

Mennonite Women's Autobiography: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Approach

Mary Cisar, *St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN*

Insiders and outsiders face different challenges in writing Mennonite women's history. If outsiders lack the personal experience that provides direct access to an ethnic/religious group's way of viewing the world, insiders often are burdened with an emotional baggage that makes objectivity and criticism difficult or impossible.¹ Inside-outside considerations also apply in interesting ways to Mennonite women's autobiography. Though all historical writing invests events with personal meaning, autobiography's more obvious drift toward fiction makes it an outsider among conventional types of historical writing. Categories like genre, point of view, audience, plot, theme, and style, drawn from the foreign discipline of literary criticism, have special relevance for its understanding.

From within an ethnic faith community such as the Mennonite, autobiography seems doubly an outsider. Where Mennonite norms call for readers to look through individual experiences and accomplishments toward what has sustained the community, autobiography glorifies the first person singular, perhaps exposing a dark lining of ambition or conflict. Autobiography, in short, threatens to substitute a personal construction of experience for order and meaning that conventionally come from the top—from teachers, ministers, and

elders. The traditional social-cultural restraints imposed on Mennonites of both genders complicate matters. Unlike diaries, journals, or brief memoirs, few examples of autobiography, which requires far greater literacy, intellectual pretension, and leisure, have found their way into Mennonite archives; fewer still have been published.²

To bring to this topic not only literary but feminist perspectives, as I intend to do here, introduces conceptual vantage points likewise foreign to the Mennonite experience. "Because of the generally patriarchal nature of Mennonite communities historically," Redekop explains, "the subordinated position, and possibly also the oppressed status and role, of Mennonite women has not been studied or, until recently, even admitted."³ *Gelassenheit*, moreover, is not a virtue practiced by feminists of the more radical stripe. But it is in fact my strategy to exploit the inside-outside dichotomy to show that we can only get "inside" the autobiographical narratives of Mennonite women by using a variety of contexts and perspectives—historical, literary, feminist, cultural, religious—in tension and overlapping, originating mostly extraneous to the community and often from outside the discipline of history.

On a personal note, I approach this topic as an outsider, neither Mennonite by birth nor historian by training, but as a student of French women's autobiography and women's studies. The particular autobiography that sparked my interest and serves as my chief example was written by a woman who came to the Mennonites as an outsider. Born in Sheffield, England, and Anglican by background, Amy Evelyn Greaves married a Mennonite from South Russia at the turn of the century and settled on a Mennonite estate. Looking back on this time forty years later, she wrote *Winding Trails*, an extensive account of her experiences in South Russia.⁴

Scholarship on Mennonite women and their writing, not surprisingly, comes almost entirely from inside the Mennonite community: Reimer, Funk Wiebe, and Yoder compile bibliographies of women's writing; Cummings, Rich, and Unrau offer biography; Penner, Klingelsmith, and Epp, history; and Reimer, Funk Wiebe, and Tiessen study women's images and themes in literature.⁵ These initial steps toward recovering the voices of Mennonite women, which began in the late 70s but have become more frequent since the early 90s, parallel the first efforts of feminist scholars, in the late 60s and early 70s, to discover, reveal, and celebrate the previously invisible contributions of women. Proceeding from a similar purpose, to teach the coming generation and enhance the life of the community through positive models, Mennonite scholarship on women, however, remains primarily historical and celebratory. Following the pattern of feminist scholarship generally, a logical next step is application of a larger set of critical perspectives in order both to situate women's writing within the literary tradition and to distinguish it from men's.

I begin with the generic features of autobiography. Unlike chronicles or annals, the literary historian Karl J. Weintraub argues, autobiography takes as its subject "concretely *experienced* reality," or historical events filtered through a

personal lens, "and not the realm of brute external fact."⁶ Turn of the century South Russia, for example, is marked by rapid economic expansion for Mennonites and growing social unrest among Russians. The Donets Basin area, where Amy Greaves settled after her marriage to Jakob Sudermann in 1900, contained coal, salt, mercury mines, and developing industries; various ethnic groups, Cossacks, Germans, Bulgarians, White Russians, Ukrainians, and Serbs among them, were settled nearby.⁷ Yet we learn virtually nothing about either the social or the geographical topography from Amy. Only briefly does she touch on social unrest, recounting dramatically its limited impact on her family. Her landscape is not dotted with villages and mines, but is composed of endless rail lines and a vast, open steppe. Amy's grasp of Mennonite doctrine and practice is superficial, yet her personal encounters with leaders like Bishop Heinrich Unruh of Halbstadt and B. H. Unruh, the *Kommerzschule* headmaster, are told with a fresh immediacy, and her own religious faith leavens the narrative. Whatever contribution autobiography makes to the record of historical events, as this story amply demonstrates, it is almost always peripheral to its primary purpose, to describe concrete personal experience.

Autobiography as a narrative genre distinguishes itself from letters or diaries by considering concretely experienced reality from a *retrospective point of view*. The narrator, Weintraub observes, writes from "somewhere beyond a moment of crisis or beyond an experience, or a cumulative set of experiences that can play the same function as a crisis." The narrator necessarily "imposes on the past the order of the present," establishing meaningful relationships among the isolated events of a life in relation to the crisis (Weintraub 824, 826). The important factor becomes not the historical accuracy of the autobiography, but the personal truth of the author's self-conception. Or, as feminist critic Spacks puts it, "To understand one's life as a story demands that one perceive that life as making sense; autobiographies record the sense their authors hope their lives make."⁸

The fate of the Russian Mennonites following the Russian Revolution forms the crisis around which, retrospectively, the events of Amy Greaves's early adulthood crystallize. She writes her autobiography with the conviction that she "was the only one to escape entirely all the horrors, tragedy, dangers, and sufferings that came upon" both of her husbands' families (152). The chief goal for her, in looking back, is to discover and expose the pattern of choices and events that led to the survival of her family.

With the temporal distance of the narrator from her subject comes, typically, a wider audience for autobiography than for diaries, which serve as an immediate personal record of events and reactions. Amy's descendants, for example, form her primary audience. To them she offers a rich and poignant description of her experiences, including encounters with aged grandmothers, Christmas on the steppes, and the death of Jasha Sudermann, her first husband. In addition, relatives and friends who have died or been lost to her, both in Russia and in England, form an implicit inner audience to whom she feels

accountable. She later dedicates her story to her two dead husbands. To the extent that she must understand and justify her own choices, she writes for herself, as yet a third audience. But the highest authority to which she responds, almost confessionally, is God itself, to show that her most problematic acts have depended not on her own choice or volition, but rather on her intuitive acceptance of God's direction for her life. This stance ultimately places *Winding Trails* within the tradition of spiritual autobiography, which, Spacks explains, "specifically declare[s] meaning to inhere in the process of discovering and sustaining commitment to God" and draws its certainty from "the affirmation of transcendent meaning" (Spacks 131). In Amy's eyes, such transcendent meaning consists in "the building and preservation of this our family" (xv).

One common way in autobiography of infusing disparate experience with significance is to choose a model or script against which to organize the plot of one's life.⁹ Indeed, one feature that distinguishes autobiography from diaries or letters is the possibility, because of the retrospective vision, of creating a coherent plot. From the age of twenty-one, when she left England for Russia with her uncle John Greaves, Amy Greaves led an itinerant life. In looking back, she makes sense of her journey from England to Russia, to Germany, to England in 1914, and from England to Nebraska by calquing her journey against Old Testament models. Initially, she promises not to look back, as did Lot's wife (42, 165). But after thirteen years of "exile" in the Russian wilderness, the death of one husband and remarriage to another, Amy's departure with her family from Halbstadt in 1912 for Germany occasions reflection on her welcome deliverance from the fate that later befell the Molotschna:

Those who operated those colonies, those fine farmers, were later ruined and deported; some lucky ones fled. Their homes were plundered, their daughters ravished, their banks robbed...

But I can only truthfully record that I was warned and that God gave to me one whom I almost rejected. It was this Gustav Enss [Amy's second husband] who led us out of the horrors that would have befallen us.... (158)

August 1914 found the family fleeing on the last train from Berlin to safety in England. After weeks of uncertainty, a letter of invitation reached them from an uncle in America, and Amy "seemed to hear the words addressed to Abraham, 'Go into the land which I will show you'" (194; see also 200). If Gustav was the family's Moses, then Nebraska became their Promised Land.

The biblical parallels were not perfect: Amy, not her Moses, made most of the decisions and spoke for the family; furthermore, neither Nebraska, nor Kansas, the state to which they soon moved and which Amy later referred to as the "Great Desert," really became the Promised Land, which always seemed to elude them as they migrated in the 20s, 30s, and 40s to Indiana, Texas, Michigan, and Virginia. Amy's story, in fact, breaks off in North Newton,

Kansas in 1915, just after Gustav began teaching German at Bethel College and before his departure as a consequence of the Daniel Explosion.¹⁰ Yet conceiving her experience in terms of the Old Testament stories allowed Amy to invest at least initial choices and movements with divine purpose.

The need to hold to biblical plots may account for certain perplexing silences in Amy's story. Many of her first husband's Dick and Schmidt relatives later found their deliverance, emigrating to Canada in the 1920s. Yet she never mentions that fact, holding instead to the fiction that she alone (with her family) had escaped. A group picture, taken at the 1912 funeral of grandmother Anna Schmidt Dick, symbolized God's unique purpose for her. "I could not locate the group quickly enough... and the picture was taken without me. I was not on that picture! It was symbolic! I was the only one to escape entirely all the horrors, tragedy, dangers, and sufferings that came upon those dear relatives of Jasha's some years later" (152). Recently recovered family photographs show that Amy was partly right: she was not on that photo. But a second group photo, taken at the same occasion, clearly does include her. This example points up both the danger and the power of autobiography. The Exodus plot cannot be sustained and the story breaks off in 1915, but the fiction does prove more powerful than reality in one respect: Amy's children knew nothing of this extended family in Canada.

Conventions of subject, point of view, audience, and plot are common, even necessary, to all autobiography, men's and women's. Through the common strands of women's experience as girls, daughters, wives, and mothers, that is, through thematic content, female autobiographers distinguish themselves from male. A feminist optic, such as that provided by the feminist literary critic Josephine Donovan, helps bring women's themes into focus.¹¹ Donovan sketches six "structural conditions" that shape women's reality: (1) within a male-centered "social construction of reality," women take on the role of "the other"; either their experience is considered deviant, or it remains invisible, resulting in women's silence; (2) of necessity, women have habituated themselves to the private sphere of domestic labor or housework, which is repetitive or cyclic, contingent and interruptible; this has repercussions for the ways they experience time and space; (3) women's work, traditionally valued and consumed primarily by the family rather than exchanged for money, has provided a vehicle for women's creativity; (4) shared physiological experiences—menstruation, childbirth, breast-feeding—give women the sense of being bound to a reality outside their own control; (5) responsibility for childrearing requires women to subordinate their own will and goals to those of others; and, finally, (6) women's mode of moral reasoning, unlike men's, which draws on abstract rights, depends primarily on establishing and sustaining connections to other people.¹²

Without necessarily judging all otherness or subordination a consequence of male oppression of women, one can use Donovan's categories as a raster for scanning the text for the presence of recurrent themes and, especially, the

silences about various themes. For it is often the silences that reveal the full character of women's reality and expose underlying tensions. Amy Enss, for example, meticulously details the interiors of her dwellings, even providing a sketch or two. The Russian landscape, by contrast, appears vague and strange, as though Amy had no orientation in external space. A mother of ten children, Amy is drawn willingly and fully into experiences of marriage, childbirth, and childrearing. Despite her preoccupation with family, she touches only with great reticence topics of sexuality, marital relations, pregnancy, and childbirth. She describes with satisfaction food she learned to prepare and various sewing projects she undertook in the company of other women. The professional and business affairs of her male relatives, on the other hand, receive only the briefest attention, even though both Greaves and Sudermann relatives figured prominently in the Mennonite community. Finally, despite loving portraits of friends and relatives, mostly female, we are left longing for more details about her own mother, who died when Amy was nine.

Throughout the narrative, Amy seems determined to elevate the constraints placed on her by fate and family to the level of God's will and to affirm her lot. We sense a silent, mostly unfulfilled desire to follow her own artistic and literary inclination. Thanks to servants, middle- and upper-class Victorian women could devote themselves to family pursuits, managing the household, fulfilling social obligations, providing moral guidance, and enjoying a significant amount of leisure into the bargain.¹³ During the first years of her marriage in Russia, this role changed not one whit for Amy, a product of a Victorian upbringing. She helped supervise Russian servants who cooked, cleaned, cared for the children, sewed, and tended garden, fields, and livestock, while she had the leisure to learn German, read, paint, and travel. After economic disaster struck and typhus claimed the life of her first husband, Amy undertook more of the household work, cooked, sewed, and earned a living for her four children through teaching and tutoring at the *Kommerzschule* in Halbstadt. Even so, she lost none of her Victorian dignity and strength in the face of a stringent fate. Wealth and worldly prestige meant little to her, and she is as silent about its presence as about its absence.

Reading the autobiography of someone like Amy Enss, who moved among several new cultural-social settings, underscores the wisdom of an approach that looks for connections across disciplines and cultures. Amy Enss's "conceptions of true womanhood," for example, stem not from the Mennonites but from Victorian ideals prevalent in her middle-class English home. For her peers, "true womanhood" meant leisured, domestic, virtuous motherhood. Men brought financial stability to the family; women provided the emotional and spiritual foundation for it (Burstyn 31). "By the cultivation of characteristics particularly feminine—self-denial, forbearance, fidelity—women were to teach the whole world how to live in virtue" (Burstyn 32). It was just this sort of womanhood, cultivated, leisured, dignified, self-controlled, and self-transcending to which the young Amy Greaves aspired, whether among her

Victorian peers or her adopted Mennonite community. These were, of course, precisely the qualities admired by her wealthy Mennonite relatives of the khutors.

Amy Enss never fully accepted what she later called the “particularities” of Mennonite women’s submission, such as plain dress and head coverings. By temperament and religious conviction, however, she sought self-transcendence; it was for her but a small step from the Victorian ideal of “true womanhood” to the Mennonite norm of *Gelassenheit*, with its emphasis on yieldedness toward God and others. In her life, the Victorian and the Mennonite contexts largely overlap in the domain of subordination of individual will to family and community, especially through women’s work, “transformed into a service of love for others.”¹⁴ Amy Enss moved from the one context to the other almost seamlessly.

Like Mennonites, Victorians, too, frowned on women’s literary activity, and for much the same reason: to write, especially about oneself, appeared vain and pretentious.¹⁵ Only if couched in communal rather than individual terms, as the story of one’s family, written for one’s family, and thus “linked overtly to motherhood” could autobiography be justified.¹⁶ Joseph Liechty and Jeff Gundy characterize “Mennonite” style by the presence of self-effacing apology or disclaimer that reflects *Gelassenheit*.¹⁷ Writing on another Victorian woman’s autobiography, Gail Twersky Reimer comments on the suppression of the literary impulse and its redefinition within Victorian norms (Twersky Reimer 205). Constraints from both cultures thus play into Amy’s characteristic writing style, with its tendency toward passive-verb syntax that shifts attention away from the narrator. A clear determination to remove her narrative persona from the limelight also emerges in her preface. Her story, she explains, “is not to be looked upon as an autobiography, because too many persons have contributed to the experiences which came to me, often unsought and unwished for.... I seem to have been drawn rather into the vortex of the building and preservation of this our family. The events seem to have evolved from some historical necessity outside of my personal contribution” (WT xv). Yet the unease she felt placing herself at the center of action stands in contrast to her ready exercise of a gift for narration, her delight in dialogue, and her English wit, which give her writing self-evident sparkle. Writing for her is clearly an act of self-discovery and fulfillment of long-felt artistic aspirations.

Studying women’s autobiography fixes our gaze on the dichotomies between inside and outside, the community and the individual, patriarchy and feminism, history and fiction. I argue, paradoxically, that we can most fully get at what is inside women’s autobiographical narrative by looking outward, that a variety of critical perspectives need not contradict or cancel each other, but may in fact mutually complement and enrich themselves. The benefits of such an approach for our understanding of a text seem clear. But a text-centered approach begs important questions. What is the benefit for the Mennonite community? And is there a point to studying Mennonite women’s writing, if the

individual text becomes an end in itself? For just as autobiography shifts emphasis away from community toward the individual, just so does an interpretive approach focused on the individual text displace the traditional goal of critical writing that serves the community. Is the baby, in a sense, lost with the bath? Perhaps the current scholarship on Mennonite topics is beginning to sort out these questions.

Notes

¹This generalization condenses points made by Hasia Diner in "Insights and Blind Spots: Writing History from the Inside, Writing History from the Outside," delivered at a session entitled "Who Goes There? Personal Access and Scholarly Distance" at the recent conference, "The Quiet in the Land? Women of Anabaptist Traditions in Historical Perspective," June 8-11, 1995, at Millersville University, Millersville, Pennsylvania. A slightly different version of the current paper was also read at the same conference.

²Most common are stories of the early Russian period (before 1900), such as the diary of Katharina Wiens Bahnmann Dyck Regier, *Our Heritage: Remembrances of My Life in Russia 1866-1895* (MHC, uncatalogued, privately published) and Helena Wieler Martens, *Grossmutter's Brief* (Mennonite Heritage Centre, MS box 3749), and, especially, of the post-Revolutionary period. A search at the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) Archives, Winnipeg, MB, revealed several examples of autobiographies in this second category, including Anna Reimer Dyck's *From the Caucasus to Canada*, tr. and ed. Peter J. Klassen (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1979), Maria Winter-Loewen, *Höhen und Tiefen: Eine deutsche Lebensgeschichte aus Süd-Russland* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Derksen Printers, 1973), Gerhard Lohrenz, *Mia oder über den Amur in die Freiheit: Die Lebensgeschichte einer mennonitischen Frau, Maria Defehr, auf Grund ihrer Aufzeichnungen erzählt von Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg: DeFehr Foundation, Inc., 1981), Berta Bachman, *Memories of Kazakhstan: A Report on the Life Experiences of a German Woman in Russia*, tr. Edgar C. Duin (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1983), Helene Berg, *Unsere Flucht: Erinnerungen von Helene Berg, Früher Halbstadt, Süd-Russland* (Baden: Thomashof, 1947), Susanna Toews, *Trek to Freedom: The Escape of Two Sisters from South Russia During World War 2*, tr. Helen Megli (Winkler, Manitoba: Heritage Valley Publications, 1976), and Anita Priess, *Exiled to Siberia/Verbannung nach Sibirien* (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers Ltd., 1972). Chronologically or thematically, only Helena Goossen Friesen's *Daydreams and Nightmares: Life on the Wintergruen Estate*, tr. Neta Enns (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1990), Elizabeth Unruh Schultz's *Lebenslauf und Erlebnisse der Frau Elisabeth Schulz, geb. Unruh*, tr. and ed. Annie Schultz Keyes, *What a Heritage: Autobiography of Mrs. Elizabeth Schultz, nee Unruh* (privately published), and Anna Sudermann, *Lebenserinnerungen von Anna Sudermann*, (MHC XX 310, vol. 3770) overlap with Amy Enss's story.

³Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 103. Redekop sees "the female psyche as compared to the male" as "a basic factor in a discussion of Mennonite personality." He believes that women's inequality, though prevalent among the Mennonites, is fundamentally incompatible with Mennonite theology: "The role and position of the Mennonite woman, and the resultant self-image and identity, has been quite disturbing and is in dire need of correction, especially in the light of the Mennonite utopian ideology which has stressed the importance and equality of the person-in-community subordinated to Christ the head" (Redekop 103-104). This notion of the community under Christ finds its foundation in the ideal of *Gelassenheit*, which, as Redekop suggests, is intended to apply to everyone, men and women alike. Yet, all too often, as Katie Funk Wiebe concludes in her study of

Mennonite women in fiction, "the Mennonite experience would seem to deny women the right to full humanity." "The Mennonite Woman in Mennonite Fiction," 231-242 in Harry Loewen and Al Reimer, eds., *Visions and Realities: Essays, Poems, and Fiction Dealing with Mennonite Issues* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, Ltd., 1985) 242.

⁴ She originally intended to name her story *Seedtime and Harvest*. At some point she changed it to *The Winding Trail*. In their 1993 edition (Northfield, MN: Privately Published, 1993), her grandchildren David P. Sudermann and Mary Blocksma modified the title to *Winding Trails: From Sheffield to the Steppes and Beyond: A Memoir 1899-1915* to reflect more accurately the sense of repeated displacement characteristic of her life. The original handwritten manuscript is in the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, MS box 175. In its published form the ms. is 207 pages long.

⁵ Mary Lou Cummings, *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1978), Elaine Sommers Rich, *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness 1683-1983* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), and Ruth Unrau, *Encircled: Stories of Mennonite Women* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1986) contain biographies of outstanding Mennonite women. Other studies, such as Marlene Epp, "Women in Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the 'Underside'," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988): 100-114, Sharon Klingelsmith, "Women in the Mennonite Church, 1880-1930," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54 (July 1980): 163-207, and Carol Penner, "Mennonite Women's History: A Survey," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 9 (1991): 122-135, are historical. Works on Mennonite women's literature, such as Al Reimer, "Where Was/Is the Woman's Voice? The Re-membering of the Mennonite Woman," *Mennonite Life* 47.1 (1992): 20-26 (rpt. in Al Reimer, *Mennonite Literary Voices Past and Present* [North Newton, KS: C. H. Wedel Historical Series, Bethel College, 1993], 37-55) and Katie Funk Wiebe, "The Mennonite Woman in Mennonite Fiction," offer primarily bibliography with some attention to the depiction of women and women's themes and literary images. Anne Yoder, "The Diaries of American Mennonite Women 1850-1950: A Guide," (Master's Research Paper, Kent State University School of Library Science [May 1992]), contains a bibliography of ninety-one of the several hundred unpublished Mennonite women's diaries/autobiographies found at the Archives of the Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN) and the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives (Harrisonburg, VA). Hildi Froese Tiessen, "Mennonite/s Writing in Canada: An Introduction," in *New Quarterly* (...) provides important analysis of the Mennonite context of Canadian Mennonite writing. She makes the point that Mennonite women writers today place "at the heart of their work... the voices of women, often projections of the authors' foremothers who suffered an enforced silence throughout the official histories of their people" (p. 12).

⁶ Karl J. Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," *Critical Inquiry*, I, 4 (June 1975), 822.

⁷ See Oscar H. Hamm, *Memoirs of Ignatyev in the Light of Historical Change* (Saskatoon, Sask: Mrs. Ruth F. Hamm, 1984), x-xv, 1-19. Also "Bachmut," *Mennonite Encyclopedia I*, 204,

⁸ Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Selves in Hiding," in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle Jelinek (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 131.

⁹ Weintraub 838. I believe that Weintraub's assertion that this scripting of one's life breaks down with the rise of individuality in recent centuries, when autobiography "became the literary form in which an individuality could best account for itself" (Weintraub 847) is misleading and reflects a notion of individual consciousness based on study of a very particular type of autobiography, that of an important public figure who, having distinguished himself from his contemporaries, recounts his personal life, his intellectual development, and his public career in order to place in context his own contribution to society and to demonstrate his exceptionality. Recent critics, particularly feminist critics, have challenged this conception of autobiography. James Olney, in "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," provides a useful summary of literary criticism on autobiography and further bibliography. In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press,

1980), pp. 3-27. See also Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* for a more recent discussion.

¹⁰Amy's husband, Gustav Enss, was a controversial figure in Mennonite higher education. For details, see James C. Juhnke, "Gustav H. Enss: Mennonite Alien (1885-1965)," *Mennonite Life* 36, 4 (December 1981): 9-15; "Mennonite Church Theological and Social Boundaries, 1920-1930—Loyalists, Liberals and Laxitarians," *Mennonite Life* 38, 2 (June 1983): 18-24; "The Daniel Explosion: Bethel's First Bible Crisis," *Mennonite Life* 44, 3 (September 1989): 20-25. At the time when Amy wrote her autobiography, Gustav was teaching at Bridgewater College.

¹¹The literature on autobiography is extensive. Two of the classic texts are Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, trans. E. W. Dicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951) and Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," *Formen der Selbstdarstellung: Analecten zu einer Geschichte des literarischen Selbstportraits* (Festgabe für Fritz Neubert), ed. Gunther Reichenkron and Erich Hasse (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1956), rpt. and trans. as "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in James Olney, ed. and trans., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28-48. For useful summaries of literary criticism on autobiography and further bibliography, see James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in Olney, ed., *Autobiography*, pp. 3-27 and Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 3-12.

The most important resources for studying women's autobiography, besides Smith's, are the following collections of essays: Estelle C. Jelinek, ed., *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1980), especially the introduction by Jelinek, "Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition," pp. 21-38; Domna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), particularly Stanton's introduction, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?," pp. 3-20; Shari Benstock, ed. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), in particular Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," pp. 34-62 and Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Female Rhetorics," pp. 177-191; Bella Brodzki & Celeste Schenck, *LifeLines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988), especially Mary G. Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," pp. 19-44 (this essay was earlier published in Olney's collection) and Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Non-Autobiographies of 'Privileged' Women: England and America," pp. 62-76; and Shirley Newman, ed., *Autobiography and Questions of Gender* (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1991), particularly Neuman's "Autobiography and Questions of Gender: An Introduction," pp. 1-11 and T. L. Broughton, "Women's Autobiography: The Self at Stake?," pp. 76-94.

¹²Josephine Donovan, "Toward a Women's Poetics," in Shari Benstock, ed., *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) 98-109

¹³See Felicity Hunt, "Divided Aims: the Educational Implications of Opposing Ideologies in Girls' Secondary Schooling, 1850-1940," in *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950*, ed. Felicity Hunt (London: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1987) and Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980).

¹⁴Sandra Cronk, "Gelassenheit: The Rites of the Redemptive Process in Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite Communities," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LV, 1 (January 1981), pp. 7-9. Though Amy herself (74) and Mennonite scholars such as Gundy and Cronk distinguish between Old Order (Swiss) Mennonites, for whom the theme of *Gelassenheit* would have been stronger, and Russian Mennonites, always more independent, *Gelassenheit* seems nevertheless to persist to some degree in all Mennonite groups. Redekop refers to it repeatedly and in many different contexts in

his *Mennonite Society*, especially in chapter 7, "The Mennonite Personality (90-105). See also Shirley Hershey Showalter, "Perhaps John Ruth's aesthetic of simplicity and Gundy's emphasis on lowliness will resonate less with Russian than with Swiss Mennonites. However, the concept of humility, I believe, is large enough to contain expressions from both major streams of church history" in "Bringing the Muse into our Country: A Response to Jeff Gundy's 'Humility in Mennonite Literature'" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LXIII, 1 (January 1989), p. 24. For a personal story based on Cronk's work on *Gelassenheit*, see Laura H. Weaver, "A Mennonite 'Hard Worker' Moves from the Working Class and the Religious/Ethnic Community to Academia: A Conflict between Two Definitions of Work," in Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay, *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), pp. 112-125.

¹⁵ Harold S. Bender states, "With their emphasis upon simplicity, sincerity, and humility, art seemed to [the early Anabaptist-Mennonites] artificial and pretentious, often dangerous and wasteful." Bender explains that this attitude toward art continued through the 19th century in most Mennonite groups. "However, in such a long prevailing negative atmosphere it is not surprising that there have been so few Mennonite artists and that those who wanted to be artists were either expelled or forced to leave." He concludes, "There are those... who doubt whether much great art can be produced in a group which has a strict standard of Christian morals and a strong sense of separation from the 'world,' and a relative isolation from the main stream of the national culture, since this might interfere with the freedom required for creative art. There are also those who hold on the other side that the autonomy of art is a danger to a truly profound religious experience and that one or the other must be sacrificed" ("Art," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, 167-168). See Showalter, 22 and Redekop, chapter 8, "Mennonite Intellect and Aesthetics," 106-127.

¹⁶ Gail Twersky Reimer, "Revisions of Labor in Margaret Oliphant's Autobiography," 213, in Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, ed., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988) 203-220.

¹⁷ "[S]tyle is never just a trivial, exterior choice of one subset of language or another. A style defines a stance, a worldview, a way of thinking and acting, both in what it contains and in what it leaves out. To open with an apology, with a statement of humility... is to recognize and assert one's limits and accountability from the start." Jeff Gundy, "Humility in Mennonite Literature," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LXIII, 1 (January 1989) 5. Gundy is commenting on his own essay. It is interesting that Redekop also begins the preface to *Mennonite Society* with a reference to the contradiction between *Gelassenheit* and writing: "There is something inherently contradictory about a Mennonite writing a book about Mennonites. The powerful tradition of *Demut* (humility) and *Gelassenheit* (submission) that has been etched deeply into the Mennonite soul forbids one from trafficking in self-analysis or attention to the accomplishments of one's own group" (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) xi. Joseph C. Liechty also identifies a "characteristic Mennonite literary style," based on humility, in American Mennonite publications in the 1860s: "Many articles and letters in the *Herald* and much private correspondence began with self-effacing disclaimers and ended by thanking the reader for kind indulgence" ("Humility: The Foundation of Mennonite Religious Outlook in the 1860s," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LIV, 1 (January 1980) 12-13.