comments on how Friesen "keeps teasing the reader with near-sonnets in" *songen.*

Mierau's strength lies in such close readings and in his gesturing towards classical frameworks for particular poems. Unfortunately, he weakens his book with large and unsupported generalizations about literary history. A dubious distinction between European modernism and American postmodernism, for example, appears to be invoked primarily in an effort to distance Friesen from the possibility of influence by the Canadian poet and critic Robert Kroetsch.

This is a compelling book (despite conspicuous flaws) because Mierau's fine ear leads him to circle back repeatedly to what is the heart of Friesen's powerful vision—the performance of poetry as a kind of dance. Like Mierau, I consider *jumping in the asylum* to be one of Friesen's "strongest books." The cover of that book features a famous photograph taken by a visitor to the asylum where Vaslav Nijinsky spent his last years. It shows the dancer in mid-air with his arms stretched out and his shadow on the wall behind him. The image illustrates the argument of Mierau's book and echoes a point made elsewhere by Robert Bringhurst: "What poetry knows, or what it strives to know, is the dancing at the heart of being."

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Mary Ann Loewen, ed. *Finding Father: Stories from Mennonite Daughters*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2019. Pp. 184. Softcover, $21.95.

Finding Father is an absorbing collection of thirteen short memoirs by Mennonite women writers about their fathers, and the companion to Mary Ann Loewen's previous edited volume, *Mothers and Sons* (University of Regina, 2015). The cross-gendered perspective of these two collections opens a window onto parenting, childhood, and youth in North America in the second half of the twentieth century. What was it to grow up female in a patriarchal household in the decades following the Second World War, amid its legacies of rising middle-class prosperity, the nuclear family, and changing expectations for girls and women? This question has motivated much feminist life writing of the twentieth century. But then what was it to experience these transformations from within an immigrant community centred around church and faith, one

which lived in uneasy tension with the enticements of the modern world?

Each voice in *Finding Father* is intimate, unique, and candid. Some of the entries tell a fairly straightforward narrative of events, while others organize their reflection on a particular theme. Magdalene Redekop's story includes seven vignettes about her father filtered through the lens of language, speech, and translation, with rich Low German phrases sprinkled throughout. A triptych of portraits by Loewen, the editor, and two of her sisters, Ruth and Lynda Loewen, is based on tributes to their father delivered at his funeral. The fathers in these stories are farmers, business owners, physicians, researchers, construction workers. Many of them are preachers or deacons. Some of them are warm and affectionate, others are distant and silent, and still others are described in more ambivalent terms. Hildi Froese Tiessen, for example, reflects on her father as "less a force with whom I actively interacted than the environment, the matrix in which I grew up." Similarly, Rebecca Plett remembers her father's "quiet power" as an extension of the horizon line of the prairie landscape of her childhood, which she memorably describes as "a symbiosis between biography and ecology."

What I particularly enjoyed about the collection was the sense of getting to know each of the father and daughter "characters." Every contribution vividly evokes a strong sense of the person through the telling anecdote, the remembered conversation, the quirky habit, the daily routine. Yet some of the entries also admit the impossibility of fully revealing a life—of the enigma of memory. In the opening entry of the collection, "The Father Character," novelist Carrie Snyder self-consciously frames her recollection of her father in relation to fiction-making: "This is not my dad, this is an amalgam of dads I have known, or dads I remember knowing, which probably also includes fictional dads," she writes. "Am I capturing him? Am I coming close?" Indeed, many of the writers allude to childhood reading as a clue to understanding who their father was or wasn't. Both Cari Penner and Julia Spicher Kasdorf reject the fantasy fathers of television sitcoms and fairy tales as inadequate to their own and their fathers' lived experiences. Others recall the practice of storytelling as a collaboration with their father, one that would prove foundational to their later careers as writers, researchers, and public speakers. Fiction and reality, fact and fantasy frequently drift into each other's lanes in these stories—a hallmark of the best life writing.

Something I noticed in nearly all of the stories is the complex interplay between the father's presence and absence, with his acts

of leave-taking (for work, for church commitments, for refuge from persecution) often recalled or imagined, sometimes in vivid detail. In more than one account, father is a steady provider but is emotionally absent, having been trained to regard such forms of nurture as women's responsibility. A father's final leave-taking in death is described frequently, sometimes with great sorrow and a profound awareness of loss that continues to haunt his daughter. Indeed, the very title of the collection announces this sense of the father as a kind of missing person—an absent presence who must be discovered or retrieved through the operations of memory and invention. Undergirding these narratives of yearning for serially absent fathers is a compassion borne of the kind of wisdom that lends these stories such poignancy and power.

"He did what he could with what he had," Penner writes of a father who was a "stranger" to her, a thoughtful admission that implies a historical perspective essential to the gentle forgiveness that characterizes many of the writers' attitudes to their fathers. What many of these fathers had were the wounds caused by displacement and war, rural poverty, mental illness, and tragic separation from their own parents and siblings at a young age. In this regard, *Finding Father* offers a personal, yet collective history of European Mennonite experience of the twentieth century. As Maggie Dyck writes, "my story could be interpreted as a microcosm of the profound transformation that our people experienced." The role of the church in the daily life of family and community is a key dimension of this history, yet surprisingly few writers dwell on this. The figure of the tyrannical, Bible-thumping Mennonite patriarch is largely absent from the collection. Instead, the majority of the women write of fathers who quietly modeled a life of faith in their actions more than their words.

As a whole, *Finding Father* will appeal to readers who recognize the particularities of North American Mennonite community life enfolded within each of the stories, but its gathering of themes and patterns resonates far beyond ethnoreligious lines. Richly perceptive life writing can prompt reflection on one's own experiences and connections no matter what her background. Moments of emotional insight couched in a well-crafted phrase can help the reader find clarity about her own relations, a great gift this collection will offer to all sensitive readers.

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