in its most private, everyday moments. As Juana María Rodríguez declares, queer archiving involves "the soiled and untidy."[22] Funk makes it clear that as a queer archive *Wes Side Story* will document every area of his life.

Queer Failure

One element of Funk's identity as a writer as given in *Wes Side Story* is that he views himself as being on the margins and that he writes to those who are also there. He dedicates the book to "anyone who has ever felt like an outsider."[23] There is an appropriate similarity between this dedication and the dedication of J. Jack Halberstam's book *The Queer Art of Failure*, which is "For all of history's losers."[24] Halberstam argues that "[f]ailing is something queers do," but that this act can be powerful because it leads to new unthought-of perspectives, and is also one of the "weapons of the weak."[25] This view of failure resonates with the

Mennonite concept of the "upside-down kingdom" that Jesus references in Matthew 20:16: "the last shall be first, and the first last." Those who are considered outsiders, whether because they are failures or otherwise, have a certain kind of subversive knowledge because they can observe the powerful without themselves being observed since the powerful treat them as though they are invisible. In acknowledging this group, *Wes Side Story*'s dedication both names Funk himself as marginal and names the book as specifically queer because being queer means being on the margins.

Funk establishes his outsider credentials early on in *Wes Side Story*. He begins the book with the story of his father proposing to his mother.[26] This narrative choice places Funk's story firmly within a community, affirming that the concept of community is an important one for him. But he then shows throughout the book how his experiences have alienated him from this community, both his immediate family and their broader Mennonite milieu. He explains that he was an unplanned child[27] and never wanted by the very community he acknowledges in the book's opening pages. He is constantly at odds with his family, noting simply that he "was different" in his description of a fight with his mother over whether or not he could take Home Economics rather than shop class.[28] Funk leaves his rural Saskatchewan home after high school, hoping that he will find belonging in Saskatoon. This move from country to city, symbolizing a rejection of the faith community in favor of a dalliance with the world, is a common one in both Mennonite lives in general and Mennonite literature specifically, and gets repeated in Funk's first two novels. Unfortunately for Funk, he does not initially find fulfillment in the city and tries to commit suicide. His family visits him in the hospital, but do not offer to take care of him as he recovers, underlining just how much of an "Other" he is to them.[29] In light of this near-death experience, it is understandable that when Funk receives his call to write about marginalized lives as a way to help those who reside there he takes it seriously.

Queering Publishing

Funk also names himself an outsider as a writer. He recounts how *Dead Rock Stars* received "17 rejections" before he finally decided to self-publish it.[30] This nontraditional publishing choice places Funk's work on the literary margins, in part because literary critics and his fellow writers may look down on it since it

does not have the publishing industry's stamp of approval and in part because his choice does not give his work access to established distribution channels. Cvetkovich's previously cited observation about the ephemerality of queer cultures certainly applies to Funk's oeuvre. Funk writes about queer culture to preserve it, but his books themselves are ephemeral in that they are very difficult to acquire because of their self-published status, especially now that he is deceased. For instance, as I was writing this essay in September 2016, I wanted to purchase a copy of Funk's first book, *Humble Beginnings*, and was unable to find one available online. A search of amazon.ca for Funk's other novels on 8 September 2016 revealed no paper copies of *Baggage* or of *Cherry Blossoms.* Just two paper copies of *Dead Rock Stars* and *Wes Side Story* each were available, and Kindle editions available for only the latter three. All of the paper copies were being sold by the same small store, Laird Books in Regina, Saskatchewan. A search of amazon.com (i.e., amazon in the U.S.) on the same date revealed one paper copy of *Dead Rock Stars*. A search of abebooks.com on the same date revealed one paper copy of *Dead Rock Stars* available from a New York bookseller and one paper copy of *Cherry Blossoms* from an Ontario bookseller along with copies of those novels and *Wes Side Story* from Laird Books. On this website Laird claimed to have twenty copies of each book rather than two (and for some reason they do not advertise their copies of *Cherry Blossoms* on amazon), but whether they have two or twenty, these statistics show that Funk's works are rare enough that they risk being lost to literary history – which is one reason why I am writing about them. As of 8 September 2016, Funk's website was still up, and there were links to purchase both paper and electronic versions of *Dead Rock Stars*, *Cherry Blossoms*, and *Wes Side Story*, but it is unclear whether a request to purchase one of these texts would be fulfilled, as it may have been Funk himself who had been the one to fulfill such requests.[31]

Funk's choice to self-publish despite the literary stigma placed on such an act by certain segments of the literary community is a liberating one. He capitalizes on the changing mechanics of the literary marketplace to make his marginalized narratives visible whether academia respects them or not. Funk's sense of call meant that he had to get his stories out there no matter the cost, even if, as it turned out, it initially meant paying for the printing of his books himself. His choice to self-publish is a queer and theologically Mennonite move because it emphasizes witness-through-story for the sake of the community rather than seeking after fame and profit.

Funk occupied the margins of the writing community because he did not have any kind of university degree or formal creative writing training, and thus had a difficult time gaining access to the reading and lecture circuit. When viewed through Halberstam's lens of failure as a queer virtue, Funk is perhaps the queerest of all queer Mennonite writers in that he had no academic credentials, he rode a bus to work, he worked menial jobs, and he even died after mistakenly taking too much pain medication.[32] His work epitomizes "outsider art" to the point where readers might wonder whether it even deserves the attention of a critical endeavor such as this one.

However, Funk emphasizes in *Wes Side Story* that his work has affected readers just as he is explicit about how visible queer role models influenced him. He shares several stories of meeting strangers on the street who identify him as Wes Funk the writer, and also notes that *Dead Rock Stars* was included in a university course on gender studies.[33] Funk's work achieves a kind of canonization via this inclusion, albeit a tenuous one because it is not taught in an English course. But the fact that it becomes visible enough to enter both popular consciousness and academia is a prime example of "the last shall be first" motif. Despite his failures, Funk is able to show that his writing accomplishes what he was called to do in that people respond to it and it is recognized by those with institutional power. Funk also writes that on multiple occasions people tell him that reading his books causes them to stop being homophobic because it gives them a better understanding of what gay life is like.[34] These accounts show the importance of Funk's stories, including his autobiography, making queers visible for others to see. His work has a prophetic effect, causing people to change their lives after hearing his message. As with all prophets, Funk's writing encounters some resistance, but this resistance helps to raise his work's profile. His books become visible enough to both be banned and be included in banned books events.[35] These incidents illustrate that the queer narratives Funk tells are still revolutionary, necessary ones. His words from the margins carry power.

Funk's Autobiographical Fiction

Funk's transgressive novels include numerous autobiographical elements. The "About the Author" statement from *Baggage* says that he has "dedicated his writing to telling stories that reflect his life"[36] and in *Wes Side Story* he notes that these autobiographical

elements are often queer.[37] Valerie Rohy highlights the importance of life writing in "queer literature."[38] It is not surprising that the assertion of self in such writing is often manifested in queer fiction as it is in Funk's work. Although Funk takes pains to emphasize *Wes Side Story*'s genre in its subtitle, he approaches writing autobiography and fiction in the same way. All of his books use the same plain, chronological prose style to the point where they become generically indistinguishable so that if one did not know any better, it would be possible to read *Wes Side Story* as a piece of metafiction about a character named "Wes Funk." Such sameness is not normally the case with novelists' life writing,[39] and may simply result from Funk's lack of formal writing instruction. Nevertheless, it works from a queer perspective because of its insistence that the boundaries between genres are made to be disregarded.[40] The queer archiving accomplished in Funk's work is what matters instead. There is always some kind of "truth" in his narratives, factual or otherwise.

Funk's insistence on writing about queer experience makes the connection between real life and the necessity of queer fictional models for the queer community explicit. The protagonists of his first two novels, *Dead Rock Stars* and *Baggage*, are both clearly fictionalized versions of Funk himself. In *Dead Rock Stars*, Jackson Hill looks exactly like Funk, with red hair, earrings, a goatee, and black glasses;[41] in *Wes Side Story*, Funk acknowledges that this character is his "alter ego."[42] Like Funk, Jackson has left his rural hometown for life in Saskatoon, but must then figure out how to relate to the community he abandoned. He struggles with constructing an identity that will allow his urban gay self to be in a relationship with a farmer. This plot is an essential one for queer literature because, as Halberstam notes, fiction depicting "queer rural life" is rare.[43] But *Dead Rock Stars* offers an example of how it is possible to find liberating queer rural spaces and thus inhabit a queer rural self. As Lee posits, biography is always concerned with "identity."[44] While some literary critics wonder whether the field of Mennonite literature should move beyond questions of identity,[45] Funk's writing argues that we cannot be done with the concept quite yet since those on the margins are forced to contend with their identities because the oppressors use these identities as justifications to oppress them. *Wes Side Story* is, on one level, about Funk's struggle to find an identity for himself, which he ultimately does as a queer writer by writing fictional versions of his experiences.

Baggage is the most autobiographical of Funk's novels, as it explicitly examines queer Mennonite identity. The novel tells the

story of Sam Brown. It begins as *Wes Side Story* does, with his parents, who discuss the burden of Sam's unplanned pregnancy. Despite the fact that she did not intend the pregnancy, his mother decides that her child will have a "purpose" and that they will name him "Samuel [.... which] means *to listen*."[46] In case readers do not immediately make the connection between Sam and the Biblical Samuel, his mother's speech makes it clear that he should be read as a prophet. "Samuel" actually means "name of God" rather than "listen," but Sam's mother's mistranslation reinforces that readers must pay attention to his story. Sam as *Baggage*'s Funk stand-in is a prophet just as Funk depicts himself as a prophet responding to a call in his autobiography.

Funk's Literary Contexts

Sam also references another literary Samuel, Samuel Reimer from Rudy Wiebe's 1970 novel *The Blue Mountains of China*, whose story is contained in the second-to-last chapter of Wiebe's sweeping narrative of Russian Mennonites fleeing the Soviet Union for the more religiously tolerant landscapes of Canada and South America.[47] Entitled "The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer," the chapter depicts Reimer's call from God to go preach peace in Vietnam and how his Mennonite community refuses to listen to him, which results in his death. While *Baggage* ends on a happier note, its resonance with Reimer's story is significant because of how its themes place it into the broader tradition of Mennonite literature. Funk's writing works to expand the tradition, making space for queer stories and calling for acknowledgment that the kind of lives they portray have been part of the larger Mennonite story all along. *Baggage* shares the oppressive rural community found in "The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer," but instead of letting this community destroy him, Sam leaves it for the theoretically welcoming arms of the city as Funk himself did.

Aside from its similarities to *The Blue Mountains of China*, Sam's Mennonite background—he notes that his family is "Mennonite," and mentions having cousins in Steinbach, Manitoba[48]—makes *Baggage* an explicitly Mennonite text. Sam's character is prophetic because he finds a way to be a queer Mennonite despite his home community's opposition. While Funk's sparse mentions of his Mennonite background in *Wes Side Story* indicate that he had a lot of pain from his homophobic upbringing, it is significant that he mentions it at all and that he chose to write an explicitly Mennonite novel. He recognizes the Mennonite

community's influence on him. Bernice Friesen also notes that Funk submitted a poem to *Rhubarb*, the journal of the Mennonite Literary Society, before he died.[49] This choice of venue indicates that Funk may have been coming to terms with himself as a specifically Mennonite writer, not only a queer one.

Just as Funk's fiction shares similarities with previous Mennonite texts, it also shares similarities with a set of foundational queer texts, Ann Bannon's five-part Beebo Brinker series of novels.[50] Although *Baggage* is not a sequel to *Dead Rock Stars*, the books share characters and settings in order to portray the possibility of a supportive queer community that is larger than individual relationships. In doing so, they repeat Bannon's creation of standalone texts within the context of a shared world of characters and issues that help to make the queer community visible. Bannon's novels remain influential because they are some of the first queer novels to have relatively happy endings in contrast to those in previous queer fiction since their characters are able to affirm their queer identities rather than being forced to either denounce them or suffer horrible repercussions.[51] Similarly, it is significant that *Dead Rock Stars* and *Baggage* are love stories that end happily because they offer an important hopeful vision for queer Mennonite futures. In these novels Funk provides the stories he describes struggling to find for himself in *Wes Side Story*.

Reading Funk's fiction through the lens of his autobiography empowers the fiction because the pedestrian, everyday aspects of its narratives are given more urgency through the activist aspects of Funk's call. Despite the various rejections he experiences, Funk shows in *Wes Side Story* that he takes his call seriously and keeps writing, ultimately succeeding in this act. His choice to answer his call helps illuminate some of the intersections between queer literature and Mennonite literature, most notably their emphasis on the search for healthy community, and places his work firmly in both traditions. It remains the task of readers to respond to the fulfillment of Funk's call and explore the queer Mennonite archive that he documents for us, which is useless if left undisturbed. How will we employ his prophetic words?

Notes

[1] This essay appears in slightly different form in *Queering Mennonite Literature* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019, forthcoming).

[2] This notion has permeated North American Mennonitism in official and unofficial ways. Many Mennonite martyrdom stories include an element of call. See, for instance, the story of Clayton Kratz, who was asked to be a relief worker in Russia on a Tuesday and was on the ship headed there that Friday, in Elizabeth Hershberger Bauman's *Coals of Fire* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1954), 111–18. There are also stories of influential churchmen, such as Harold S. Bender, who frequently called people to serve the church in various capacities. See Jeff Gundy, *Walker in the Fog: On Mennonite Writing* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2005), 145; and Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998). I recall the eminent Mennonite historian Theron Schlabach telling me in conversation when I was his student that the reason he got a Ph.D. in History was because Guy F. Hershberger, Bender's contemporary, told him to since there was a dearth of historians suitable for employment by Mennonite colleges. Swiss Mennonites traditionally called their pastors and other church leaders by the lot, although this practice has disappeared among all but the most conservative congregations. Considering his Saskatchewan roots Funk was probably a Russian Mennonite, and thus would not have been influenced by this element of the concept, though, as John C. Wenger notes, the last name Funk is "Swiss Mennonite" in origin. "Funk," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 420. For a recent discussion of the theological aspects of call from a Mennonite perspective, see Keith Graber Miller, *Living Faith: Embracing God's Callings* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2012).

[3] Despite its subtitle, Funk specifically names the book as "autobiography" rather than memoir on the copyright page and pledges his attempt to make it "truthful." This choice to write about his entire life rather than just his writing career (which is why it is improper to call it a memoir) is significant because, as I argue later in this essay, he attempts to offer the narrative of a queer life for use as a model for others.

[4] Wes Funk, *Wes Side Story: A Memoir* (Regina, SK: Your Nickel's Worth Publishing, 2014), 84.

[5] Ibid., 104.

[6] Abram J. Lewis, "'I am 64 and Paul McCartney Doesn't Care': The Haunting of the Transgender Archive and the Challenges of Queer History," *Radical History Review* 120 (2014): 27.

[7] Kay Stoner, "How the Peace Church Helped Make a Lesbian Out of Me," *Mennonot* (Fall 1994), 10-11, http://www.keybridgeltd.com/mennonot/Issue 3.pdf. The spiritual and geographical journey toward worldliness that Stoner names is so archetypal that it was already being satirized in the 1980s. See Emerson L. Lesher, *The Muppie Manual: The Mennonite Urban Professional's Handbook for Humility and Success or (How to be the Gentle in the City)* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1985).

[8] Casey Plett, "Natural Links of Queer and Mennonite Literature," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 34 (2016): 287.

[9] I cite a number of sources on queer archiving throughout this essay, but it is also important to note that Mennonites love archiving. There are numerous Mennonite archives in North America. A partial list would include those held by historical libraries at Mennonite colleges such as Bethel College, Bluffton University, Conrad Grebel University College, Eastern Mennonite University, and Goshen College. There are also various regional archives

maintained by Mennonite denominations, conferences, and private groups. Paul Tiessen's recent work on Rudy Wiebe's archives has been helpful for my thinking about the subject. See Paul Tiessen, "Double Identity: Covering the *Peace Shall Destroy Many* Project," in *After Identity: Mennonite Writing in North America*, ed. Robert Zacharias (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 70–85; "Re-framing the Reaction to *Peace Shall Destroy Many*: Rudy Wiebe, Delbert Wiens, and the Mennonite Brethren," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no.1 (2016): 73–102; "Archival Returns: Rudy Wiebe and the Coming Back of Thom Wiens," in *11 Encounters with Mennonite Fiction*, ed. Hildi Froese Tiessen (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Literary Society, 2017), 50–68; and his reflections on interacting with archives in "'I want my story told': The Sheila Watson Archive, the Reader, and the Search for Voice," in *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace: Explorations in Canadian Women's Archives*, ed. Linda Morra and Jessica Schagerl (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 264–65. I also thank one of *JMS*'s peer reviewers for the reminder that archival activities such as family recordkeeping and genealogy are common hobbies for Mennonites who are otherwise uninvolved in academic pursuits.

[10] Funk, *Wes Side*, 82. On the practice of barebacking and how it can function as a liberating, anti-homophobic practice, see Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Marlon M. Bailey offers an important expansion of Dean's ideas in "Black Gay (Raw) Sex," in *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 239–61.

[11] Funk, *Wes Side*, 48, emphasis in the original.

[12] Ibid., 43, 68.

[13] Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

[14] Funk, *Wes Side*, 104.

[15] Wes Funk, *Dead Rock Stars: Illustrated Edition*, illustrated by Kevin Hastings (Regina, SK: Your Nickel's Worth Publishing, 2015).

[16] Funk, *Wes Side*, 104.

[17] Along with *Dead Rock Stars*, which was originally published without illustrations in 2008, see Wes Funk, *Humble Beginnings* (Saskatoon, SK: Wes Funk, 2006), *Baggage* (Regina, SK: Benchmark Press, 2010), and *Cherry Blossoms* (Regina, SK: Your Nickel's Worth Publishing, 2012).

[18] Although, as I argue here, Funk's title works in liberating ways, it is also necessary to acknowledge that he chooses to riff off of the title of a work that is racist. Unlike its inspiration *Romeo and Juliet*, where the Montagues and Capulets are social equals who happen to hate each other, in *West Side Story* Puerto Ricans are portrayed as dangerous racial Others who must be subdued at all costs. This discriminatory stance is evident in the names of the gangs: the whites are the Jets, symbols of technological progress and emblems of the future, and the Puerto Ricans are the Sharks, animalistic and bloodthirsty. William Shakespeare and Arthur Laurents, *Romeo and Juliet & West Side Story* (New York: Dell, 1965). As a Puerto Rican, I wish that Funk had chosen a different title and that he did not have the racial blind spot which his title reveals. But as a queer, I find much that is valuable in *Wes Side Story* despite its titular flaw.

[19] Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 75.

[20] Funk, *Wes Side*, 52, 29–30.

[21] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7. I first encountered a citation of Cvetkovich's book in Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "Archiving Queer Feelings in Hong Kong," in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose (London: Routledge, 2013), 400–01, and I acknowledge the importance of Leung's essay for my thinking about Funk's work. It may seem odd to cite an essay on queer experience in Hong Kong when discussing queer experience in Saskatchewan, but I do so because Leung's focus on the regional is a useful model for thinking about Funk's work, which is proudly rooted in both rural and urban Saskatchewan. This citation also emphasizes the point that queers are marginal everywhere.

[22] Anjali Arondekar, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, and Susan Stryker, "Queer Archives: A Roundtable Discussion," *Radical History Review* 122 (2015): 213.

[23] Funk, *Wes Side*, 5.

[24] J. Jack Halberstam [as Judith Halberstam], *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), v.

[25] Ibid., 3, 7, 88.

[26] Funk, *Wes Side*, 9–10.

[27] Ibid., 15.

[28] Ibid., 39.

[29] Ibid., 69–71.

[30] Ibid., 118.

[31] See http://www.wesfunk.ca/.

[32] Sean Trembath, "Local Author Wes Funk Dead at 46," *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, 13 October 2015, http://www.thestarphoenix.com/Local+author+Funk+dead/11432193/story.html. See also Bernice Friesen, "In Memory," *Rhubarb*, Winter 2015, 63.

[33] Funk, *Wes Side*, 146, 150.

[34] Ibid., 128, 204.

[35] Ibid., 191.

[36] Funk, *Baggage*, 167.

[37] Funk, *Wes Side*, 128. Funk's third novel, *Cherry Blossoms*, about a heterosexual woman, is the least autobiographical of his books (and thus I do not examine it here), but even it includes some autobiographical elements such as vacation destinations and Funk's usual country-to-city migration story.

[38] Valerie Rohy, "In the Queer Archive: *Fun Home*," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 3 (2010): 343.

[39] To cite a Mennonite example, the writing voice in Rudy Wiebe's *Of This Earth: A Mennonite Boyhood in the Boreal Forest* (2006; Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007) is very different than the voice in, say, *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995).

[40] Funk explicitly advocates this principle in his choice to have *Humble Beginnings* contain multiple genres.

[41] Funk, *Dead Rock Stars*, 20.

[42] Funk, *Wes Side*, 160.

[43] J. Jack Halberstam [as Judith Halberstam], *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 42. Unfortunately queer rural fiction is still rather rare overall, though many queer Mennonite texts include rural settings like *Dead Rock Stars* does.

[44] Lee, *Biography*, 14.

[45] Zacharias's *After Identity* wrestles with this issue, as does Hildi Froese Tiessen's "Beyond 'What We by Habit or Custom Already Know,' or What Do We Mean When We Talk About Mennonite Writing?," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 1 (2016): 11–27.

[46] Funk, *Baggage*, 5, emphasis in the original.

[47] Wiebe, *The Blue Mountains of China*, 188–215.

[48] Funk, *Baggage*, 65, 103.

[49] Bernice Friesen, "From the Editor's Desk," *Rhubarb*, Winter 2015, 2.

[50] Ann Bannon, *Odd Girl Out* (1957; San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2001), *I Am a Woman* (1959; San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2002), *Women in the Shadows* (1959; San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2002), *Journey to a Woman* (1960; San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), and *Beebo Brinker* (1962; San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2001).

[51] These traditional condemnatory endings include characters suffering not only from breakups, but also from "illness," mental breakdowns, and "suicide" as punishment for their queer relationships. Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 51–52, 57. Likewise, Cvetkovich notes that in 1950s fiction lesbians usually end up "sad, lonely, or dead." *An Archive*, 253. Kristen Hogan documents how the availability of lesbian fiction such as Bannon's "with *good* endings" felt "life-changing" for lesbians, in *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 2, emphasis in the original.