

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Thrill of the Chaste: The Allure of Amish Romance Novels.* By Valerie Weaver-Zercher. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2013. Pp. 315. \$50, cloth; \$24.95, paper.

My father-in-law grew up Amish. It has been almost ten years since I married into a now-Mennonite family from Holmes County, Ohio, and what continues to amaze me even more than how much I have to learn about the Amish is how often people use random popular culture “sources” to correct me on the handful of facts that I’m pretty sure I have right. “That doesn’t sound like what I’ve heard,” I often find myself saying. But too often a friend from Brooklyn or Chicago who has seen *Devil’s Playground* or even over-the-top “reality” shows like *Amish Mafia* claims to be more of an expert than me.

Valerie Weaver-Zercher encountered a similar rash of unsolicited yet adamant opinions in the course of her research for *Thrill of the Chaste*, an engaging and comprehensive history and analysis of the cultural phenomenon of “inspirational Amish romance novels” (xvi), or what some members of the publishing industry call “bonnet books.” Most everyone had a theory for the recent explosion of the genre—in 2012, one was published every four days (4)—and most everyone also felt compelled to talk more than listen. “Indeed,” she observes, “the interesting thing about the rise of Amish fiction is not that no one knows why it is popular: it is that *everyone* knows” (8). Weaver-Zercher’s book-length exploration is not only a groundbreaking contribution to an area that deserves more study, but also an excellent read, as all-consuming and hard to put down for this scholar of American literature and popular culture as Amish romance novels are for their devoted fans.

The book begins with a survey of the authors, the fans, and the industry responsible for the genre’s recent spike in popularity: Weaver-Zercher includes a graph that ends with a steep incline from 12 books published in 2008 to 85 in 2012 (5). Also telling is the decision by publishers in 2011 to reclassify these books: from “contemporary inspirational romance” to their very own category, “Fiction / Amish & Mennonite” (5). This label characterizes the bulk of the genre’s readers as Christian evangelical women—although the exceptions to that generalization are some of the book’s most intriguing sections. As for the genre’s authors, while many claim tangential family heritage or at least a regional association, most have little or no current, meaningful connection to Amish families and communities—an Amish author, Linda Byler, is the exception.

At the crux of Weaver-Zercher’s analysis of the Amish romance zeitgeist are the twin forces of “hypermodernity” and “hypersexualization.” Hypermodernity, a term Weaver-Zercher attributes mainly to the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky, suggests that our culture is growing at an impossible pace, putting too much pressure on individuals in too many spheres of their lives (10).

Hypersexualization, a parallel force whose main definition Weaver-Zercher attributes to the sociologist Kenneth Kammeyer, defines the encroachment of extreme sexual expression into multiple cultural spheres until it seems inescapable. In short, to North American culture at large, especially since 9/11 and the economic downturn, hypermodernity and hypersexuality seem overwhelming and perhaps even to blame for these cultural ills, while the Amish and their supposedly “simple” lives appear to present a respite, if not a cure. In keeping with the astute analysis in the book as a whole, however, Weaver-Zercher highlights the irony of readers’ resistance to these two forces despite the fact that their beloved genre could not exist without them. “Even as Amish fiction dissents from hypermodernity,” she observes, “the publishing apparatus behind Amish romances, with its breakneck speed of production, is situated smack-dab in the middle of it” (10). A similarly careful attention to and excavation of ironies and contradictions keep the book engaging and surprising—she examines rather than dismisses outlying stories and details using “transactional reading theories and cultural criticism” (xii), which focus on readers more than on the texts themselves—although Weaver-Zercher did read “some forty Amish novels as research” (xiii).

After reviewing the history of the genre, Weaver-Zercher characterizes the two main “discourse communities” involved in the production of these books: the evangelical community driving the boom and the Anabaptist community that has been swept into the fray. She then trains her clear-eyed analysis on each of four “metaphors”—really, thematic frameworks—for the purposes and effects of Amish novels, spinning out the meaning and implications of Amish novels as “commodities, religious icons, methods of transport, and curators of godly womanhood” (xiv). The final section of the book looks more closely at the relationship of the Amish to the genre, the specific and broader cultural effects of the genre in culture as a whole—including an astute exploration of the implications of appropriation and authenticity—and some thoughts about the future of the genre. This last section is a bit undigested, but perhaps needs to be—the full implications of any boom can’t effectively be analyzed without more hindsight.

It’s easy, perhaps too easy, to dismiss the books that have taken over entire racks in Walmart, Costco, and CVS, and coopted entire walls at religious bookstores, especially when the makeup and plucked eyebrows of most of the cover models look ridiculous to anyone with more than a superficial understanding of the Amish themselves. Weaver-Zercher’s triumph, however, is her studied respect for the genre, its readers, and the phenomenon itself. This respect, despite the novels’ inaccuracies and misrepresentations, has caught her a lot of flak from some early online reviewers who not only missed the nuances of her argument, but also seemed to wish she’d written a different book: an exposé rather than a scholarly analysis. Weaver-Zercher does address the issue of accuracy, but argues that such laundry lists of errors in small details—cover photos with bonnets pinned too far back on the head or slips in Pennsylvania Dutch dialect—and even bigger mistakes that perpetuate myths about shunning and spouse-swapping, distract from the more important issue of cultural appropriation. “Although no author of Amish fiction intends to assert

dominance over the Amish by writing about them," Weaver-Zercher acknowledges, "the sheer number of Amish books written by evangelicals, and the success they are finding in the publishing marketplace, makes it fairly clear who is in charge" (213).

Weaver-Zercher argues that the biggest problem with this type of cultural appropriation is the erasure of the most important differences between the Amish, their evangelical readers, and North American society as a whole. The readers of inspirational fiction, for example, would much rather read about buggies and baked goods than about nonviolence, and nearly all of the novels evacuate the crux of Amish spirituality and replace it with the evangelical rhetoric of a personal savior and a personal relationship with God.

Yet even these disturbing trends prove more fascinating than alarming for Weaver-Zercher. "[C]laiming that Amish fiction poses a present and measurable threat to Amish life would be histrionics at this point; suggesting that it may alter Amish culture is not" (244). While the readers of these mass-market paperbacks may harbor misconceptions about the Amish themselves, their collective desire for "a sane, coherent, and communal future" (250) might prove, overall, to be a positive influence on a society that could stand to slow down and listen.

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JESSICA BALDANZI

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*Manufacturing Mennonites: Work and Religion in Post-War Manitoba.* By Janis Thiessen. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2013. Pp. 249. \$65, cloth; \$27.95, paper.

This is a pioneering work in a new area of study for Mennonites. It is situated away from the usual Mennonite studies of recent history that concentrate on congregations and conferences, and missions and aid agencies, as well as small-scale, mostly rural communities based around agriculture. Instead it examines Mennonite-owned businesses in modern capitalist states from the point of view of owners, managers, and workers. As such it has an urban, industrial focus and draws for theoretical and comparative purposes on the scholarly literature of business and labor history applied in new and interesting ways.

Thiessen examines and compares three Manitoba companies: Friesens, the printer located in Altona; Loewen, the windows and doors manufacturer in Steinbach; and the furniture manufacturer Palliser, founded and headquartered in Winnipeg. The first two businesses were founded by descendants of 1874 immigrants (Kanadier); the third, Palliser, by a refugee immigrant of the 1920s (a Russlaender). Not surprisingly, given the history of the Russlaender, the latter was established and continues in urban Winnipeg whereas the others are situated closer to Mennonite rural communities in what were Mennonite-centered towns (Steinbach is now classified as a city). The Russlaender owners are also Mennonite Brethren, the evangelical wing of the Russian Mennonites whose followers were more likely to stress individualistic achievement than the community-centered older orders, even if all to some degree have been touched by North American evangelical Christianity.

Although she mentions these differences in origins, Thiessen does not fully explore their significance. While social inequality often associated with labor has long existed in Mennonite communities in the Dutch, north German/Prussian, and Russian experience, in late Russian history these factors developed into a particular set of class relationships marked by the use of non-Mennonite laborers in field and factory and, within Mennonite communities, a class differentiation based on education, occupation, income, and the rational use of capital. The founder of Palliser was a capitalist employer before immigration and in Canada drew most of his workers from his fellow immigrants with similar experience. The Kanadier companies also drew their labor from their own kind but in a very different, more agrarian-connected world.

To understand the structure and function of the three companies Thiessen uses printed and archival sources from company collections, official and trade union documents and reports, and interviews she conducted with owners, managers, workers, and outsiders such as union officials. Thiessen's comparison of the companies is somewhat weakened when she reveals in a footnote that after promising her full access to their records, the owner of one of the companies (Palliser) then refused to cooperate. The result is an inevitable imbalance, which is further reflected in the interviews in which workers and managers from two companies easily outnumber those from Palliser. Thiessen, however, works hard to overcome this problem.

The book is framed by certain assumptions. Mennonite religious ideas reflected in identity are identified as being influenced by the ideological teachings of North American Mennonite scholars. The ideas of Harold S. Bender, Guy F. Hershberger, J. Lawrence Burkholder, and John H. Yoder in particular are discussed, often in ways that some might find original and at times idiosyncratic. Thiessen seems unaware of Rodney Sawatsky's important work on Mennonite ideology and identity or at least she does not cite it. Exactly how the teachings of these mostly non-Russian-based writers living in the United States were transferred to Manitoban Mennonites is addressed in passing by stating that they were encountered through sermons, Sunday school teaching, and church periodicals, but no sources are cited or articulated within her argument; saying is one thing, showing is another.

These elite religious ideologies are just one source of "false consciousness" that Thiessen proposes, although she avoids using this term with its Marxist overtones. The other source is derived from the "corporate mythologies" generated by the companies' owners that they use in commercial advertising but also to influence their employees in the workplace. The term mythology here is clearly intended to mean something false, manufactured to create something not entirely connected to reality.

With these frameworks in place, Thiessen examines historical circumstances and events to see how such ideologies and mythologies influenced the lives and experiences of workers employed in the companies. This is set against a background of rapid economic expansion of the companies and the challenges this presented to workers and managers, including the impact of economic downturns with increased industrial conflict. At the same time the role of

government increased as different political parties gained office, especially with the election of the left-wing New Democratic Party. They initiated labor reforms that strengthened the role of trade unions and presented particular challenges to Mennonites. How workers and managers dealt with these challenges and how religious justifications were used to limit union membership and establish schemes in which workers shared profits or shares in the companies, or both, is discussed in detail. The discussion and analysis of these issues represents some of the most original and compelling material in this pioneering book.

One interesting feature revealed by the author's research is the impact of increases in the size of the companies on Mennonite collective identity and social cohesion. As the companies grew richer and expanded, their owners began to lose touch with their workers and their workers with them. Class divides, differences in communication, and the demands of the marketplace pulled them apart. Whatever the falseness of ideologies and mythologies, whatever the paternalism of shared faith or shared ownership of businesses, the importance of scale remains. For Mennonites this is, of course, a problem not limited to businesses. It is also a feature of many of the institutions Mennonites have established in the modern world that have increased in size and complexity. Religious conference organizations, aid agencies, and educational institutions all risk losing touch with the smaller, local congregational communities on whom they depend for funding and support and whom they claim to serve. The similarities between private businesses and "public" Mennonite agencies in this respect are a reflection of the connection between capitalism and globalization in a modern world and recent experiences in Mennonite history.

The book's text and style remains close to its thesis origins and is clearly addressed to a scholarly elite with its own rituals of academic presentation and argument. This can be seen in its tendency toward ideological formation in terms of "theory" and the citation of secondary and comparative sources with positivist fervor ("as X has shown"). In places the text is repetitive and the book is confusingly referred to in the conclusion as "this manuscript" (162). The conclusion, however, lifts the book out of its analytical emphasis. The author provides an explanation of how she became concerned with the subject through her own experiences working for Mennonites. And she also presents a challenge not just for future studies in this area, but also in her thoughts on how Mennonites must deal with issues of class, work, and industrial capitalism in a modern world.

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JAMES URRY

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*A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age.* By Glen H. Stassen. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press. 2012. Pp. 280. \$25.

One cannot do "incarnational ethics" simply as an intellectual scholar arguing for a rational moral ideal defined as the "good." As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it in *Ethics*, "Ethical discourse, therefore, is not a system of propositions which are

correct in themselves, a system which is available for anyone to apply at any time and in any place, but it is inseparably linked with particular persons, times and places."<sup>1</sup> In *A Thicker Jesus*, Glen Stassen, the Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, lays the foundation for such a Kingdom-ordering of human society, not through framing a rational Christian ethic, but through following Jesus in "incarnational discipleship." As he states at the beginning of his work, "Our question is this: How do we find the solid ground for an ethic that is neither authoritarian nor merely privatistic?" (6).

Stassen's ethic, offered for "a secular age," is based on Charles Taylor's diagnosis of the factors that gave rise to the secularism of our age and on a profound and sympathetic expansion of Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* and *Ethics*, which attempted to counteract secularism. Using Taylor's historical analysis of secularism's development as a kind of analytic backdrop, Stassen develops a counter theological foundation for a secular, but not secularistic, ethic. Since the sovereignty of God is not a deistic sovereignty, but a continuous involvement in what we think of as "secular" life, our notion of following Christ should likewise take us into the secular/actual world as a kind of incarnation of God's active presence at the center of life.

His "thicker" interpretation of Jesus is in contrast to both "a nineteenth-century idealistic interpretation of Jesus too transcendent to actually guide our social life" (110) and a fundamentalistic view that limits Jesus' mission to dying on the cross for our sins. It describes "incarnational discipleship" that embodies God's presence in and for the world as Jesus incarnated God's kingly rule. Thickness is also another term for a holistic perspective that includes passions, loyalties, and interests, not just individual rational intellect in ethical discourse (117).

Stassen interprets the Sermon on the Mount as "prophetic realism," not as rational or utopian idealism. It is not simply a "dyadic" contrast between the old and new way (the church and the world), but a description of how God intends the world to operate. "This will help us see," Stassen explains, "the 'thicker Jesus' of incarnational discipleship giving guidance for the Lordship of Christ in all of life, including the political struggle—which was Bonhoeffer's intention" (186).

Stassen claims that modern Western democracy and scientific empirical research have their early beginnings in the religious presuppositions of Free Church Calvinism (72). He laments the political manipulation and distortion of this democratic tradition by both political and religious fundamentalisms, which he blames in part for the expansive growth of secularism. Incarnational discipleship must include repentance for such self-centered misuse. He associates the Holy Spirit's presence with ethical repentance, and he finds a secular analogy for such repentance in scientific methodology's willingness to self-correct as new information occurs. He suggests, therefore, that "we learn from the scientists to see repentance as a life practice. . ." (97).

One cannot understand this book without at least a brief reference to the rich and varied life and experience of the author, which he freely reflects on to

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1. *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 271.

illustrate his point of view. He dedicates the book to his father, Harold E. Stassen, World War II veteran and former governor of Minnesota. He recalls, "Dad told me, 'Glen, war is so horrible that we have to do all we can to prevent World War III and atomic war.' So I asked myself, how do we develop an ethic that is effective in preventing wars like that?" (200). In pursuing that goal Glen Stassen is influenced by Bonhoeffer, James William McClendon, and John Howard Yoder, whom he calls a "mentor" (70). Following this tradition he appeals to their "more accurate interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount as realistic diagnoses of power dynamics and transforming initiatives that deliver us from those vicious cycles. . ." (190).

Stassen's style is informal and at times almost sermonic, which he himself recognizes. The downside of this style, he notes in his preface, "is that scholars may not notice that I am making what I hope is a sophisticated, scholarly, even, in a sense, scientific argument for method in Christian ethics" (x). He appeals to "the evidence of the data of history" and to "tested" characters such as Dorothy Day, André Trocmé, and Martin Luther King, whose "integrity, courage, and perspicacity" led them to recognize and oppose the evils of their day. "I am arguing," he says, "for a method based on enough humility to seek data and agreement that partially transcend or even correct our own perspectives" (14).

Some of the chapters originated as papers for scholarly conferences. This makes for considerable repetition, but in the long run this is advantageous as he moves from political to scientific to sociological to literary settings and then finally to the theological foundations for ethical discourse in these contexts. His amazing breadth of references witnesses to his self-confessed "curiosity," and it makes the reading of this book a wide-ranging education.

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C. NORMAN KRAUS

*For a Church to Come: Experiments in Postmodern Theory and Anabaptist Thought.* By Peter C. Blum. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2013. Pp. 177. \$21.99.

Perhaps the best way to describe Peter Blum's *For a Church to Come* is as an extended tribute to John Howard Yoder. This is not to say that the book is primarily a treatment of Yoder's thought, although it takes up many themes that were important to Yoder and are now important to many of his interpreters. Nor do I mean to say that Blum primarily represents or relies on Yoder—other thinkers, such as Levinas, Derrida, Nietzsche, and Heidegger probably figure more prominently here and add more to the style of argumentation than Yoder does. I call this book a tribute in a deeper sense, because of its capacity to add new life to future interpretation of Yoder's work. If most scholars have approached Yoder from the "Right" of narrative theology or radical orthodoxy, Blum's "experiments in Anabaptist thought" open up a potential "Left Wing" of Yoderian thought. Blum thus contributes an alternative view that adds richness to our imagination of what Yoder's thought, and Anabaptist thought in general, could mean for communities of faith.

The book is organized as a collection of essays, each written for previous occasions. While Blum freely acknowledges (even celebrates) the occasional nature of these pieces, the book ends up reading coherently with several clear proposals that emerge through the interaction of the essays. Blum suggests that the church must be on guard against the ways that we reify community boundaries so that they close us off to the transcendent challenge of the Other. The problem, as Foucault and Derrida teach us, is that it is impossible to function as a community, or even to exist as an individual, without making such reifications and therefore doing violence to others. Against those who write this off as an “ontology of violence,” Blum suggests that impossibility is paradoxically what makes peace possible. When we think of peace as something that can be achieved or as something that characterizes us as Anabaptists, we block any consideration of whatever falls outside of our own definitions—we blind ourselves to the Other. For peace to be peaceful, it must come as an impossibility, which, as John Caputo says in the foreword, is “something that shatters our horizon of expectation, the horizon of what we thought possible” (13). Perhaps, Blum suggests, peace depends on the recognition that our ways of thinking are always potentially violent, and that “saying no to violence” (153) means dismantling these systems.

A second line of thought, also present throughout the book, deals with the question of cultural relativism. There is the suggestion that meaning is socially constructed, but not therefore unreal, unimportant, or viciously relative. Meaning arises as symbols are negotiated and related to other symbols in a language system. Blum advocates a “cultural portability” to some rituals or concepts that allows for meaningful communication across cultures, if not full-fledged universality. Additionally, building on Levinas, Blum suggests the possibility of a transcendent ground for ethics in the precultural trace of the Other.

Although the use of postmodern theory might initially intimidate some readers, especially those not used to reading academically, the issues that Blum addresses are quite relevant to Anabaptist faith communities. Blum’s essays could provide resources for discussions related to church identity, conflicts over worship styles or church ritual, debates about sexuality, the relation between Anabaptist pacifism and a victim mentality, and questions of Christian cultural engagement. These are all issues that I hear being raised within Mennonite churches, not just in academic circles. So while the style of the book probably lends itself more to a graduate or undergraduate classroom, I hope that the book finds a wider audience as well.

Blum is clear from the beginning that his mode of writing is not that of the linear argument, nor is it an attempt to come up with some definitive statement on ecclesiology, or any other -ology for that matter. He characterizes his essays as experiments, “a deliberately unsettling sort of experiencing, a risking of our perspective that may lead to change that we do not foresee” (22). As I was thinking about the task of reviewing this book, which includes criticism of the content, it struck me that the abandonment of finality also implies in some sense the impossibility of traditional methods of criticism, which usually seek to



uncover inconsistency or faulty logic. So how is one to critique a work that makes a virtue out of inconsistency (20) or celebrates its own lack of system?

A constructive response would have to find areas where Blum's essays fail to unsettle us enough, where they leave intact certain systems of domination or close down possible avenues of discourse. Given this, I wonder about one methodological point, which is Blum's way of producing a caveat in front of anything that might be mistaken for an argument. For example, after his defense of an "ontology of violence" in the last chapter, Blum ends by noting that he means "not to finalize the choice of one ontology, so much as to warn against finalizing the choice of another" (159), so that both have the status of provisional proposals. I appreciate the humility that this represents, and I understand that it is an attempt to embody a nonviolent mode of philosophy. But does this not also shut down possibilities for further conversation about the issue? One can neither disagree with Blum's ontology (since he has told us that he is not really proposing one), nor can one hold exclusively to an alternative perspective (since this exclusivity represents a kind of violence, according to Blum).

Any solution to the problem would have to take deconstruction at least as seriously as Blum does, but perhaps could find some way to invest particular constructions with greater status than deconstructive methods alone would warrant. If the goal of the philosophical task is to encourage rich discussion in community, it seems to me that a better strategy would be to propose some explicit, even systematic ways of thinking about reality, so that these proposals could constructively interact with alternatives. I am thinking in particular of the difference between Derrida and Deleuze. Both fully expect their work to be contingent and imperfect, but the latter uses a robust philosophical system to ground an emphasis on difference and instability, where the former avoids any appearance of system. In my opinion, Derrida and Blum do offer specific, even consistent, ways of thinking, and there is something disingenuous about denying that their styles of thought imply certain metaphysical assumptions rather than others.

All this does not keep *For a Church to Come* from being a fascinating set of essays offering a creative perspective on the most pressing issues for the church of the postmodern era. Blum does not provide answers to these issues, which would actually be less than what we need, but creates some space that might allow us to consider them with courage and integrity.

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JUSTIN HEINZEKEHR

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*According to the Grace Given to Her: The Ministry of Emma Somers Richards.* James E. Horsch, John D. Rempel, and Eldon D. Nafziger, eds. Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies. 2013. Pp. 150. \$17.

This collection of essays and reflections on the life and ministry of Emma Sommers Richards frames the story of one woman's call to ministry within the context of shifting attitudes toward the ordination of women in the Mennonite Church. The essays trace themes of Richards's gifts and call, as well as the

fruitfulness of her gifts within her family, her places of ministry, and the wider Mennonite world.

Miriam F. Book opens the collection of essays with reflections on her own journey toward ordination and the significance of Richards's influence on the (Old) Mennonite Church as it gradually and increasingly embraced women's gifts in church leadership. Book's reflections are followed by essays from Richards's sister, Elaine Sommers Rich; a college friend, Arlene M. Mark; and a missionary coworker, Nancy V. Lee. These essays outline memories and key events from Richards's childhood, college education, and missionary work in Japan, respectively. Earl Sutter, a longtime member of Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church, describes the process of discovery that led Lombard Mennonite Church to call Emma Sommers Richards to ministry and request her ordination. A chapter on the political process that led to her ordination in 1973 by Illinois Mennonite Conference follows. Her husband, E. Joe Richards, and a granddaughter, Naomi Woods, offer essays that reflect on the impact of her life on their lives. Gayle Gerber Koontz provides the sweeping story of women's growing role in Mennonite leadership throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. And finally, Richards herself, closes her story by offering a timeline highlighting events and opportunities that have been personally significant in her life and ministry.

Throughout the collection, the essayists make a point to highlight Richards's innate leadership gifts and the fruit they bore in the service of the church. From her mother who encouraged her to speak at church "so that the ones in the back row can hear you" (16), to a congregation that received her sermons "with enthusiasm" (55), people and organizations recognized her gifts for ministry and invited her to use them. Nine brief reflections offered by Richards's mentees and colleagues attest to the fruitfulness of her ministry by describing the positive influence her ministry had upon their lives. Ryan Algrim, lead pastor of First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, describes the influence of her mentoring on his life and ministry. He writes, "[Emma] never wavered in her love and support. Her unconditional hospitality has been an example I have always tried to live up to. . . . Emma was and continues to be my pastor" (64). Rachel S. Fisher also credits Richards with influencing her decision to enter pastoral ministry. She writes, "When I heard of Emma's call to serve as co-pastor of Lombard Mennonite Church, I began to take more seriously what seemed to be a call from God. . . . I realized that God was calling me" (79).

The essays and reflections in this work tell the story of Emma Sommers Richards for a new generation of leaders who may be unfamiliar with her ministry and the story of her groundbreaking ordination. As a young woman serving as a Mennonite pastor on the path toward ordination, reading her story helped me understand the beginnings of the tradition of calling women to leadership in the Mennonite Church. The affirmation and respect I receive for my leadership gifts must, in part, be attributed to the church culture that began to form in response to the ministry of Emma Sommers Richards and other pioneers in female leadership—a culture that recognizes the gifts of the Holy Spirit in

women and men alike, and nurtures and calls these women and men to leadership in the church.

One of the unstated goals of this book seems to be to reaffirm the decision the Illinois Mennonite Conference made in 1973 to ordain Emma Sommers Richards and to celebrate the subsequent proliferation of women serving in church leadership roles (310 active ordained women were serving in Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada as of 2011). In the preface, editors John D. Rempel and James E. Horsch state that their hope for this book is that “through the story of Emma and her call to ministry, all brothers and sisters in the church will see that the Holy Spirit gifts given to women need to be encouraged for the well-being of the whole body of Christ” (xi-xii). With the persistent attention given to Richards’s gifts and calling and the warm, personal reflections offered on the importance of her ministry in others’ lives, the editors have created a book that has the capacity to achieve this goal.

Two regrets in reading this work are the limited voice given to Richards herself and the sense that the book may have some difficulty appealing to broader audiences. After hearing the writers praise Richards’s speaking and writing skills so highly, it is disappointing to be unable to experience these gifts beyond the brief timeline chapter that Richards wrote. A transcript of one of her sermons would have been a nice addition to the appendix. Second, the essayists name-drop people, places, church organizations, and committees throughout the book with, at times, only minimal explanations; this makes it difficult for those less familiar with the world of the (Old) Mennonite Church in the latter half of the twentieth century to follow the finer points of the story. The effect created is that of looking over someone’s shoulder into their family filing cabinet with personal journals and family histories filed next to church conference reports. While having access to such information is a privilege, the pieces can be challenging to fully appreciate if you don’t already know the family.

*According to the Grace Given to Her* is a warm testament to the contributions that Emma Sommers Richards has made to the Mennonite Church and offers hope for the continuing affirmation and ordination of gifted women and men.

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LAURA NEUFELD

*John. Believers Church Bible Commentary.* By Willard M. Swartley. Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press. 2013. Pp. 593. \$34.99.

Willard Swartley has provided an excellent addition to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series with this fine study of the fourth Gospel. His introduction deals with the usual topics of the authorship and setting of the book, its purpose, its structure and literary characteristics, and its theological and ethical themes. Some additional topics that have special importance for a commentary on John are this Gospel’s relationship to the synoptic Gospels, its relationship to the other Johannine literature, its use of Old Testament Scripture, its political perspective, and its symbolism.

In his analysis of the structure of the book, Swartley recognizes a prologue (1:1-18) followed by three main parts. Part one is entitled "Acceptance and Rejection: The First Passover" (1:19-4:54); part two is "Rejection and Acceptance: The Second Passover" (chap. 5-12); and the third part is "Denouement: Final Passover, Passion, and Resurrection" (chap. 13-21). This analysis based on John's unique reference to three Passovers during Jesus' public ministry is quite helpful; but since Swartley says that "Israel's major feasts form John's overall structure" (516), one wonders why the other feasts are not highlighted in his structural analysis of the Gospel. Following the format of the Believers Church Bible Commentary series, the commentary on each section of the biblical text includes an outline, explanatory notes, "The Text in Biblical Context," and "The Text in the Life of the Church." Unique to this volume in the Believers Church Bible Commentary series is extensive supplementary material that is available online.<sup>2</sup>

A significant strength of this commentary is its bibliographic breadth. Swartley has surveyed a vast array of commentaries, monographs, articles, and other resources, both ancient and modern. He summarizes insights gained from them and interacts with them for the rich benefit of his readers, who are thus delivered a feast of information about previous scholarship on the Gospel of John. He frequently presents various views on the interpretation of a problematic passage or a controversial issue, weighing them in his own mind but also allowing readers to come to their own conclusions.

Swartley examines questions that may well enter the mind of the curious reader and are often skipped over by other commentaries. For example, why does Jesus make what seems to be a "petulant" Jewish claim in opposition to Samaritan worship in 4:22 (128)? And why does Jesus engage in a negative interchange with Jews who had believed in him in 8:31ff.? The comments on every chapter are filled with intriguing theological reflection. He is not afraid to stick his neck out theologically, as when he notes John's description of Jesus' distinction from the Father and oneness with the Father, followed by Swartley's expression of strong support for John's Christology in opposition to the dismissal of John by the modern quests for the historical Jesus. He points out interesting Old Testament echoes or allusions—for example, those that are heard in Jesus' acts of going up the mountain and feeding the crowd with barley loaves in 6:1-13. His commentary is replete with interesting insights, such as his reflection on the two scenes in the Gospel involving Jesus' mother and wine (2:1-11 and 19:25-30) and the connections between cleansing and humble service in Jesus' act of footwashing (13:1-20). However, there were a few insightful comments that needed more evidence to convince the reader, such as the statement that the fig tree of 1:48-50 was connected in Judaism with meditating on and keeping the law.

"The Text in Biblical Context" sections include very helpful discussions of topics in biblical theology, tracing themes in both Old Testament and New Testament texts. For example, when discussing the episode of the Greeks coming to see Jesus in 12:20-22, Swartley shows that the idea of the inclusion of the

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2. [http://heraldpress.com/titles/JohnBCBC/Docs/JohnBCBC\\_WebSupplement.pdf](http://heraldpress.com/titles/JohnBCBC/Docs/JohnBCBC_WebSupplement.pdf).

Gentiles in God's story of salvation is a theme found throughout the Bible. In "The Text in the Life of the Church," Swartley often gives good overviews of the history of interpretation of the text as well as ideas regarding contemporary application. For example, he includes a very helpful discussion of contemporary Jewish-Christian relations in connection with chapter 8, where Jesus makes some harsh comments about the Jewish opponents of his day. However, it was disappointing that, after paying special attention to the topic of the Holy Spirit in John 16, "The Text in the Life of the Church" does not offer Swartley's own theological conclusions and practical implications for today's church, especially in response to Pentecostal/charismatic emphases.

The usual Believers Church Bible Commentary essays at the back of the book are a valuable addition. The advantage of having them there is that reference can be made to them from anywhere in the explanatory notes. However, there is a disadvantage as well: because the introduction and explanatory notes contain additional material on some of the same topics, one must not rely on the essay alone to give a comprehensive discussion of the topic at hand. Of the thirty-one essays, especially helpful were the ones on "I AM," "The Jews," "Signs and Works," "Witness and Testify," and "Women in John." An unnecessary essay was the one on textual variants. It is not actually a topical essay but rather a collection of individual textual notes that would be more appropriately placed in the explanatory notes of the verses where the variants are found.

It is noteworthy to see Swartley speaking positively about the historical reliability of the Gospel of John, following trends in recent scholarship. As a specific example, he regards favorably the historicity of John's description of Jesus' death as occurring prior to the Passover meal. He also weaves in archaeological findings that coincide with John's narrative, such as the recent discoveries about the Pool of Siloam.

Swartley describes his literary approach to the book as a narrative analysis of the present form of the text. Thus he deals with the canonical, narrative unity of chapters 14-17 instead of speculating about earlier literary divisions or editorial stitching of those chapters. He also defends chapter 21 as an integral part of the Gospel, not a redactor's addition. He does not ignore other theories about the Gospel's composition, but he refreshingly seeks to follow the unified flow of thought in the book as we now have it.

In a few instances, explanatory comments on a certain verse were located in the discussions of other texts in later chapters. While they were relevant to those other contexts, one would never find those comments if one were using the commentary to find an explanation of the earlier verse in question. For example, important translational and exegetical points about 1:1 are located in the comments on 1:34 and 20:22, far removed from the discussion of 1:1. Also, while dealing with Thomas' actions in chapter 20, he makes comments about Thomas' actions in 11:16 that would have been helpful to read in the discussion of that verse. A simple cross-referencing from one context to the other would avoid repetition but help the reader locate the material.

Swartley works efficiently from the Greek text, yet he intends to write for readers who may not have a working knowledge of Greek. Sometimes the issues

of translation and interpretation are clearly laid out and explained, as in his explanation of Greek vocabulary variation in 21:15-17. However, in other contexts the translation and interpretation issues are not clear to an English reader, and Swartley's explanations make sense only if one consults the Greek text or has some additional knowledge of Greek grammar. This is the case in his discussion of the meaning and translation of *monogenes* in 1:18. Also, when he explains the textual variant in 20:30-31, he does not make clear how the present tense of *pisteuo* would express the Gospel's purpose to strengthen believers and the aorist tense of the verb would express the Gospel's missional purpose. These points can be understood only if one already knows the difference between the present and aorist tenses in Greek.

A puzzling aspect of this commentary is the presence of apparent contradictions in viewpoint that Swartley expresses in different parts of the book. Who are the "other sheep" of 10:16? The comment on 10:16 says that they are not Gentiles but rather dispersed Jewish-Christians, as in 11:52. But the comment on 11:52 says that the dispersed children of God include scattered Israel and the Gentiles. What is the meaning of Jesus' authorization of the disciples not only to forgive but also to retain the sins of anyone (20:23)? Swartley adopts Linda Oyer's proposal to translate "retain" as "prevail over, control, overcome." Rather than being antithetical to forgiveness, as is commonly thought, the word refers to the complementary activity of achieving victory over evil alongside forgiveness. However, when discussing contemporary application in "The Text in the Life of the Church," he reverts to the more common understanding that an antithesis is being expressed: as the disciples proclaim the good news about Christ, "[t]he response of people to this gospel determines whether their sins are forgiven or retained" (471). Such inconsistencies may leave readers wondering which point of view Swartley is really advocating.

This commentary is to be highly valued not only for its scholarship and depth of thought about theological issues, but also for the evident concern Swartley has for the life and ministry of the church. He includes many practical observations as he applies John's Gospel to the church's work in our world. On occasion, he makes refreshing worshipful comments about the point under consideration. Three of the early sections of the commentary include helpful closing paragraphs entitled "Sermon Starters," but then that heading ceases to appear. It would have been rewarding to see this at the end of every section; but he does scatter sermon ideas here and there throughout the book, offering practical stimulus to pastors and teachers. Swartley's commentary is a valuable addition to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series and merits a place on the shelf of all those who desire to hear and respond to the message of John's Gospel for our own day.

*Goshen, Ind.*

CHANEY R. BERGDALL

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*Citizenship: Paul on Peace and Politics.* By Gordon M. Zerbe. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2012. Pp. 276. \$26.

"Paul was a Roman citizen," some of my students have said, "so his privileged status compromises his communication of the gospel to those who are victims of empire, not its citizens." My response often seemed inadequate to address their anxiety about whether Paul's theology makes a difference in his views on politics and social equality. A book about Paul's understanding of citizenship, I thought, might help in our exploration of this issue.

Gordon Zerbe, professor of New Testament at Canadian Mennonite University, employs the rubric of citizenship to engage in a broad discussion of how Paul understood the implications of the Gospel for peace and politics. His book makes a significant contribution to the current lively scholarly conversation on this subject.

*Citizenship* consists of an informative introduction and overview followed by twelve essays, six of which were previously published. The book is organized according to four themes through which Zerbe approaches citizenship: loyalty, mutuality, security, and affinities. Each chapter in this volume rewards the reader with a wealth of information and stimulating theological reflection on the overall theme. Extensive endnotes reflect the author's thorough acquaintance with relevant scholarship; many of them also provide substantive additional exegetical analysis supporting his arguments.

Under "Loyalty" Zerbe focuses initially on Paul's letter to the Messianic assembly in Philippi, a major Roman imperial center. Zerbe contends that in Philippians Paul counsels a communal lifestyle and confession that confront the ideology of Rome. A key text in support of this contention is Philippians 1:27, which Zerbe translates, "Be a citizen body and practice your citizenship in a manner worthy of the good tidings of Messiah" (20). The entire letter commends "the practice of Messianic citizenship" oriented to the saving work of Messiah Jesus. This "heavenly citizenship" (cf. Phil. 3:20-21), Zerbe argues, is not other-worldly but next-worldly, counter-imperial, and global in scope.

Zerbe makes clear that standard translations of Pauline vocabulary need to be revisited. He typically employs terms such as "assembly" rather than "church" and "Messianic" rather than "Christ," especially since frequent usage of traditional language has led to the assumption that Paul is addressing religious and spiritual topics that have little if anything to do with politics. Several early chapters are devoted to word studies. He suggests that "faith" would be more accurately rendered as "loyalty" and "believers" can be described as "loyalists." Worship, at its core, is theo-political, an expression of exclusive loyalty to, and participation in, Christ, "pledging allegiance both in sacred ritual and in dedicated service in all of life" (60). Where English Bible translations have "righteousness" Zerbe regularly deploys the term "justice," which is interpreted as restorative in intent, not intrinsically punitive.

One of Zerbe's alternative translation decisions is not backed up by comparable exegetical effort. He uses the word "Error" instead of "Sin" but (unless this reviewer missed it) he does not elaborate on this usage. Zerbe would have benefited from the exegetical work by his mentor, John E. Toews, whose

Believers Church Bible Commentary on Romans uses a bold-print **Sin** to communicate that Paul has in mind a dominating and enslaving power and not, in the first place, the error or sinful act that results from yielding to its seductive power.

Under “Mutuality” Zerbe includes an essay on unity and diversity in Messiah’s body politic, followed by other essays on economics, slavery and patriarchy, and ecumenical relations. The concluding essay in this section features a carefully articulated and provocative theological discourse on the global politics of Messiah rooted in the universal salvation theme in Romans 9 to 11. With reference to social structures such as slavery and household patterns, Zerbe suggests that twenty-first-century interpreters of Paul’s writings can mitigate their disappointment in Paul by noting the direction that he sets—namely, away from domination and oppression and toward mutuality and equality.

Part three on “Security” deals with Paul’s overtly political rhetoric, including the use of military metaphors and his ethical teaching on nonretaliation. In the final chapter in this section Zerbe shifts into a more philosophical mode of inquiry: text theory; audience analysis; and the relevance of a peace theology in a violent world. He appeals to later readers of Paul’s first-century texts to “take up Paul also in terms of the directionality of his thought, not simply in respect to his static location in antiquity” (179-180).

This reviewer had the sense that the final two chapters (“Affinities”) were less connected to the book’s core themes. The connections between the theme of citizenship and Paul’s anthropology (chapter 11) seem tenuous. A discussion of the contributions of philosophically oriented and Marxist critics of Pauline politics and theology (chapter 12) better coheres with the overall thrust of the book, but it feels like an ill-fitting wrap-up to the volume.

Nowhere in this volume does Zerbe provide his trademark exegetical and theological treatment of Paul’s pastoral counsel in Romans 13:1-7. This passage about relationships with ruling authorities could rightly be considered central in a discussion of citizenship. Occasionally Zerbe refers to this text and offers a brief interpretation of it (e.g., 24ff, 140), but a careful historical and theological study of this text is missing. Chapter 9 on “Paul’s Ethic of Nonretaliation and Peace” focuses appropriately on Romans 12 but it does not seek to demonstrate how submission to authorities coheres with that ethic.

As an anthology of essays, *Citizenship* challenges readers to engage in a contextual analysis of each essay while also being alert to the connecting themes. This challenge is comparable to what readers of a particular Pauline letter face. Each letter is part of a collection of Paul’s letters, and that collection is within the library called the New Testament, which is itself in an anthology called the Bible. Zerbe provides more clues to his readers than does the collector of letters by the apostle Paul, including those written in his name. As both author and collector of the essays in *Citizenship*, Zerbe would have been more helpful to his readers if he had concluded this volume with a chapter providing an overall synthesis. Of course, Paul also did not draft such a synthesis, but it is unlikely that he envisioned that his letters would eventually be available in a library of first-



century writings. Most of Zerbe's essays end with helpful concluding reflections. The beginning introduction supplies enticing incentives for the reader to join this scholar both to discover "a vital framework for understanding Paul's apostolic letters" and to reflect on "the contemporary implications of his legacy" (2). A succinct concluding essay would have demonstrated the writer's penultimate answers to difficult questions raised by his wrestling with Paul.

A careful reading of *Citizenship* will benefit my students attempting to assess Paul's credibility when offering pastoral guidance for congregations, including people not protected by an imperial safety net. Any student of Paul's letters will find in this book a rich theological resource for contemplating how affiliation with Messiah's global community will inevitably lead to confrontation with other political entities claiming the ultimate allegiance of their citizens.

*Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary*

JACOB W. ELIAS

*Instead of Atonement: The Bible's Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness.* By Ted Grimsrud. Eugene, Ore: Cascade Books. 2013. Pp. 270.

In his recent book, Ted Grimsrud challenges the common understanding of Jesus' death as a sacrificial atonement, believing that this view provides ideological cover for a retributive orientation in the contemporary world. Instead, he describes the "Bible's core salvation story" as based on God's love and mercy rather than divine wrath or impersonal scales of justice. Framed with a critique of the contemporary criminal justice system, his book argues for a shift away from violence in both biblical interpretation and the contemporary world.

Grimsrud introduces the book by describing the "popular meaning" of atonement as a "sacrificial payment that makes salvation possible" (3). Linking atonement to God's impersonal holiness that requires punishment to satisfy God's aggrieved honor or balance the scales of cosmic justice (7, 21), Grimsrud seeks to step behind post-biblical theology to replace the "logic of retribution" with a "logic of mercy" by focusing on salvation, since the latter "was made possible by God's mercy *instead of atonement*" (46; added emphasis). Despite its title, the book focuses more on violence than atonement in light of his base conviction that "God's will does not ever include violence" (21-22).

In the opening section, Grimsrud provides an overview of the Old Testament story, describing a positive role of law, an understanding of sacrifice, and the "message of key prophets," culminating in Jesus' teaching as consistent expressions of God's love and self-initiated mercy (23-88).

In the second part, Grimsrud argues that the significance of Jesus' death lies not in the necessity of its sacrificial atonement, but rather in the exposure of the worldly "Powers": the Pharisees' "cultural exclusivism"; the temple's "religious institutionalism"; and the Roman Empire's "political authoritarianism" (89-185). Grimsrud sees Jesus' life as a continuation of the Old Testament salvation story that exposes appeals to violence, sacred and otherwise, as a sham. Jesus' resurrection, then, reflects God's vindication of his life and message, and a repudiation of the idolatrous claims of these "Powers." Latter chapters argue that

Paul and Revelation also reflect a “restorative” rather than “retributive” mode (186-225).

Finally, the conclusion reiterates Grimsrud’s focus on the Bible’s “core message of mercy,” briefly acknowledging that biblical material is “diverse” and “messy” on this topic while explaining why he sidelines so-called “pro-violence” biblical elements (233-236). The book ends with a brief contrast between retributive and restorative justice in the contemporary criminal justice system and an appeal for the latter “peacemaking approach” as more consistent with the Bible’s salvation story.

Grimsrud adds to ongoing discussion among Anabaptist writers regarding how to deal with violence in the Bible and as justified by contemporary Christians (see recent work by Eric Seibert, J. Denny Weaver, Tom Yoder-Neufeld, et al.). He helpfully articulates a positive view of law as a gift and insists that Jesus’ life proves more than simply a preamble to his death. The book is geared toward a broad readership and written in an accessible style, though there are consistently distracting stylistic issues.

While I strongly resonate with Grimsrud’s commitment to nonviolence, insistence on the ongoing significance of Jesus’ life and teaching, and critique of the contemporary criminal justice system, his book reflects several persistent and interrelated difficulties.

First, while he seeks to move behind postbiblical theology, Grimsrud provides inadequate discussion of the key biblical concepts related to his topic. While he defines *atonement* as it is commonly (mis)used today (3), he spends little attention on its biblical use; in contrast to 100+ pp. on Jesus, he passes over Leviticus and its scriptural basis for atonement in three (44-46). While Grimsrud provides his own definition for *salvation* as “restoration of harmony with God” (7) he does not acknowledge that *yeshu’ah* (in Hebrew) connotes military victory commonly linked to depictions of God as a warrior and judging king (Ex. 14:13-4; 15:1-3; Is. 59:16-19; Ps. 98), with the related verb *save* (*yasha’*) often tied to divine or human violence (Ex. 14:30; Jud. 2:16; 2 Sam. 22). Similarly, where he immediately identifies *salvation* as synonymous with *shalom* (peace) (1-2) and so dismisses a link between God and either violence or retribution (22), Grimsrud does not recognize that the basic meaning of the root *sh-l-m* lies in the restoring of equilibrium, often through (re)payment, requital, or retribution (Ex. 22; Is. 59:18; Jer. 51:6; Ps. 137:8).

Second, Grimsrud repeatedly contrasts a retributive (i.e., violent), impersonal view of God with a personal, restorative one focused on God’s love and mercy. He does not, however, expand upon *hesed* (love/mercy) as loyalty that *prompts* judgment in light of violated covenant; neither the blessings or curses (Deut. 28-29) nor the results of violating ethical and ritual holiness (Lev. 15:31; 18:25-28) appear in his discussion of the Torah. Where he portrays mercy rather than judgment as the basic scriptural paradigm, he does not adequately recognize that these two are necessarily connected, since mercy presupposes judgment that decides to *forgo* punishment.

Third, Grimsrud’s focus on the “main storyline” of the Bible (24) proves highly selective, avoiding elements that conflict with his perspective. For

instance, he emphasizes Exodus without noting its underlying view of God as a warrior (33); the Israelites' establishment in "the promised land" as part of "God's healing strategy" with no mention of divine or human violence (29-30; Joshua does not appear in the Scripture index); and the prophets' future hope while downplaying their extensive depiction of God's judgment, often as a "figure of speech" or "rhetoric" (36, 54, 58). Despite his insistence on continuity between Old Testament and New, Grimsrud neglects to mention Old Testament precedents for the "day of the LORD" in Romans (193) or the handing over of vengeance to God in the New Testament books he discusses (Rom. 12:19; Rev. 6:10). Even when Grimsrud discusses Jesus' "parable of the vineyard," oddly portraying the vineyard as the temple rather than the people (104; cf. Is. 5:1-7), he avoids its strong retributive judgment motif or the significant continuity between Jesus' teaching and the Old Testament on this topic. Finally, Grimsrud does not discuss Hebrews, the New Testament book that perhaps most thoroughly draws upon atonement language to depict Jesus' significance.

Fourth, Grimsrud provides a simplistic, synchronic reading of the Gospels. While he does so to appeal to "the common Christian reader" (69), the effect is that he does not take into account the rhetoric of the New Testament itself. Most striking, while Grimsrud notes that Jesus is a "partisan in a debate among Jews" (117), he repeatedly depicts the Pharisees among "the Powers" as legalistic, committed to "cultural exclusivism," "twisting Torah," focused on "external details," and the like (111-129); his critique of the Pharisees' attempt to "apply Torah more widely" (117) rings particularly hollow in light of his positive view of the Sermon on the Mount (114), where Jesus also drastically expands the law's reach. In his portrayal of the Pharisees, Grimsrud reiterates the very stereotypes that have historically prompted Christian violence against Jews, with prominent scholars who have written extensively and accessibly on Jesus and the Pharisees failing to appear (Jacob Neusner, A.J. Levine, Bruce Chilton, et al.).

Finally, for most of the book Grimsrud emphasizes the historical nature of salvation (29) as well as God's ability and willingness to intervene in history (38), most decisively in Jesus' resurrection (175-177). At the end, however, Grimsrud adopts an opposite, "materialistic" understanding of history as reflecting the "natural consequences" of a "natural and impersonal process" in order to insulate God from judgment (235), a move that seems to undercut his previous argument.

To conclude: within a few pages it becomes clear that atonement functions as little more than a foil for violence, which is the central concern of this book. Indeed, while Grimsrud identifies the "life and teaching of Jesus" as his hermeneutical key (23), his avoidance and downplaying of judgment motifs in the Gospels suggests that nonviolence rather than Jesus provides his interpretive center. In the end, Grimsrud's concern to "construct an understanding of salvation that has no need for violence" (19, added emphasis) trumps his claim to describe "how the Bible itself presents salvation" (24). His dual claims that "we do *not* find an atonement model in this story" (233; his emphasis) and that Jesus' death "adds nothing" to a biblical view of salvation (74, 82, 86, 233) exaggerate a selective counterreading, and in doing so mimic the very type of universalized

claim he sets out to debunk. In the end, this book may unfortunately harden opposition to the ongoing significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that Grimsrud seeks to promote.

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W. DEREK SUDERMAN

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*Living Faith: Embracing God's Callings.* By Keith Graber Miller. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House. 2012. Pp. 126. \$12.95.

In *Living Faith*, Keith Graber Miller encourages careful conversations about a "contemporary Christian theology of vocation from a Mennonite perspective" (77). This book provides the historical and current resources necessary for those conversations, as well as a helpful discussion framework to guide them. His thesis is that "sixteenth-century Anabaptists and twenty-first-century North American Mennonites do share some theological and ethical continuity in terms of their vocational experience" (76). Each group has taken seriously the challenge of living out its faith by following Jesus while engaging in various occupational, professional, and societal roles.

Graber Miller provides background to the subject of vocation and calling in the first four chapters of this book. He describes "how vocation or calling have been understood in the Christian tradition" (30) and provides accounts of calling in the Old Testament and the New Testament. In this section he identifies the evolution and changing perceptions of calling and vocation. Graber Miller describes this process beginning with a description of the understanding of call as a "member of the people of God" combined with (according to some) a call to a specific position or kind of work. He describes a narrowing of the understanding of Christian vocation in the early fourth century; the term vocation applied only to those with a "sacred calling or vocation" who occupied "official leadership roles in the church" (34). The sixteenth-century reformer Martin Luther challenged this position and encouraged a broader understanding of vocation and call to recognize that "the everyday worldly activity of everyone in the priesthood of believers has religious significance" (39). The section ends with a discussion of the perspectives of early Anabaptists related to vocation and call. According to Graber Miller, these perspectives held that Anabaptists should occupy a more constrained range of occupational involvements than that advocated by the reformers. Anabaptists rejected occupational roles involving violence or coercion, participation in political activities, and engagement in many forms of economic activities because they exploited or harmed others in ways that violated their understanding of discipleship.

That historical perspective provides a helpful foundation for the next three chapters, which describe issues of vocation and calling that have been more recently engaged by Anabaptists. In some cases, these perceptions and practices have changed over time. For example, Graber Miller refers to work by Wally Kroeker of Mennonite Economic Development Associates that describes an evolving understanding that "money is a tool for potential good," and that

practices of wealth creation are a legitimate alternative to the practices of wealth distribution.

Graber Miller provides a review of the occupational shifts that have taken place among Mennonites. According to Graber Miller, sixteenth-century Anabaptists emerged from “a rich academic and theological milieu” and in subsequent years moved to engage occupations most typically found in rural environments where they would not need to compromise their Christian principles. In North America, shifts from “small-town crafts and farming to the professions and the office” (56) began in the 1950s. Graber Miller attributes some of these vocational changes to the influence of Civilian Public Service (C.P.S.) in the 1940s, 1-W service in the 1950s, and church-supported voluntary service programs that exposed young people to other occupational fields and professions. The result of these sociological shifts is that today relatively few U.S. adult Mennonites live on farms; 41 percent occupy managerial and professional occupations and 27 percent are in technical, sales, and administrative support roles. In addition, a majority of Mennonite women are now part of the workforce.

The changing vocational involvements of Mennonites invite careful consideration of how to bring “these real-world experiences into their theological considerations” (65). From the earlier 1970s and 1980s discussions of the “perils of professionalism,” to more recent examinations of the influences of gender, race, ethnicity, and family history on occupational choices, Graber Miller encourages careful thinking about callings and vocation. He ends this section of the book with a presentation of the Anabaptist historical perspectives on vocation and ministry, the practice of choosing pastors by lot, and our current understanding of pastoral ministry.

The final two chapters are structured around six “points of continuity” that guide faithful Christians as they work to develop a contemporary understanding of vocation based on the perspectives and practices of sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The first three of these principles are: “1) seeing faithful discipleship as our primary calling; 2) honoring and blessing the way followers of Jesus live out their faith in their occupational, professional, and worldly roles; and 3) allowing our commitments to being Jesus’ disciples to shape and transform our roles” (83). The final three principles encourage honoring the place of called-out leaders in the church, engaging in and making possible lives of integration, and working to bring healing and reconciliation to the world.

Graber Miller writes that the process of discernment related to vocations and call can be aided by small group discussion among same-age and diverse age participants. To support that possibility, Graber Miller has included six “Questions for Reflection” at the end of each chapter. These questions can be used to facilitate vocational learning that will come from hearing each other’s counsel and stories. He acknowledges that while some readers will have identified and lived out their call, others readers will be at the early stages of vocational discovery. Graber Miller hopes that conversations around this topic can occur in intergenerational settings where older participants can share their experience and counsel with younger people, or in youth or young adult

discussion settings where participants can use the material in this book to shape conversation about vocational discernment, life path choices, and the presence of God's spirit as they make those decisions.

I appreciate Graber Miller's encouragement to take seriously the examination and then implementation of decisions related to vocation and calling. Many of today's young adults experience the blessing and the challenge of vast opportunity related to vocational direction. The six principles he identifies in chapters 8 and 9 provide a useful framing for deliberation related to the integration of Christian discipleship with choices related to occupation and profession. But while many young adults are challenged by uncertainty related to opportunity that can at times feel overwhelming, others experience the disappointment and anxiety associated with unemployment and under-employment. On occasion, I have the impression that Graber Miller implies the existence of more choices than actually exists for many people today. I would find helpful a discussion of how individuals and their communities of support might navigate the experiences of losing or being unable to obtain employment to which they feel called—in some cases because of economic conditions beyond their control.

Finally, Keith Graber Miller writes that "Mennonites and Christians ought to seek for themselves and others human systems and workplaces where all can not only 'make a living' but 'make a life'" (86). As compelling as that goal appears, it's one that is most easily accomplished in the presence of a robust range of employment opportunities provided by education and life in a context where economic opportunity abounds and safety nets are firmly in place. It might be more true to life to temper the description of this goal. It would be helpful to include a discussion of the mechanisms necessary—at the personal, faith community, and political levels—to address Graber Miller's acknowledgement in the associated endnote that "One of the horrific realities is that our economics and governmental system, in which most of us are deeply invested, often make such 'faithfully made lives' impossible for the majority of the world's population to attain" (116). The fact that this description is so sadly descriptive of the lives of so much of humanity requires our constant awareness and discomfort as we simultaneously recognize more holistic vocational opportunities and work for greater justice for all.

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KAREN KLASSEN HARDER

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*Poetry in America.* By Julia Spicher Kasdorf. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press. 2011. Pp. 88. \$15.95.

Julia Spicher Kasdorf's much-anticipated third collection of poetry is a *Georgics* of post-9/11 America, set in cars, classrooms, big box stores, and small-town YMCA kickboxing sessions. These poems explore the lives of ordinary working Americans in small towns and semirural landscapes where desire is tempered by disillusionment and a good mechanic is valued at least as much as a poet. In "English 213: Introduction to Poetry Writing," an extended lesson in

metaphor, the poet's car breaks down just before she is to give a poetry reading at which "half the audience walked out . . . / to attend a memorial service for some boys, killed/ in a frat house fire." However, in an illustration of exchange value worthy of Marx, the poet is able to sell enough books "to cover the cost of radiator hose, plus labor,/ that transaction as sweet and pure as the motion/ of any of our lubricious, invisible parts." In Kasdorf's democratic vision, the poet is a kind of laborer, too.

The title poem, set in a Barnes and Noble bookstore in Evansville, shows the poet-speaker hoping to evade the awkwardness of a poorly attended reading by inviting her audience of two to coffee. But Barbara, a stranger who shows up in "walking shorts and sandals with socks" and who has "bangs and plastic glasses like Ramona the Pest," insists on hearing the reading. "I thought of priests/ who must pronounce the full Eucharist even if no one goes to Mass," Kasdorf writes. But Barbara claims to be a poet herself. "*Can't help the disease. It's either write or go mad.*" By the end of the poem, the reader and the poet have changed places, as the poet listens to Barbara's stories of 'fast[ing] for 19 days at the gates of the governor's mansion because he'd turned Kentucky's community colleges into trade schools." "*Evil bastards will call it job training, but it's just one more way to keep poor people down.*" Poetry is a priesthood of all practitioners, one of rolled-up sleeves and passionate engagement. At the poem's end, Barbara voices an ethic of care as she asks the poet: "*Where the hell is your umbrella?*"

The poet's umbrella, her protection from life's vicissitudes, comes at least in part from the teachers around her, ordinary human beings making do. Thus she absorbs lessons not only from lyric poets such as Hopkins, Rilke, and Yeats, but also from people who cope with life's challenges by reaching for the resources at hand. From Annaliese, a former dean's wife, she learns how to break open a head of garlic by smashing it with a can, and from her father how to take a break from work stress by lying down in a field in starlight.

The second section of this three-part book introduces the arduous labors of childbirth and mothering. A new mother so lonely that she "scraped both elbows bloody" when she "dove for the phone" admits that "this birth/ striking as death/ and common as dirt" has stolen her writing voice. Yet this "dirt" is also the fertile soil that produces "a child, conceived before/ the towers burned/ but born after" who delights in the "materiality of language." "The Baby Screaming in the Backseat" expresses all of the outrage the poet feels at injustices from sweatshop labor to oil-guzzling modes of transportation. In poems such as "Veterans Day, Greene County, 2004" and "Cardio Kickboxing in a Town of 6,000," Kasdorf reaches beyond her sense of irony with an ethic of care to embrace others fighting for meaning in a chaotic and disappointing world. Yet the fragility of the maternal bond, of family, also haunts this section, which also includes an elegy, "This Side of Paradise," for Reetika Vasirani, a poet who took her own life and that of her toddler son. An elegy for a marriage, "The Day," focuses on the removal of a sugar maple in the couple's front yard. In "Swallows Over Bellefonte," the poet lies down on the grass with her daughter to watch the birds, recalling the poet's own experience with her father.

The final section returns to perennial themes in Kasdorf's work—longing, the love of language, the particularity of place, and the persistence of history. This section includes the only specifically Mennonite subjects in the book, culminating in a four-part elegy, "Rachel on the Threshing Floor," for Rachel (Yoder) Spicher, a 38-year-old woman and mother of Kasdorf's father, who was killed in a buggy accident in 1948.

The sequence is framed by visual and musical ekphrasis—an opening poem based on a photograph and a closing poem based on a traditional Amish hymn, the *Lobsang*, or hymn of praise, "sung at every service/ but funerals." This lyric envelope encloses Rachel's actual diary entries in part two, and the poet's retelling of stories about the incident in part three, allowing the subject to speak in a duet with the poet-granddaughter who has received her story. The placement of this sequence in the collection aligns the fate of Rachel, and its ripple effect on her family and community, with the lives of other women in other cultural contexts, including that of the poet.

A thread of longing, sharpened by Kasdorf's refusal of nostalgia, runs through the collection—from the "dumb desire for flight" of adolescent girls playing "double the digits" in their father's cars, to a teacher's response to troubled students, to the poet's ambiguous reassurance to her daughter in the closing poem: "Under a roof with someone who loves you/ is your home . . . though/ you will always long for what's not there." In between, the poet's obsession with earth surfaces again and again—in the comfort she finds in lying on the ground with her father, and then later with her daughter; in Percy Yoder's parable of two ways to plow with horses; in the graveyards that populate this book; and in a particularly moving poem, "Return to Bern," in which she visits sites of Mennonite martyrdom with an intimate friend. The many elegies of this book offer a valediction to a traditional way of life, and simultaneously record the persistence of earth in the geography of the imagination.

*Poetry in America* demonstrates a commitment to the lyric narrative form Kasdorf has chosen for her previous books, and its craft is strong as tempered steel. Sometimes a poem may at first glance appear to be pure description, but a careful reading reveals the ways in which Kasdorf's metaphors lie close to the skin of language, even as she demonstrates the uses of poetry in living an ethical life, placing it alongside other kinds of labor. This gesture recalls the commitment the poet made to put her hand to the plow in "Green Market," the first poem of her award-winning first volume, *Sleeping Preacher*. *Poetry in America* continues to cultivate lived experience in often rocky terrain, as the poet offers a rereading of cultural narratives and reaffirms the arduous labor of wresting meaning from everyday sorrows "striking as death/ and common as dirt."



*The Juliet Stories*. By Carrie Snyder. Toronto: Anansi. 2012. Pp. 324. \$22.95.

More often than I care to admit, I stumble upon a text that reminds me of my literary myopia and the borderland limits of my reading diet. Like most of my colleagues who teach English literature in United States institutions, I know too little about the rich literary tradition of my northern neighbors, beyond a smattering of Margaret Atwood novels and a Booker Prize winner or two.

Canadian writers who identify as Mennonites have been the most powerful reminders to me that a literary tradition exists beyond my own country's, with writers like Miriam Toews, Dora Dueck, and Rudy Wiebe expanding my understanding of literature written in English—and so, by extension, my students' understanding as well. This year, I will be adding Carrie Snyder to my list of significant writers any student of literature should know. Her *Juliet Stories* is an excellent novel in stories worth the critical attention it has received.

*The Juliet Stories* traces the experiences of its namesake protagonist, Juliet Friesen. In the opening story, Juliet lands in Managua with her family: two younger brothers, Keith and Emmanuel; and her parents, Bram and Gloria, peace workers come to Nicaragua with the Roots of Justice, an organization intending to stop the Contras from slaughtering "ordinary Nicaraguans" through nonviolent efforts like "stand [ing], peaceful and strong" between the Contras and the Nicaraguans they intend to kill (18). The family's cultural dissonance is immediate and painful, especially as Gloria and the children must face their new home alone, as Bram sets himself to the task of peacemaking while his family negotiates the streets of Managua and the anger of their missionary hostess.

This first story, "Rat," strikes several themes Snyder limns through her collection. Most notable of these is the conflict that develops when ideology trumps familial relationships. Certainly Bram, but Gloria as well, are driven by their hope for a peaceful Nicaragua, sometimes losing sight of their work's hidden costs, paid for in part by Juliet and her siblings.

In "She Will Leave a Mark," this cost becomes more explicit. When Keith gets lost at a pro-Ortega rally, his mother is the last to realize his absence because she is caught up in seeing Ortega—a man of the people, she believes, and someone who is a "revolutionary hero." Gloria panics when she discovers the loss, lashing out at those who try to calm her. Only later will she apologize, order restored with Keith's return. The story ends, though, with the tension still thrumming: do the adults, swept away in Nicaraguan politics and their role in international matters, recognize the need for peace in their home?

Throughout the story cycle, Snyder powerfully explores the ways ideology, politics, and the desire to change the world complicates and compromises relationships, affecting Gloria's ability to relate to her children, to her husband, and even to the Nicaraguans she feels called to serve. While initially, we might believe that Bram's allegiance to peacemaking is misguided, drawing his family into danger, other stories suggest Gloria is equally complicit in disregarding her children and her husband with her ideology—her longing for Something More—that makes it difficult for her to tend to what remains before her.

Part two of the story cycle, "Disruption," calls Gloria back to herself, her family, and to Canada. Juliet's brother has been diagnosed with cancer, intensive treatment is necessary, and so Gloria and her children join Juliet's grandma in an apartment, while Bram remains initially absent, still fighting for justice. Although the settings in "Disruption" are more familiar, perhaps even comfortable—the Friesens are no longer in a war zone, after all—the stories here seem somehow more weighted, Juliet's own sorrow deeper, and her family's unity threatened in new ways.

In "Disruption," the narrative lens also pulls back, allowing us to see the perspective not only of Juliet, but of other characters as well. No longer a child, Juliet as protagonist becomes more complex, as do our feelings for her. While in the first part our empathy resides almost entirely with Juliet, in later stories, it is diffused, lingering not only with Juliet, but also with her parents, her siblings, her grandmother, and other characters who come into her orbit.

The second half of the book challenges us to consider where Juliet's disruption resides, and in what ways this disruption changes her character. In part, of course, there is a break from what had become familiar in Nicaragua. The rhythms of her family's life, however dissonant, are rhythms nonetheless; the landscape, so different from her North American upbringing, has become comfortable, so much so that when Juliet and several friends disappear, playing in a cove, they feel no panic—even as their parents do.

While still in Nicaragua, though, Juliet anticipates this disruption—her growing awareness afforded by maturity allows her to recognize the "great divide" between childhood and being adult. In "What Howard Hughes Left Behind," Juliet muses that "she lives in an unknowable world . . . on the other side are the grown-ups who know everything, who hold the answers to the gigantic questions that plague her: How do you know you are in love? How can you be sure about God? What if you're wrong?" (133). Juliet herself resists crossing over to adulthood, though its inevitability portends the book's second part—the heartbreak she will experience—and the recognition that "gigantic questions" will plague her, as they do all people, until the grave beckons.

The book's penultimate story, also named "Disruption," suggests that Juliet has become as her mother, driven by a longing for peace, the impulse to stand in the breach where injustice occurs. As with Gloria, Juliet's allegiances are bifurcated—she has also become a mother—and she must decide how she will love her oppressed neighbor while also protecting her children. Her final act, the help she provides, lends her a purpose, "cut(s) her life wide open," and empowers the neighbor, too, who leaves her situation with the affirmative "I am not afraid" (313).

Such affirmation resides at the heart of Snyder's work. Despite the protagonist's grief, her complicated family, her coming-of-age into a space where young brothers get cancer, parents divorce and remarry, and pregnancies end unhappily: despite all this, we feel as well Juliet's strength, her ability to endure. This is due in no small part to Snyder's beautifully drawn characters, who embody so well the complexities that come with being human.

Although it is always dangerous to connect an author's own life story to her fictional creation, at least some of what Snyder has written in *The Juliet Stories* is inspired by her own experience living in Managua in the 1980s. On the Mennonite Heritage Portrait site, Snyder writes briefly about her time there when her parents were working for an organization called Witness for Peace. After fourteen months "protesting the covert war" in Nicaragua, her family returned to Canada after her brother was diagnosed with leukemia. Her parents later separated and divorced, as do Bram and Gloria, once resettled in Ontario and contending with their own sorrow.

While Snyder does not see her novel-in-stories as being Mennonite per se, she still believes her Mennonite heritage can be traced through her work: "Storytelling is in my blood," she writes, "as is the impulse to share what I do, as is the doggedness to do the work necessary; and it's all quite Mennonite, even if the art my siblings and I create is not, either in content or form."

*The Juliet Stories* was a 2012 finalist for the Governor General's Literary Awards, one of the top prizes for Canadian literature. Snyder's rich storytelling can be enjoyed in her nearly-daily blog posts, *Obscure CanLit Mama*, although "obscure" may be a misnomer, given that Snyder herself has been named by CBC Books as "One of the Top Ten Canadian Women Writers You Need to Know." After reading *The Juliet Stories*, I'm convinced Snyder should be named one of the top women writers everyone must learn to know, given the power of a text that questions the permanency of borders, and the ways journeying somewhere new might cut each of us "wide open."

George Fox University

MELANIE SPRINGER MOCK

*Monstrance: Poems.* By Sarah Klassen. Winnipeg, Man.: Turnstone Press. 2012. Pp. 118. \$17.

Perhaps there is no better place to dip into a book of poetry than on an airplane. Headed from the known to the unknown and gripped by a mixture of dread and excitement, I opened Sarah Klassen's eighth book of poems. I tend to be a nervous traveler—both on airplanes and in the unexpected twists of adult life as a stumbling Anabaptist today. But as I read the title of the poetry collection's first section—"Travel Advisory"—and later encountered lines like a ". . . silhouette/ suspended between earth and sky" (63), I knew I had tucked the right book into my carry-on. Klassen's work brings international landscapes and the very act of travel into focus, but her new poems also illumine "[t]he invisible made visible" (10) at home and within, glimpsed through a kitchen window, when walking through a familiar meadow, or while sitting on a crowded city bus.

Not immediately familiar with the term *monstrance*, I only knew it sounded and looked powerful, mysterious, even slightly ominous. Klassen's collection reinvents the word's dictionary definition—according to her title poem, "A vessel in which the consecrated host/ is exposed to receive the veneration/ of the faithful" (7)—and her reader only need study the book's striking front cover to

gain a sense of how the term will be re-visioned inside. Instead of a manmade treasure symbolizing holiness that we are most often not allowed to touch, on Klassen's mostly black-and-white cover, we look down onto two open hands, cupping the title word surrounded by warm color. The hands, we see, have lived a while. They are empty except for the language that they offer. And indeed, a book of mostly autobiographical, lyrical poetry like this one is another form of vessel. The collection as a whole sets out to remind the speaker (and thus, her readers) that we as humans carry the whole world inside us, just as the book's introductory epigraph, a quote from Origen, assures.

Listening to news coverage about the newly appointed Pope Francis in March 2012 and being reminded of the wealth and rituals tied to the Vatican, I could not help recalling Klassen's title poem and how, as a tourist, she stumbles upon a showcase of rediscovered church treasure in Vilnius, both awed and wary of such splendor on protected display for the masses:

Allowed to look, the tourist wants to touch,  
be touched,  
but everything is out of bounds: saints, angels,  
Christ, even the hem of a garment. (9)

However, as news stories announced that Pope Francis planned to wash the feet of both female and male inmates on Maundy Thursday instead of holding a grand service in a nearby basilica, I also thought about Klassen's book, which often pushes against socially constructed boundaries.

Though many of the poems in this collection dialogue with the natural world where "wheat and weeds grow side by side" (105) and where crows, dogs, sparrows, and gophers teach her speaker important lessons, they also look directly at the undeniable brokenness of humanity—namely, how we cannot escape it by simply leaving home or stepping into a house of worship. In the poem "Waging Peace," a terrified speaker hopes to "stand/ exposed at the crossroads of unguarded anger/ a presence, not an absence" (112). Klassen's work repeatedly does just that, sometimes at actual Palestinian checkpoints, other times at the bedside of a dying friend, or after witnessing the violence of language or absence within her own neighborhood. Indeed, the best poems in *Monstrance* reveal and unpeel what we might otherwise overlook, hurry past, or take for granted. "What is a monstrance for? A prairie tourist / wandering in wonders," Klassen's title poem asks, and the following poems attempt a many-faced answer.

One strong point of this collection is its use of poem series. Without these themed sections, the reader might feel pulled in too many directions at once. In the book's section titled "Songs of Ascent," we follow the traveling speaker to various lakes, first through the people who journey toward water, then through a poem series about the birds that do the same. In the series called "Crow Quartet" that immediately follows, it becomes clear that the "crow mother" that sometimes "plummets from the heady height/ and lands victorious on carrion" (60) serves as a mirror for the humanity encountered in this collection.

But even as Sarah Klassen explores how to rejoice in a world where the offspring of all creation dies needlessly and publicly each day, where terminally

ill neighbors slowly fade away, and where crops turn to dust in a rainless season, I believe urgent wonder sits as the core of her newest collection. In *Monstrance*, we trust a poet-guide whose real coffee (as she puts it in “This nascent hour”) is, in fact, a new way of seeing. When others are sleeping, Sarah Klassen is wide awake. Because of this, and because of bold poems that recognize the complicated violence of witness, Sarah Klassen serves as a notable mentor for current and future Mennonite-affiliated poets. Like the last stanza from “Prayer in time of too much rain on the prairie,” *Monstrance* invites its readers to sit with what it means to be a living—and dying—vessel filled with, among other things, commemoration, grief, and empathy:

Remember the years of prairie drought when the slender  
panting deer burst forth from dry bush  
into dry clearing: wild-eyed  
and thirsty (17).

Ohio University

BECCA J. R. LACHMAN

*Shaken in the Water*. By Jessica Dawn Penner. Tipp City, Ohio: Foxhead Books. 2013. Pp. 379. \$18.

Jessica Dawn Penner’s first novel, *Shaken in the Water*, follows the story of the Harder family from 1903 to 2007. They live in Ulysses, Kansas, a fictional, mostly Mennonite town, and are descendants of the 1870s Russian migration to North America (376). While the novel is in part a traditional family saga, culminating as usual with the younger generation’s rejection of old-time values and their attempts to leave the community, what drives the narrative is the way the family is accompanied throughout the century by the supernatural as they struggle with their Mennonite heritage. Beginning with their matriarch, Agnes, who bears a mysterious birthmark on her back known as the “Tiger Scar” (15), certain family members are haunted by a mysterious and not always benevolent “Voice” that reveals itself to them during times of crisis. The search for answers to questions such as “Where does the Voice come from?” and “What is its relationship to Agnes’s scar?” propels the reader.

Agnes is *Shaken in the Water*’s central character, with seven of the twenty-five chapters dedicated to her alone. She initiates the Harder tradition of transgression by engaging in a sexual relationship with her neighbor, Nora, the only person she loves even though she marries Nora’s brother, Peter. Two of Agnes’s children, Huldah and Johan, are the primary supporting characters. Upon being shunned by the church for refusing to wear her head covering after it gets blown off in a tornado, Huldah moves into town by herself. The Voice becomes her constant companion, taking the form of a tiger that lives in her yard. Among other powers, it gives her the ability to see when each member of the family will die. Johan is the opposite of his older sister (whom he does not meet until he is 20 years old because of the shunning [280]), fastidiously orthodox and expecting his wife and children to live up to his high moral standard.

Other Harders stray outside of the church's boundaries by engaging in divorce, public nudity, drug use, animal sacrifice, and murder. However, these elements of the novel are presented in a straightforward, sincere manner as the characters struggle to survive in their strict community. Their flaws feel organic within the narrative rather than being sensationalized.

Similarly, one of the book's strengths is its unabashed, honest portrayals of physical desire. Aside from Agnes and Nora's relationship, there are incestuous relationships between Nora and Peter, and Johan and his niece, Imma, who is one year younger. These latter two relationships are thought-provoking and disturbing because they are actively chosen by each partner, and for the men they are more fulfilling than the relationships they have with their wives. Nora asks Peter, "How is this a sin? It feels right" (122), and he is unable to give a convincing answer. With these relationships, Penner accomplishes the difficult task of making readers uncomfortable while also compelling us to keep reading to see what will happen. The novel's taboo relationships are a powerful witness to how the traditional suppression of sexuality among Mennonites leads to unhealthy sexual expression.

*Shaken in the Water's* narrative includes a number of elements from previous pieces of Mennonite literature. For instance, the sense of wonder that Agnes feels when she is nude outdoors is reminiscent of a scene in Rudy Wiebe's *Sweeter Than All the World*, and Johan is an American version of the father in Miriam Toews's *Irma Voth*. There is even a nod to the Amish film thriller, *Witness*, in the manner of the death of one of Agnes's grandchildren. The book's pastiche of elements from previous Anabaptist-inspired narratives is not lazily derivative, but is rather evidence of Penner acknowledging the tradition in which she writes and claiming space for herself within that tradition as she adds her own voice to it. Many novels portray the experiences of Canadian Russian Mennonites, but very few, especially recently, depict Russian Mennonites in the U.S., and it is exciting that *Shaken in the Water* remedies this lack.

The novel is unflattering toward Mennonites, but its portrayal of them is fair. While Johan's wife, Ellen, claims at the end of the book that the "entire family had tried to be people they would never be" (366), this failure nevertheless offers hope because of the family's refusal to give up. *Shaken in the Water* is not an angry book, but is firm in its insistence that the community do a better job of respecting women and other groups that it has marginalized in the past, including LGBT persons and the differently-abled.

*Shaken in the Water's* only major deficiency is highlighted in a note about Mennonites at the end of the book: Penner depicts her Russian Mennonite characters wearing elements of plain dress that were only worn by Swiss-German Mennonites (376). While Penner is entitled to use whatever form of poetic license she likes, choosing to base a major element of the plot on a historical inaccuracy feels overly risky when it would have been easy to find some other plausible reason for Huldah's shunning. It is as though Penner assumes readers will expect the Mennonites in the novel to fit the usual "Mennonites are like Amish, right?" stereotype, so she gives it to us rather than being historically accurate. The depiction of the Mennonite community in

general and individual characters specifically are otherwise sound, and it would be better if the novel simply allowed the strength of these portrayals to carry the story rather than propping up the narrative on a historical inaccuracy.

Despite this flaw, *Shaken in the Water* is a success both in terms of its content and its form. The fantastic nature of the Voice's presence fits easily within the otherwise realistic narrative, which jumps around, but is roughly chronological. The book is peppered with Low German, most notably in its early chapters, and this element keeps readers attuned to the novel's historical time period without being overbearing. *Shaken in the Water* is an engaging novel that portends well for Penner's future work.

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