

# Many Kinds of Love: The Unpublished Works of Peter G. Epp

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Peter G. Epp (1888-1954) was born and raised in the village of Petershagen in the Molotchna colony, South Russia. He was educated at the Teachers' Institute in Halbstadt, the *Freie Evangelische Predigerschule*, Basel, Switzerland (1906-8), the University of Heidelberg, Germany (1908ff.), and received the Ph.D. degree from the University of Basel in 1912. From 1912 to 1924 he taught school in Russia, six years at the Barvenkovo School of Commerce and another six years at his alma mater, the Teachers' Institute in Halbstadt. In 1924 Epp emigrated to America where he taught German and Russian at Bluffton College and Ohio State University. He died in 1954.<sup>1</sup>

Epp was a prolific writer, but not nearly all his works have been published. His published works include *Die Erlösung* and *Eine Mutter, Die Mennoniten in Russland*, "Johanna," and "Das Geisslein."<sup>2</sup> His most ambitious works, *An der Molotchna*, *Eros Multiformis* and *De Homine* remain unpublished. These works may never be published in their entirety for a number of reasons. They are extremely long and they were never given final revision by the author. This unfinished quality would make it necessary for someone to edit these manuscripts, a daunting task when one realizes that the bulk of this unpublished material is in Gothic script.<sup>3</sup> \*

Epp's unpublished works are now housed at the University of Basel. My interest in these manuscripts dates from 1983 when as part of my research on *Eine Mutter* I examined the "Peter Epp Collection" at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. Here I found numerous notes, letters and even hand-written essays on philosophical subjects such as "Time." Of special interest were some scattered references to the manuscripts in Basel that were not to be released for publication until the year 2000. Correspondence with the archivist at the University of Basel soon made it clear that, while wholesale publication of these manuscripts might be forbidden until the date specified, such a ban would not prevent me or any interested scholar from examining them or writing about them. In 1990 I was finally able to spend the necessary time in Basel to examine these works. I was also given permission to photocopy all of *Eros Multiformis*. Since then I have, as indicated below, recorded this entire work on audio-tape.

Why did Peter Epp direct his widow to deposit certain of his manuscripts in the archives at the University of Basel and why did he request a ban on their publication until the year 2000? Was he concerned that his readers might think he had slandered some of their relatives? Or did he think that the truths he felt he had revealed about humankind might be too harsh for the Mennonites of his time? The "Peter Epp Collection" at Bethel College sheds some light on Epp's motives, but there are no simple answers to these questions.

Shortly after his death in 1954 Peter G. Epp's widow wrote to the archivist at the University of Basel concerning her husband's unpublished manuscripts and



*Peter G. Epp in Basel ca. 1908*

*Photo Credit: A.B. Enns*

his last wish regarding their preservation. Following a lengthy correspondence,<sup>4</sup> a formal agreement was reached between Justina D. Epp and the University of Basel Library in September, 1954. A Memorandum of Agreement (*Vereinbarung*) was signed by the University of Basel, September 21, 1954, and by Mrs. Epp, September 28, 1954. According to this memorandum Mrs. Epp agreed to turn over the manuscripts described below along with the sum of one thousand dollars subject to the conditions prescribed in Epp's will. To meet these conditions the university promised to safeguard these manuscripts and to invest the money in a trust fund until the date agreed upon. After this date (the year 2000) the university reserves the right to decide whether or not publication is feasible. If publication is not considered possible the university library is free to put the money and the accumulated interest to use as it sees fit.

This Memorandum of Agreement is clearly the conclusion of a friendly exchange of letters that began with Mrs. Epp's original request, a letter dated April 17, 1954. This letter reads in part as follows: "It was the wish of my deceased husband, Peter Epp, Ph.D., that his [unpublished] manuscripts be preserved at the University of Basel, his Alma Mater, until the year 2000." This is an interesting departure from the year 2100 mentioned in Epp's personal papers; in this letter Mrs. Epp merely quotes her husband's statement that by the year 2100 literary scholars will be able to read these works with calm objectivity. This letter which initiates the subsequent negotiations specifically names the manuscripts *Eros Multiformis* and *De Homine*.<sup>5</sup>

One must then regard Mrs. Epp's original letter of April 17, 1954, as part of the formal agreement reached with the University of Basel in September of the same year. As noted above, Epp's widow never mentions the year 2100 as the termination date of the agreement, a date that Epp mentions in a document preserved among his personal papers. In "My Work—My Wish" Epp names those of his works which may be published under the name of Peter Epp. He then goes on to express the hope that the manuscripts described below will not be published before the year 2100 and then only as works written by one "Ubique Peregrinus" (world traveller). This part of his will is dated October 17, 1949, and signed by Peter Epp himself. In another part of "My Work—My Wish" Epp makes the following statement:

After my bodily death, I would like to live on under no other name than "Ubique Peregrinus." I have always and everywhere here on earth been an alien. This role was not the least bit unpleasant for me; it was indeed my choice. This world's goods have never meant much to me.... My true being has found its expression in my work. What I was as a person, my personal circumstances, my personal experiences, yes, my profession and my professional activity—all that is secondary [of no consequence] should it disappear or be forgotten forever. My work, however, will live.<sup>6</sup>

This was written by Epp himself at a time when he was still able to do so. On the back of the same sheet of paper there is a further statement which he apparently dictated to his wife. This part was obviously signed with a very unsteady hand and dated Nov. 11, 1949; it is entitled "For Justel" and can be

translated as follows:

It may be that after my death you will be asked about my manuscripts. Don't let a single one of them get out of your hands.... In the year 2100 literary critics will be able to read these works with calm objectivity.<sup>7</sup>

There is also a virtually illegible note, presumably written shortly before his death, in which Epp advises his wife not to read "De Profundis."<sup>8</sup>

To this date my research has focused on the fictional work *Eros Multiformis*, a manuscript of nearly 3000 pages made up of seven distinctly separate segments or novellas. This massive work evolved over a fairly long period of time. It appears, from notes in the Peter Epp Collection and jottings on the title pages of the novellas, that Epp had some difficulty deciding which of the novellas should be included and how they should be arranged. According to the title page of "Ohm Esau," Epp originally envisaged a tetralogy or group of four works that was to include "Die Stimme," "Die Jungens," "Willie Schoppske," and "Ohm Esau." Elsewhere the author indicates a different grouping. In "My Work--My Wish" Epp states that the work *Eros Multiformis* consists of "Die Jungens," "Willie Shoppeske," "Ohm Esau," and "Die Wege des Herrn."<sup>9</sup>

In his "List of My Works," Epp confuses the matter further by apparently abandoning the concept of a tetralogy and listing the following six novellas as constituting the larger work, *Eros Multiformis*: "Die Stimme," "Die Jungens," "Willie Schoppske," "Ohm Esau," "Die Wege des Herrn," "De Profundis."<sup>10</sup> Apparently the seventh novella, "In der Stille," was added later. Epp never refers to this title in his personal papers. In my descriptions of the novellas below, I have followed Epp's proposed arrangement in his "List of My Works," except for "Die Jungens" which I have placed last in the series for reasons I give later. "In der Stille" could be put almost anywhere, but I have placed this, the longest of the seven, quite arbitrarily in the fourth position.

There are also intriguing questions one could raise with regard to Epp's sources. To what extent are his stories fictional? To what extent are they factual or even autobiographical? Amongst his personal papers there is the following statement:

I am no historian. My works should not be considered historical documents. The historian describes a world, a reality, which exists even without him. The question can always be asked: Is the account of the historian accurate, adequate? ... I myself have created the world of my writings; it exists only in my writings. The question whether my writings are true should not be asked at all. No actual facts should be looked for in them. The people that I portray do not constitute a group that has actually lived somewhere at some particular time—they represent mankind itself and it is all of mankind that I portray. Whoever knows how to read my works will find these people everywhere—in every land and in every generation.<sup>11</sup>

However, in "Ein Paar Gedanken Über diesen Roman zu berücksichtigen bei der Revision" ("A Few Thoughts to Consider when Revising the Novel") the author admits that his characters are modelled, originally at least, upon living persons:

The first draft is never suitable for publication. It must always be thoroughly reworked. I always have in mind a general plan for each chapter even before I begin to write. I also have a model in mind for each one of my characters, a real living person. However, I take liberties with that model as I proceed. Sometimes I retain only the most basic personality traits—whatever suits my creative intuition.<sup>12</sup>

Epp's method of composition is also unclear in spite of his occasional efforts to enlighten future readers. Again in "Ein paar Gedanken..." he suggests that he adopts the free writing approach in his first drafts but then resorts to a ruthless revision. With the exception of "Die Jungens" there is no proof in the surviving manuscripts that such extensive revisions ever took place. On the contrary, the reader is left with the impression that such corrections and improvements would have greatly improved his overall style, especially with regard to economy of wording in descriptions and conversations. The occasional confusion with regard to characters' names further corroborates this impression. I submit that Epp might have done better as a short story writer than as a novelist. Perhaps he lacked models in this genre.

Following is a description and brief analysis of each of the novellas (segments) that make up the manuscript *Eros Multiformis*:

"Die Stimme": ("Peregrinus" appears in the top left hand corner and "Peter Epp" in the bottom right.) (257 pages)

This is the story of a precocious but very troubled young man named "Heinrich." (Epp does not use any surnames in this story.) Heinrich is unusual in that he periodically hears a voice which he takes to be the voice of God, the same voice, he insists, that inspired the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. The voice promises him a rosy future, fame and great accomplishments as long as he fully trusts this inner muse.

During his early years Heinrich is influenced by his older sister, Anna, who is also his surrogate mother, and by three innocent, idealistic children, Cornelius, Maria and Agnes. However, as a student at the gymnasium he falls under the spell of the riotous young Sasha. Sasha unsuccessfully tempts Heinrich with a more worldly philosophy. His motto is: "Geniessen wollen wir, nicht denken!" (We want to indulge our senses, not think!) He has nothing but contempt for Heinrich's asceticism.

Heinrich is able to resist Sasha's cynicism until he meets Vera, an attractive Russian girl. At this time he also experiences disappointment when a promising manuscript is rejected by a publisher. He seeks comfort from Sasha and even from his earlier friend Agnes, but he is mocked by the former and cruelly rebuffed by the latter. Desperate, Heinrich confides in one of his teachers, but even this kindly mentor questions the authenticity of the voice. Heinrich is so devastated by all this that he goes home and takes his own life.

"Willie Schoppeske": (On the title page: Peregrinus: *Eros Multiformis: Eine Tetralogie*: II: "Willie Schoppeske") (328 pages)

"Willie Schoppske" provides the reader with a welcome change in mood from the dark, sombre "Die Stimme." Willie has no idealistic dreams, nothing of the genius one feels was forever silenced in "Die Stimme." Indeed, Willie confesses often that he is limited, *beschränkt*, as he puts it. He is incredibly naive and has had just enough education to prove that a little learning is a dangerous thing. (The name "Schoppske" actually means "little sheep" in Low German.) Willie has resigned himself to being a humble school teacher, something the central character of "Die Stimme" always resisted.

Willie is extremely miserly. When he marries Lydia, the daughter of a well-to-do widow, he refuses to co-habit with her because he insists that they cannot afford to have children. Needless to say, the marriage is not a very happy one until Willie's friend and counsellor, the matronly Mrs. Muntas, takes matters in hand and puts an end to the ridiculous stand-off between Willie and his wife. Domestic encounters like this provide Epp with plenty of opportunities for comedy.

When Lydia becomes pregnant Willie persuades her to spend as much time as possible during her pregnancy solving mathematical problems in the hope that this will increase the chances that their future son (a daughter is never considered) will be an engineer and not a lowly school teacher or even, God forbid, a missionary.

Willie frets constantly about the status of his future inheritance. When Lydia's mother marries the elderly widower Mr. Neufeld, Willie worries that the old couple might somehow beget offspring and so disinherit them. Willie cannot understand why Mr. Neufeld has so little respect for him: "Bin doch ein ganz ausgebildeter Lehrer!" (After all, I'm a fully trained teacher!) He is unabashed even when Lydia's mother informs him that Mr. Neufeld's private assessment of him was: "Er ist doch ein richtiger Schopps!" (He certainly is an absolute ninny!)

As the time for the awaited birth approaches, Willie's worries take a new turn. What if Lydia should die and thus leave him with a dependent but no inheritance? However, when Lydia presents him with a healthy son and Mr. Neufeld celebrates the event by investing 10,000 rubles in a trust fund for the lad's education, Willie is comically eloquent in his expression of pious platitudes. In future, he vows, he will put his faith in Providence.

"Ohm Esau": (Sub-title: "The Remarkable Adventures and Sad End of Ohm Esau: An Example to all Serious-Minded Persons.")

An earlier title, "Nebuchadnezzar," has been stroked out. There is also evidence on the title-page of an attempt to order the segments: 1. "Die Stimme" 2. "Die Jungens" 3. "Willie Schoppske" 4. "Ohm Esau." At the end of the "Ohm Esau" segment there are some dates and the signature "Peregrinus." (215 pages)

This is the tragic story of a Mennonite minister's fall from grace. However, Epp intersperses this sad account with numerous comic scenes that satirize both Esau and the larger Mennonite community. In an early scene Esau readily

confesses to his fellow minister Johannes that he is well built and has the same needs as any mere mortal. (Johannes admits that Esau rattles the windows when he strides to the pulpit.) Esau confides to Johannes that he has even been aroused at times by various women in his congregation. He fears that God will punish him as he did Nebuchadnezzar by transforming him into a beast.

What is truly lamentable about *Prediger* Esau's decline and eventual fall is his perverted reasoning. (He often fears he is going insane.) In his theological discussions with Johannes he finds fault with God's creation, with his commandments and with his institutions, such as monogamous marriages, basing his arguments on analogies with the animal world and examples from the Old Testament. He toys with the false teaching of some early Christians who believed that sin need not be avoided since it merely provided greater occasions for God's grace.

The most poignant and at the same time bitterly satirical scene takes place at the deathbed of Emilia, the servant girl in the Esau household. Emilia has been sexually abused by her master and has secretly had an abortion. Mrs. Esau, however, ignores all that and tries instead to arouse in her the fear of hellfire and damnation by reminding Emilia of her lies in the past about a broken tea-glass and stolen *Pfeffernüsse*. Mrs. Esau tells her she will forgive her only at the very moment of death—otherwise Emilia may ask further questions for which she must be forgiven again. The irony, obvious but telling, is that the sins of Emilia, a mere *Dienstmädchen*, are petty and venial when compared to the heresies and abusive practices of Ohm Esau whose actions she is never allowed to question.

The story ends with the suicide of Ohm Esau. Esau's metamorphosis, although metaphorical, is real enough. He has rationalized his savage passions again and again until finally he himself is the victim.<sup>13</sup>

"In der Stille I & II": (Epp's pseudonym "Peregrinus" appears in the top left hand corner of the title-page and "Peter Epp" at the bottom right corner.) As noted above, this title is not mentioned by Epp in his notes or personal papers. Nevertheless, his pseudonym on the title-page suggests that he considered including this work as part of *Eros Multiformis*. (704 pages)

"In der Stille I": (The title-page describes this as a novel.)

Epp begins his "novel" by presenting a number of young couples, all from the same village, and all at different stages in their courtship. The story of Isaac Enns and Lieske Esau is presented in greatest detail and is therefore central. After these two marry, the village of Petershagen elects Isaac as preacher in spite of the fact that Lieske often contradicts her husband publicly. The community is more concerned about the kind of preaching they want than they are with their minister's domestic situation. They have been exposed recently to sermons by ministers who are quite evangelical and preach the need for conversion. Isaac is elected because he is local and can be trusted to resist such innovations.

Isaac Enns has no charisma, no oratorical skills or leadership abilities.

When his wife Lieske notices that the younger people find Isaac amusing she becomes even more contemptuous of her husband. Her blunt honesty and her youthful exuberance are in direct contrast to his naive earnestness. Her favourite song is "Schön ist die Jugend; Sie kommt nicht mehr!" (Youth is a beautiful time; it won't come again!)

The general pattern for all the young couples is to marry early, spend the first few years of married life in their parents' *Sommerstuben* (summer rooms), and then strike out on their own. While some remain in the village the shortage of land in the Molotchna Colony forces others to move to new settlements like those in Siberia. Others leave the land altogether. Derk Martens joins a business establishment in Moscow. Derk's elders are shocked when he writes that there are no Mennonites in that city of a million inhabitants.

With the exception of Isaac and Lieske most of the characters are flat and all too predictable. Epp is concerned in this novel with the tension between the old ways and the new, but all too often this amounts to little more than minute, nostalgic descriptions of the old. Nevertheless, Epp can also mock those who are too resistant to change. When Heinrich Krueger brings home from Melitopol the very latest invention in farm machinery, a threshing machine, the road leading into Petershagen is crowded with onlookers. Only Old Martens remains closeted in his little room reading the Book of Revelation. He is convinced that the end is near as he fervently prays for the Lord's second coming.

#### "In der Stille II":

The second part of "In Der Stille" continues to follow the fortunes of the characters already introduced in Part I but mainly from the perspective of the older generation left behind in the home village of Petershagen. The Ennses, Kruegers and Martens talk of little else besides their absent children. Of the young couples originally present only Isaac and Lieske and Heinrich (Krueger) and Netke have remained in the village; Isaac and his faultfinding wife Lieske remain in the Esau's *Sommerstube*, awaiting the inheritance of two *Vollwirtschaften*. Heinrich and Netke continue to prosper as exemplary farmers, successfully passing their value system on to their children.

Much of this segment continues to deal with "land," the problems it creates for people and the various attitudes towards it. Epp does this incidentally but most skilfully when he has Heinrich Krueger explain such matters to his son as they eat their noon meal in the open fields. The young father waxes quite eloquent when he says: "Land, land, there is nothing better than land. Sometimes I just like to sit down on it and bury my hands and my feet in the rich soil! Do you know which is the most beautiful passage in the Bible, my son? When God says to Abraham: 'All this land that you see I will give to you and your children!'"

Derk Martens continues to inhabit that mysterious, fascinating and sinful world called "Moscow." His visit is one of the better scenes in the novella. The *Sommerstube* has to be specially prepared. To the great delight of his aging



parents Derk still likes plain Mennonite food: eggs, ham, butter, bread and milk. However, he causes quite a stir when he reveals that he wears special night attire. Derk's mother looks forward to impressing her female friends with this news.

“Die Wege des Herrn I & II”: sub-title: “Roman von Peregrinus” (614 pages)  
 “Die Wege des Herrn I”:

In “Die Wege des Herrn I” Epp examines the lowest stratum in Mennonite society. A vagabond named Wölk in conversation with his sometime intimate companion Gret explains how their society functions and how it is ordered. At the top of the heap is the wealthy *Gutsbesitzer* and next to him is the *Vollwirtschafter*. Below them are the *Kleinwirtschafter* and the landless people. At the very bottom of the order are the truly destitute, *die Verkommenen*. Wölk has no illusions about his place in this system. He is a former mechanic and school teacher, one of the landless who is in danger of slipping to the very bottom. Wölk is also cynical about male/female relationships and the higher love (*die ewige Liebe*). This cynicism, he reveals, is the result of an unhappy love affair in his youth.

Wölk associates with a man named Kieselbrecht, a blacksmith, and the very dregs of society, two men with the unlikely but highly descriptive names Puddrik and Muddrik. Kieselbrecht is quite a colourful character who dreams of participating in the imminent Revolution. The Revolution has already reached Tokmak, rumour has it, and soon the trumpets will announce its arrival in the Mennonite colonies. There is an obvious parallel here with the apocalyptic language of the Bible and even a parody at one point of a well known Mennonite hymn when Kieselbrecht says, “Wer weiss, vielleicht schon Morgen!” (Who knows, perhaps tomorrow!)

The impending revolution is one unifying theme. Another is the marriage motif. Next to land, a wife is the most important status symbol for a man. Most of these low-life characters are at some point in the story looking for wives. Even the oldest of them, a man named Schloef, blind and ailing, is looking for his third spouse. Only the rakish Wölk is content to remain unattached. And while some marriages end in peaceful compromise others end disastrously. Muddrik murders his wife and then with Wölk's help bribes the police in Tokmak to falsify their report. Kieselbrecht eventually settles down with the unruly Gret and even the feeble, pathetic Schloef finds Tante Mathies willing to warm his bed. The old man euphorically sums up his happy state with the words: “Die Wege des Herrn sind sehr sonderbar!” (The ways of the Lord are mysterious indeed!)

“Die Wege des Herrn II”:

In “Die Wege Des Herrn II” Epp adds “Ohm R\_\_\_” to the motley crew of characters introduced in the first part. Ohm R\_\_\_ is a student of Scripture (*Bibelforscher*), someone who can devote all his time to this because, as one of the privileged, he owns a *Vollwirtschaft* which he has rented to someone less

prosperous. His wife is as practical and down-to-earth as he is fanciful and other-worldly. She busies herself about the house and yard and is content to leave such heavy matters as the determination of the exact day of the Second Coming to him.

When Onkel Piewing comes to R\_\_\_ one day to complain that he has been hearing voices during his rounds as night watchman, R\_\_\_ is convinced that this is a sign and that Piewing is a messenger sent from God. R--- informs Piewing that the promised rapture is imminent and that the two of them have been chosen to be among those who will be taken from this earth before they die. Piewing's wife Hanke is quickly included at Piewing's earnest request, but Mrs. R\_\_\_ poses a problem. She has time and again made it clear that she prefers to be among those who will die a natural death and then be subject to the judgment of the Almighty. She is even called into the Grosse Stube to see if she can be persuaded to change her mind, but she stands firm.

Epp humorously describes the difficulties Ohm R\_\_\_ encounters as he attempts to win converts. Mrs. Piewing is other-worldly as long as her stomach is full but becomes a dangerous revolutionary who cares only for this world when she is hungry. Eventually the Piewings are excommunicated but not before they have sorely tested the Christian patience of both Mr. and Mrs. R\_\_\_. R\_\_\_'s encounter with Old Schloef and his third wife Tante Mathies is highly entertaining. Old Schloef has just been rescued from his miserable widowed state and is not yet ready to leave his new-found earthly bliss. Tante Mathies is of Mrs. R\_\_\_'s mind and would rather live out her natural span of years.

Eventually, however, Ohm R\_\_\_ becomes more sinister than comical. In spite of his eloquent preaching and his disdain for all things worldly, this venerable old patriarch is only human and it becomes apparent as the story progresses that he is as culpable as any other mortal. Human pride has led him to mistake his own inner voice, his selfish desires, for the Will of God.

"De Profundis I & II": (500 pages)

"De Profundis" or "Out of the Depths" is, as the title suggests, the most serious and philosophical of all the segments that make up the larger work *Eros Multiformis*. It is also the most autobiographical, although even here Epp attempts to be detached and to characterize his central character objectively. The principal theme of the entire work, the nature of human love, is also more dominant here as the author attempts to resolve the problems involved in trying to define it. At the end Epp's hero (or anti-hero), Heinrich von Seiten, seems prepared to settle for less than the ideal.

"De Profundis" is also the most complex of all the segments as far as narrative technique is concerned. Epp alternates from first-person to third-person and moves freely from present to past tense by means of numerous flashbacks. Furthermore, one is not always sure when the central character is describing objective reality or when he is fantasizing. The result is often a denial of harsh truth. Yet truth, ironically, is what this rebellious anti-hero is deter-

mined to find. The central character of this narrative is also haunted by loneliness and a Kafkaesque fear of madness.<sup>14</sup> Appropriately, there is much less dialogue here than in previous segments. The protagonist is either musing despondently, fantasizing or delivering megalomaniacal speeches to imaginary audiences.

Chronologically the story begins with the protagonist on a train that is carrying him from South Russia to Basel, Switzerland. Epp's brilliant but inexperienced scholar is armed with an initial disbursement of three hundred rubles (a gift from his patron, a wealthy *Gutsbesitzer*) and the firm conviction that it is his mission in life to create a work that will reveal the most profound *Erkenntnis* or knowledge of which humans are capable. At this point Epp's protagonist is still able to maintain a balance between youthful idealism and overweening pride.

Seit or Seiten comes into contact during his student years in Basel with characters who shape his views in various ways. First there is Shura, by contrast a well adjusted young man who plays the mandolin, sings and is popular with the young women but is no match for Seiten in a theological argument. Then there is the pious director of the *Predigerschule* (seminary) who is totally practical and concerns himself with the niggling little matters of life, with physical *reinlichkeit* (cleanliness) and the goodwill, not to mention the financial support, of the Basel patricians. There is also a blind professor who waxes eloquent on the eternal verities and the need to denounce all the pleasures of this world, pleasures which he no longer yearns for since his physical eyes no longer tempt him.

In spite of these numerous contacts Heinrich von Seiten is unsuccessful in establishing meaningful relationships with others. His brief love affairs, if they can be termed affairs at all, are almost entirely fantasized. The profound truth and the great new philosophical system which is Seiten's mission throughout has clearly eluded him. Nevertheless, by circuitous means he may have discovered something about human love, its imperfections and foibles, its virtues and beauties. Human love, it seems, encompasses a very wide range of sensibilities from ardent physical desires and needs to a yearning for the eternal and divine.

"Die Jungens": (On the title page: "von Ubique Peregrinus")

This is the only segment that has been typed. On the last page there is what appears to be Peter Epp's signature and his address, Elm Street, 9, Bluffton, Ohio. This signature has been stroked out and "Peregrinus" written above it. (331 pages)

It is difficult to place this segment in the larger work, *Eros Multiformis*.<sup>15</sup> In one sense it belongs at the very beginning, as it describes an almost idyllic world peopled mainly by children. And while it is mildly satirical at times, it is never bitter or even sarcastic. This is Russian Mennonite village life without the intractable problems Epp points to in the other narratives. There is something almost mythical about this world where the main protagonists have not yet lost their innocence. On the other hand, one could argue that "Die Jungens"

constitutes a harmonious resolution to the disturbing implications and unresolved dilemmas presented earlier, a benign final phase in Epp's overall darker view of Mennonite society in Russia.

"Die Jungens" is an entirely appropriate title for this unassuming little romp through a nameless Mennonite village in the Molotchna colony where the boys playfully compete with each other in their attempts to attract the attention and gain the affection of the girls. One sentence sums up much of what Epp is trying to say here: "Es ist komisch wenn die Jungens anfangen wollen gross zu werden!" (It is comical when boys decide they want to be grown-ups!)

The plot, such as it is, begins with the attempt by one Bolt to organize a *Gesellschaft* or boys' club. The power struggles that result are all too similar to the conflicts that characterize the larger community of which this "brotherhood" (*Bruderschaft*) is a microcosm. The boys whose parents own *Vollwirtschaften* (large farms) immediately command more respect than those who are less prosperous. Bolt is a natural leader since he has been to the Crimea, has travelled great distances on trains and has bargained with Tartars over purchases of tobacco.

The transition from boyhood or *Jugend* to adulthood is clearly anticipated toward the end of the segment. *Taufunterricht* or "confirmation class" is frequently mentioned throughout the narrative, but the subject is confronted head-on in a parodic question and answer exposition led by Bolt, who concludes that membership in the church will mean giving up membership in their club. However, the two organizations may not be so different after all since Bolt observes, following his explanation of church discipline, that "die Gemeinde ist genau das, was bei uns die Gesellschaft war." (The congregation operates exactly as our club did); that is, the bad people are excommunicated.

In the end there is an attempt to resolve all conflicts and to renew strained relationships. Complete honesty is perhaps too much to expect. Nonetheless, all quarrels are resolved amicably—one of the boys who was shunned earlier is finally accepted as a full member and Bolt celebrates the triumph of goodwill by playing a chorale on his harmonium.

### Conclusion

There are some interesting parallels between these manuscripts and Epp's later published works. Some examples of this are the scenes which Epp later reworked in *Eine Mutter*.<sup>16</sup> Yet the differences between these manuscripts and the published works are much more significant. In these earlier works Epp is often extremely critical of the Mennonite community. At times it is almost as if this writing was undertaken as a private, therapeutic exercise. By the time he wrote *Eine Mutter* this stormy period in his life seems to have passed.<sup>17</sup>

Epp's strength as a writer does not lie in plots or even character development. Plots are often hastily or arbitrarily resolved. Some of Epp's characters are

quite flat and one-dimensional and others incredibly naive. Epp is at his best when his characters engage in debate. Lengthy exchanges between characters with opposing points of view provide the reader with a great deal of entertaining satiric dialogue.

Epp's central characters have a great capacity for self-deception. As Epp's protagonists find it increasingly difficult to reconcile earthly or human love with the divine or heavenly, they seem to experience a fall from grace that is usually irreversible. Time and again Epp confronts the reader with the dark, bestial side of human nature, a reality most of his characters choose to ignore or eventually try desperately to rationalize.

Where does one place Peter G. Epp in the pantheon of Mennonite writers? Epp belongs to a generation of Mennonite intellectuals like Dietrich Neufeld, Johann Klassen, B.H. Unruh, A.B. Enns and others who were originally sent by Mennonite communities in Russia to study abroad so that they might better serve their congregations as teachers and ministers at home or as missionaries in foreign countries.<sup>18</sup> The Pietistic movement of the late nineteenth century had made Mennonites aware of the need for more educated spiritual leaders. Some of these young men found themselves alienated from their sponsoring communities which were not ready for their progressive ideas. Peter Epp was one of those young Russian Mennonites who proceeded from the *Predigerschule* to the much more secular universities in Switzerland and Germany. After World War I Epp moved on to an American university setting that was even further removed from his Russian Mennonite culture. Like other members of the "Mennonite intelligentsia" who left their Russian homeland to study abroad, Epp eventually felt rejected and unappreciated by his own people. This may account for the fact that there is in *Eros Multiformis* such a ruthless exposure of the more unpleasant truths about his homeland. It may well be that Epp found it necessary to suppress that more realistic literary vision at a time when many Russian Mennonites were still mourning the loss, after the Russian Revolution, of what they thought had been an idyllic world.

### Notes

I wish to express my thanks to Ms. Clara K. Dyck who made the Peter Epp manuscripts much more accessible to me by recording them on audio-tape.

<sup>1</sup> *Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. 1, 237.

<sup>2</sup> See my translation of *Eine Mutter*, 1932, as *Agatchen* (Hyperion Press, 1986) and Elmer Suderman's translation of *Erlösung*, 1930, as *Deliverance*, *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 10, (1992), 165-209. *Die Mennoniten in Russland* was published by Epp's widow, Justina Epp (no

date). This work is an excerpt from the unpublished larger work entitled *An der Molotchna*. For further information on Peter Epp's published works see Cornelius Krahn's "Literary Efforts Among the Mennonites of Russian Background," and Justina D. Epp's "A Tribute to Peter G. Epp." Both articles appeared in *Mennonite Life*, October, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Of the seven novellas that make up *Eros Multiformis* only "Die Jungens" is in typescript.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the original letter of April 17, 1954 and the Memorandum of Agreement, September, 1954, seven letters written between May 18 and September 21 have been preserved in the Peter Epp Collection, Bethel College Archives. These letters do not alter the terms of the final agreement.

<sup>5</sup> See the letter from Mrs. Epp to the University of Basel, April 17, 1954, Peter Epp Collection, Manuscript No. 4, Folder 5, Bethel College Archives, North Newton, Kansas.

<sup>6</sup> The Peter Epp Collection.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> A note added later by an unidentified archivist speculates that although the note is illegible Epp's last wish may have been that this fragment should be destroyed.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Epp Collection. See Folder # 5

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> In a postscript Epp states: "Begun [place name in Russia illegible] 1916-20. Completed Bluffton, 1925. Revision begun in Halbstadt, summer of 1924."

<sup>14</sup> Although Epp's protagonist refers to numerous writers he has read he does not mention Franz Kafka (1888-1924).

<sup>15</sup> A number of emendations in Gothic script have been made in the typed copy, presumably by Epp himself. This suggests that if "Die Jungens" was one of the earlier segments it underwent some revision later.

<sup>16</sup> Hanke Pieewing's greedy consumption of buns and coffee in "Die Wege des Herrn" clearly anticipates Mrs. Esau's insatiable appetite for the same fare in *Eine Mutter*. The patient, all-forgiving Mrs. Enns in "In Der Stille" at times reminds the reader of Agatha, the central character in *Eine Mutter*. The significance of land in "Die Wege des Herrn" constitutes another broad parallel with *Eine Mutter*.

<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to accurately date these writings but if the note at the end of "Ohm Esau" is any indication, most of these writings date from an earlier period. See footnote 13.

<sup>18</sup> See Al Reimer's translations of Dietrich Neufeld's *Russian Dance of Death* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1977) and Hans Harder's *No Strangers in Exile* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1979). Harry Loewen has also written about this generation of writers. See for example his "A Mennonite Artist as a Young Man: The Letters of Johann P. Klassen to a Friend (1905-1913)," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 5 (1987), 21-36, and his "Intellectual Development Among Mennonites of Russia 1880 - 1914," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 8 (1990), 89-107.