

From Zealots to Saints: The Dichotomy of Anabaptist Images in Swiss Historical Fiction

BERIT JANY*

Abstract: The early Anabaptist movement has been fictionalized by Swiss authors in a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary narratives. This article will focus on two of the more prominent works: Gottfried Keller's *Ursula*, the first fictional depiction of the movement's origins on Swiss soil; and Katharina Zimmermann's *Furgge*, the most recent fictional writing dealing with Swiss Anabaptist history. The critical reading of these two texts exposes the way in which Swiss authors have fictionalized the faith group, its commitment to particular theological and ethical aspects, its separation from society, and the experience of persecution. The study also investigates the social and religious principles drawn from historical accounts and sources that have influenced the Anabaptist image as an ideal society on the one hand, and its stigmatization as a fanatical sect on the other. The essay thereby reveals the underlying programmatic aims and national ideals of each author, cloaked by their literary articulations of conflict-laden encounters between society and the religious minority.

"Once hunted; now acclaimed" (*Früher verjagt, heute gefragt*) is a phrase that captures well the Anabaptist experience in their Swiss homeland.¹ When the religious movement started in the context of the sixteenth-century European Reformation, its followers were soon harried out of the land (*früher verjagt*). As radical reformers seeking to establish an ideal Christian community through separation from the secular realm and ecclesiastical sphere, the Anabaptists were perceived as dissidents and heretics. Although a few early modern contemporaries regarded them as exceptional Christians, it was not until the twentieth century that popular opinion shifted from a condemnation of the group's deviation from

*Berit Jany is a faculty member in the German department at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

1. In their 2006 annual meeting, the European Mennonite Conferences asserted that after having been persecuted in the past, Swiss Mennonites are more popular today than ever before, especially in consideration of Switzerland's year of commemorating the Anabaptists (*Täuferjahr*) in 2007; the broadcasting of Peter von Gunten's Anabaptist documentary "*Im Leben und über das Leben hinaus*" on Swiss television in 2005; and the sixth edition of Katharina Zimmermann's Anabaptist novel *Die Furgge* (1989) in 2005—Barbara Hege-Galle and Markus Rediger, "Mennoniten in Europa zwischen Stagnation und Aufbruch," accessed Jan. 12, 2013, <http://www.mennonews.de/archiv/2007/01/08/mennoniten-in-europa-zwischen-stagnation-und-aufbruch/>.

customary social and religious order to an appreciation of their peaceful community life and steadfast belief. Over the course of time, the Anabaptists caught the public's interest (*heute gefragt*) and have become a subject for scholars and novelists alike.

In their portrayal of the early Anabaptist movement, Swiss authors of fictional narratives have also employed the opposing concepts of "verjagt" and "gefragt," expressing either aversion to or admiration for the faith group.² Swiss fiction writing has generated an image of the Anabaptists as "Other" by focusing on the movement's theology of discipleship, with its practical and ethical implications, and its separation from the established church and society.

In their fictional treatments, authors have tended to either demonize or idealize Anabaptism for its separatist theology. The most conspicuous example of rejection is Gottfried Keller's novella *Ursula* (1877), the first fictional depiction of the movement's origins on Swiss soil. By contrast, the latest fictional narrative of Swiss Anabaptism, Katharina Zimmermann's historical novel *Die Furgge* (1989), portrays the Anabaptists as non-conformists, but with a deep sympathy for their experience of persecution and persistence and their commitment to follow Christ's teachings of peace. Appearing a century apart, both Keller's and Zimmermann's representations of the Anabaptists initiated a critical discussion in Switzerland of political and national issues.

The history of the Anabaptist movement in the Helvetic region has not been easily available to Swiss society. In the past centuries, much of the Anabaptist experience was simply omitted from Swiss historiographies and national identity. "When I was a child—at school, at home, at church—I never heard . . . of the Anabaptists, and knew nothing of them," Katharina Zimmermann admitted in a 2017 interview in which she describes the coincidence that provided inspiration for the writing of the Anabaptist-themed novel.³ This reality makes Keller's and Zimmermann's

2. To be sure, some Swiss novels and fictional narratives dealing with early Anabaptism have taken a less polarized approach to representing the faith group. Rudolf von Tavel's novel *Der Frondeur* (1929) and Walter Laedrach's historical fiction *Passion in Bern* (1938), to name a few works that were written in the time between Keller's and Zimmermann's fictional productions, give a more multifaceted depiction of the faith group in which they intertwine aspects of piety and sedition with the purpose of discussing both the concept of discipleship to Christ and national unity.

3. Katharina Zimmermann, "Katharina Zimmermann discusses *Furgge*," interview posted on YouTube by Lancaster Roots 2017, video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xMP96p1t40. Zimmermann had come across the history of Swiss Anabaptism when her husband was called to serve as pastor of the Protestant congregation of Schangnau and she discovered pastoral accounts depicting the seminal days of persecution of Anabaptists in the Emme River Valley.

discoveries of Swiss Anabaptist history—their reading of historical sources and accounts that profoundly shape their understanding and literary depiction of Swiss Anabaptism—all the more critical. Examining both the earliest and the more recent Swiss Anabaptist-themed narratives, this article argues that developments in historical research have served a crucial role in the changing nature of plots and characters in each authors' fictional portrayals of the faith group.

The portrayal of the Anabaptists in Swiss fictional literature—the authors' engagement with the chief principles and issues of the faith group that weave together a spectrum of literary images representing Swiss Anabaptism—also opens a broader investigation into the poetic treatment of social movements in history, which often disguise participation in contemporary cultural and political debates. In *The Historical Novel*, the literary theorist György Lukács reflects on the social and political objectives inherent in historical narratives, especially with reference to the manipulative character of historical fiction as it is influenced by the author's political and ideological agenda in the depiction of social conflict.⁴ According to Lukács, the act of drawing a connection between the reader and the historical material is highly politicized and can only be accomplished by concentrating on marginal characters or groups—or as Barbara Potthast has observed, by recruiting historically less-known characters as heroes who nurture readers' empathy.⁵

A critical reading of Keller's and Zimmermann's Anabaptist-themed narratives reveals how social and religious aspects of early Anabaptism, in addition to the group's conflict with the outside world, have shaped the image of the radical reform movement in nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical fiction. This effort to reconceptualize research on Anabaptist-themed fiction moves beyond the notion of "authenticity" as proposed by previous scholars toward an analysis of the images and representations of the religious minority and its conflicts with society.⁶

4. Lukács's examination of the historical novel is part of a wider contribution to literary analysis in which he sees fiction as a product of social forces. In his theoretical work on historical fiction, he seeks to understand the "social and ideological basis from which the historical novel was able to emerge."—*The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1962), 20.

5. Barbara Potthast, *Die Ganzheit der Geschichte: Historische Romane im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 37.

6. The critical discussion of fiction treating historical Anabaptism began in the first half of the twentieth century when leaders of German Mennonite communities became concerned with the authenticity of Anabaptist representations in narratives; see Christian Neff's contributions to the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, *Christlicher Gemeindekalender*, and

The close readings of these texts reveal how the writers' personal beliefs and their ideas of national unity and identity influence their attitudes toward the faith group.

KELLER: *URSULA* – A BAND OF ZEALOTS

Gottfried Keller's historical novella *Ursula* first appeared in the *Züricher Novellen* (1877) at a time when the author had retired from his position as the cantonal secretary of Zurich.⁷ The story is set in early sixteenth-century Zurich, where Hansli Gyr, newly returned from the Italian Wars in 1523, discovers that his home community in the township of Grüningen has been infiltrated by the strange convictions of the Anabaptists. Even Ursula, his childhood love, and her family have converted to the group and are now acting strangely. After an exchange with Zwingli at a Zurich tavern, Hansli becomes an enthusiastic supporter of the reformer. The City Council makes strenuous efforts to bring the Anabaptist movement under control and eventually arrests members of the group, including Ursula and her parents. Hoping to win her back from her family's religious fanaticism, Hansli liberates her from the prison tower, only to find her in a deranged state. While Hansli joins the Reformed troops in the Second Kappel War, Ursula regains her senses and eventually reunites with him after she saves his life on the battlefield.

Keller's romance is set in a rich historical context. *Ursula* gives readers a vivid picture of Zwingli's reformation efforts and the armed conflict between Protestant and Catholic parties in early sixteenth-century Switzerland. But the novel depicts the rise of Anabaptism, embedded within the religious conflicts of that time, in an exceedingly one-sided way. Keller clearly sides with Zwingli as Switzerland's national hero, and the Anabaptist community assumes the role of the radical opposition that, with its fanatical teachings, threatens the implementation of Zwingli's reforms and the establishment of a new state church. Anabaptism is an unsound element in the development of a national spirit and culture.

Keller's interest in the history of early modern Switzerland was twofold. In his larger collection of Zurich novellas, he traced several distinct historical characters in the town's history. With *Ursula*, he sought

Mennonitische Blätter; and Otto Schowalter's short survey on German Anabaptist-themed fiction in Neff/Hege's *Mennonitisches Lexikon*.

7. According to James M. Lindsay, this office rewarded the heavy demands on the *Staatsschreiber* with a very good income and provided financial security for Keller, which may have encouraged him to write a collection of novellas addressing the historical heroes and events of his hometown as an acknowledgment of his gratitude.—*Gottfried Keller. Life and Works* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1968), 67.

to establish a literary monument to Zwingli's outstanding statesmanship during the Reformation. At the same time, Keller also used the historical events of the sixteenth century to mask social and religious issues of the contemporary *Kulturkampf* in Switzerland. During the 1840s, Keller participated in a liberal movement in Zurich that supported the modern idea of a constitutional state. Inspired by the "idea of the Swiss nation,"⁸ the movement promoted liberal principles such as the freedom of worship, freedom of the press, and freedom of association that they hoped would be adopted by all cantons. They also advocated for the supremacy of the state's authority over that of the church.⁹

To be sure, some of these same principles were reminiscent of central tenets of Anabaptism. Yet despite the fact that the group was historically a liberal element in the religious landscape of early modern Switzerland, Keller, who was primarily interested in nation-building, identified the Anabaptists with narrow-mined religiosity—characteristics that he associated with the Catholic Church of his time.

The novella's description of the rise of a national consciousness in the early sixteenth century parallels the rise of an official national identity in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, Switzerland was in the process of consolidating its cantons into an actual Swiss nation united by a federal constitution. Keller transplanted these national aspirations—disrupted and threatened by Catholic resistance—to the sixteenth century where he identified a similar interference with the national idea by radical religious groups like the Anabaptists. In that regard, his novella linked the present with the past by a subjective selection of historical material. Lukács has described this method of selecting and interpreting historical facts by referring to the philosophy of "historical solipsism" in which history is perceived only through the lens of the present subject—that is,

8. Edgar Bonjour, Hilary S. Offler, and George R. Potter, *A Short History of Switzerland* (Westport, Conn. Greenwood Press, 1985), 257.

9. An example of the dispute between state and church over the issue of dogma versus science was given by the Strauß affair, which took place in Zurich in the third decade of the nineteenth century. The German liberal theologian David Friedrich Strauß, a pioneer in the historical investigation of Jesus, was forced out of his position as chair of theology at the University of Zurich because his appointment caused a storm of controversy. According to Emil Ermatinger, Keller, a radically liberal thinker in terms of religion, wrote the novella *Ursula* in reaction to Strauß's dismissal from office.—*Gottfried Kellers Leben, Briefe und Tagebücher* (Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1920), 136.

10. According to Benedict Anderson, profound changes in the early sixteenth century, most notably the invention of the printing press and the distribution of publications in the vernacular, initiated a process by which Europe replaced the imagined sacred community with a national one.—*Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 12-41.

"history is a chaos, in itself is of no concern . . . but to which everyone may attribute a 'meaning' which suits him, according to his needs."¹¹ Lukács defined the approach to historical narratives in bourgeois realism as a subjective management of "dead facts" that provide a disguise for the treatment of contemporary issues.¹²

Gottfried Keller drew most of his information about early Swiss Anabaptism from Melchior Schuler's historical account *Thaten und Sitten der Eidgenossen*, a tendentious account of the Anabaptists, which, in turn, was based on Johannes Kessler's polemical *Sabbata*.¹³ Schuler's judgmental attitude is evident already on the first page of his account where he confuses the Swiss Anabaptist movement with Müntzerism and describes the Anabaptist leaders Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz as "avaricious and desperate for fame" (*ruhm- und habsüchtig*).¹⁴ When reading Schuler's descriptions of the Anabaptist movement, it comes as no surprise that Keller chose the rise of Anabaptism as the historical setting within which to project the religious discourse that concerned him at that time. According to Keller's biographer, Emil Ermatinger, the Swiss writer had already tinkered with the idea of employing the Anabaptist theme during his time in Germany in the 1850s.¹⁵ There he had come in contact with Feuerbach's philosophy of religion, which had completely reshaped his religious thinking.¹⁶ In light of his adaptation of Feuerbach's interpretation

11. Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 180.

12. *Ibid.*, 236.

13. In his sixteenth-century Reformation diary, *Sabbata*, the theologian Johannes Kessler gives a one-sided survey of the Anabaptist events in Zurich. Anabaptists had formerly attended Kessler's Bible study classes until division occurred over the question of pedobaptism.

14. Melchior Schuler further depicts the Anabaptists as seducers who aspire to a "reversal of all clerical and civic order" (*völlige Umkehr aller kirchlichen und bürgerlichen Ordnung*).—*Die Thaten und Sitten der Eidgenossen* (Zürich: Friedrich Schulthess, 1838), 66-64. Furthermore, Hedwig Meumann has pointed out parallels between Johann Hottinger's accounts of Swiss Anabaptism and Keller's description of the faith group in the novella.—"Entstehung und Aufbau von Gottfried Kellers Ursula" (Ph.D. diss., Bonn, 1916), 14. In Hottinger's historical biography of Zwingli, he draws information about Anabaptists mostly from Schuler's account and thus imitates the disdainful attitude toward the movement. Much like Schuler, Hottinger traces the origins of the Anabaptists to Müntzer and suggests a certain danger for the secular and ecclesiastical order posed by the "delusions of the radical reformers" (*Schwärmers Wahn*).—*Huldreich Zwingli und seine Zeit dargestellt für das Volk* (Zürich: Drell, Füßli und Comp., 1842), 285.

15. Keller had written "Wiedertäufer" (Anabaptists) and "Kindernarren" (child-like fools) in his personal notes.—Ermatinger, *Kellers Leben*, 559.

16. Ludwig Feuerbach's essential ideas of Christianity uncover God as a manifestation of man's inner self, meaning that humans project the ideal state of being with high moral insights and correct judgment onto a concept outside of themselves and then strive to reconnect to this conceptual creation. The philosopher claims that "God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man . . . religion is designated as the self-consciousness

of religious phenomena, the portrayal of the Anabaptists in the novella as fanatic, irrational, and immoral beings can be understood as an expression of a more general concern with religious narrowness and extremism.¹⁷

In his novella, Keller denigrated the Swiss Anabaptists as strange and uncouth, creating a caricature of the movement to illustrate the danger of zealotry. Anabaptism is a disease, an epidemic that slowly infiltrates not only Zurich, the native territory of the protagonist, but the entire Swiss Confederation as well. The opening sentences metaphorically articulate the religious situation in Switzerland during the Reformation and anticipate the conflict that will unfold in the narrative.

When religions change, it is as if the mountains opened, and forth into the light of day issue not merely the great magic serpents, the gold-hoarding dragons, the spirits of clear crystals, but with them also base, many-taloned monsters, and a whole army of rats and mice.¹⁸

The antithetical elements of the “upper- and underworld” present the foundation for the collision that will occur between the differing theological concepts emerging during the sixteenth century. Keller categorized two religious directions using mythological and natural metaphors that depicted Zwingli and his colleagues as shiny, legendary creatures while the radical believers were pictured as odious and undesirable vermin inhabiting the dark corners of society. Throughout the narrative Keller frequently employed a light-dark contrast to further underscore the division between the two groups.

of man.” — *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 32.

17. The novella has not received much attention outside the religious discourse. Hartmut Lauffhütte argues that the narrative’s fragmentary character and its unsuccessful integration of history and poetics have evoked a negative response and even a lack of interest from readers. — *Geschichte und Poetische Erfindung. Das Strukturprinzip der Analogie in Gottfried Kellers Novelle ‘Ursula’* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1973), 11-13. Despite being less well-known than other Keller narratives, *Ursula* was made into a TV drama by the East German DEFA in cooperation with the Swiss television broadcasting in 1978. According to Thomas Beutelschmidt and Franziska Widmer, the director Egon Günther created a film that presents a critical view on contemporary issues disguised by the sixteenth-century setting. The representation of the Anabaptists in the film differs from the novella in regard to the group’s attempt to withdraw from the societal power and the effort to establish their own set of rules. — *Zwischen den Stühlen. Die Geschichte der Literaturverfilmung URSULA von Egon Günther – eine Koproduktion des Fernsehens der DDR und der Schweiz* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2005), 28.

18. Gottfried Keller, *The Banner of the Upright Seven and Ursula*, trans. Bayard Quincy Morgan (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1974), 69.

On a macroscopic level, Keller introduced Hansli, the protagonist of the story, within a broad geographic and historical framework:

So it was at the time of the first Reformation in the north-east parts of Switzerland, and especially in the neighborhood of the Zurich highlands, when a dweller in those parts, [Hansli Gyr] by name, came back from the war.¹⁹

Then the author transitions to a microscopic level to tell the love story of Hansli and Ursula, interweaving that narrative within the larger social conditions and events of the Swiss Reformation.

Keller characterizes Hansli as a typical Swiss figure. His name—the diminutive of the common name “Hans”—conveys “a certain affectionate familiarity and the reputation for trustworthiness.”²⁰ His physical appearance—a tall, strong, and athletic soldier—reflects strength, power, and rationality. Hansli’s last name, Gyr, is Middle-High/Swiss German for *Geier*, a bird of prey, which further contributes to the image of a strong and determined young man.²¹ In addition to the bird of prey reference, Gyr also evokes a comparison with another winged figure, that of the archangel Gabriel, with whom Ursula confuses Hansli during her state of delusion. Michael Andermatt detects in the name and character of Hansli Gyr an “evil-divine” (*schlimm-heilig*) ambivalence, which, however, also implies a sense of ordinariness and balance.²² Hansli exemplifies the common Swiss person; he is a “good illustration of the spirit of the people” who, with his alliance to Zwingli, also personifies the Reformation and the Swiss national spirit.²³

In contrast to Hansli’s strong character and firm belief in the established church, the Anabaptists are first introduced to the story through the rather biased account of a fellow countryman, who warns the returning soldier of the “practices of the Anabaptists.” “Go on home to your mountains, and you will find it swarming with as many fanatics and prophets as the fleas on a dog.”²⁴ The metaphor of the flea-infested hound reiterates the picture drawn in the introduction of the novella of Anabaptists as society’s

19. *Ibid.*, 69. Quincy Morgan’s choice of Jackie Geer (as the translation of the protagonist’s name Hansli Gyr) has been replaced with the name in the German original text.

20. *Ibid.*, 70.

21. Michael Andermatt, “Historisches Erzählen und der Kulturkampf im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Konstruktion von konfessioneller Differenz bei Conrad Ferdinand Meyer und Gottfried Keller,” in *Akten des X. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Wien 2000*, ed. Peter Wiesinger and Hans Derkits (Bern: Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik, 2003), 377.

22. *Ibid.*, 377.

23. Keller, *Ursula*, 114.

24. *Ibid.*, 73.

vermin. In binary opposition to Hansli's qualities as an honest, strong, and faithful citizen, the old man describes the Anabaptists as prophets "preaching in the woods and dancing and practicing lechery; and the women are madder than the men."²⁵ Keller borrowed the image of the *Schwärmer* (wild-eyed fanatics) from the anti-Anabaptist writings of Luther and the Reformed Church historians. He employed the term to insinuate a certain degree of fanaticism associated with the Anabaptist movement. The account of the Zurich Anabaptists is restricted to a few stereotypical features reminiscent of early modern descriptions of a witches' sabbath. By drawing on rumors about the movement's sexual transgressions in their nocturnal gatherings in secluded places, Keller created an image of the Anabaptists associated with irrationality and moral decline.²⁶ The old man's remark about sexual indecency, particularly among women, alarms Hansli and makes him concerned about the intrusion of these heretic beliefs into his home community.

Much to his consternation, upon arriving in Grüningen Hansli finds evidence that Anabaptist doctrines are indeed spreading into his community. In the house of Ursula's father, Hansli encounters the strange figures of the local Anabaptist congregation, marking a confrontation between the dominant Swiss identity and that of the other, marginalized group. His strength and sanity contrast sharply with the weakness and irrational conduct of the self-proclaimed prophets depicted in the story.

Their odd physiognomic attributes and ludicrous mannerisms accentuate the opposition to the hero. Ursula's father, Enoch,²⁷ for example, attempts to impress and intimidate Hansli with a piercing stare. He and his fellows "indulged in this bad habit of blinking at people." Eyes and gaze serve as one set of leitmotifs in the story, contrasting the sane and stable condition of Hansli—who looks at the group with "guileless calm eyes"—with the maniacal state of the band of zealots.²⁸

The strange and irrational nature of the self-proclaimed prophets is further reflected in their outward appearance. One Anabaptist in Keller's

25. *Ibid.*, 73.

26. According to John S. Oyer, the Anabaptist practice of meeting secretly, sometimes at night, was viewed with much criticism by the dominant society and generated the anti-Anabaptist canard about secrecy being primarily for the purpose of sexual license.—*"They Harry the Good People Out of the Land" Essays on the Persecution, Survival and Flourishing of Anabaptists and Mennonites*, ed. John D. Roth (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 2000), 98.

27. Laufhütte has pointed out that the forefather Henoch (1 Mos. 5:18) has often been associated with the apocalypse, which makes the name particularly suitable for the leader of the Anabaptist group portrayed in the novella.—*Geschichte und Poetische Erfindung*, 41.

28. Keller, *Ursula*, 79.

story has a shrill voice, clammy hands, a sack-like garment, and a lower lip that is "reminiscent of the devil dangling his feet while sitting on a bench." Their grotesque facial features, contrasting starkly with the healthy appearance of Hansli, marks them as disreputable people and figures from the "underworld."²⁹

In order to establish a semantic connection between the fanatic believers and the respectable character of Hansli, the author caricatures the Anabaptists. Their discussion of the Bible, for example, reflects the group's ridiculous manners and illogical views on religion. As soon as Hansli enters the conversation, they criticize his military uniform. Enoch humiliates the soldier and then proclaims the imminent millennium. In addition to irrational beliefs and moral laxity, Keller depicts the Anabaptists as cowards who frantically scatter into the forest when the town authority walks through their neighborhood.

This exaggerated emphasis on chiliastic theology further mocks the true convictions of early Swiss Anabaptists. Wirtz, one of Enoch's Anabaptist companions, explains his understanding of the Bible by applying vivid metaphors such as: "What is the Book? . . . An empty skin, a bag, until I blow the holy spirit into it."³⁰ This exchange, along with the pantheistic and animistic discourse expounded by another Anabaptist participant, who recognizes God in the form of all natural substances, are an inversion of the Christian doctrines of the historical Swiss Anabaptists.³¹ The absurd and sacrilegious comments voiced by Ursula's father and his followers create a distorted picture of the movement's piety that provokes the readers' aversion.

Karl Reichert has grouped the Anabaptist character traits into three main categories—self-interest, moral transgression, and hubris—all of which contrast sharply with the inner qualities of courage, moral integrity, and modesty associated with the protagonist of the story.³² Throughout the novella, the weakness, cowardice, excess, and fanatical behavior of the Anabaptists serves to accentuate the sanity and strength of Hansli and Zwingli, the heroes of the story.

In contrast to the abnormalities of the Anabaptists, Keller articulates an idealized national Swiss identity. At every turn, the Anabaptists are the

29. Lee B. Jennings, "Gottfried Keller and the Grotesque," *Monatshefte* 50 (1958), 14.

30. Keller, *Ursula*, 81.

31. Elizabeth Horsch-Bender, "The Mennonites in German Literature" (M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1944), 91.

32. Karl Reichert, "Das Problem des Originals im Zyklus 'Zürcher Novellen' von Gottfried Keller" (Ph.D. diss., University of Jena, 1959), 176.

opposite of what is familiar and genuinely Swiss. In a scene at the *Ketzerturm*,³³ where they are imprisoned and starved into submission, the Anabaptist prisoners unleash “an uncanny clamor with their singing and shouting . . . which at times degenerated into a widely audible howl of curses and cries.”³⁴ This reprehensible conduct, filled with hideous noises, suggests a deranged state of mind. The narrator focuses on members of the group whom he labels as “condemned criminals,” and justifies their imprisonment with the remark that “a good part of them were indeed probably without honor.”³⁵ The scene reinforces the demonization of the movement and further supports the narrator’s justification of the captivity of its members.

The epitome of religious fanaticism finds expression in the episode where Enoch and his co-religionists strive to “be like children,” in accordance with a literal interpretation of Matthew 18:4 (“Whoever humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”). In this bizarre scene of degradation, the aged members of the Anabaptist group dress up as toddlers, babble like babies, and play with toys:

Squatting barelegged, on the floor of the living-room, in an old red petticoat, which was to represent a child’s dress, [Enoch] was building a little wagon out of boards which he loaded with chaff, groaning with childish sounds: Lo lo lo, da da da!³⁶

This idiotic childishness suggests that the group has lost some of its seditious quality but remains ludicrous nonetheless.

Ursula’s emotional and mental development further underscores this depiction of the Anabaptists as psychologically damaged. Keller portrays the eponymous heroine as a victim of her father’s ridiculous delusions.

33. The imprisonment of the Grüningen Anabaptists is also documented in Schuler’s historiography. Keller’s description of the prisoners’ condition in the tower (*Turm*) has a striking resemblance to Hottinger’s quotation of the Anabaptists’ sentence.—Keller, *Ursula*, 110; and Schuler, *Thaten und Sitten*, 305.

34. Keller, *Ursula*, 111.

35. *Ibid.*, 110.

36. *Ibid.*, 125. Here Keller is exaggerating material he found in Schuler’s account of Anabaptists in the area of St. Gall and Appenzell. The “Kindernarren” scene, linked to Keller’s initial idea of the novella, is illustrated by the artist, René Beeh, in plate four of his collection of lithographs dedicated to the author’s 100th birthday (1914). The picture, entitled “Ursula,” captures a moment of grotesque worship. Four adults raise their hands in prayer. They perform ecstatic movements while their facial expressions and gazes remain indifferent. An old woman, dressed in simple clothes and no shoes, is holding a doll behind her back, visible to the observer.—*Gottfried Keller Bilderbuch. Zum Hundersten Geburtstag Gottfried Kellers* (Zürich: Eugen Rentsch Verlag, 1914).

Both she and her mother are obligated to give absolute loyalty to Enoch and his millennialist worldviews. Indeed, Enoch's control over his wife and daughter poses a threat to their physical and mental well-being. Fearing her father's dominance while also being captivated by his religious illusions, Ursula appears to be a victim of an inherently psychological bond; the only way for her to withdraw from her father's illogical faith is to fall into mental sickness. Hansli ascribes her schizophrenic-like state to the religiously extremist beliefs and practices of her parents when he asks them "what have you done to your daughter Ursula?"³⁷ Only by his intervention is she able to be saved. When she flees the grotesque scene at her parents' house, she finds herself in "pure air" and "illuminated" territory.³⁸ Her mood and state correspond, almost point by point, with the brightness of the environment in which she evolves.

The sensory perceptions also enhance the novella's contrast between the ideal Swiss state—that is, a free and Reformed community under Zwingli's leadership—and the state of religious delusion led by unscrupulous men of the Anabaptist group. The light/dark antithesis reaches its climax when Ursula first sees the Swiss Reformer whose "attractive look brightened ... the spirit of the intent girlish spectator."³⁹ Zwingli, equipped with both a sword and fervent prayer, moves to the battlefield, the embodiment in the novella of the ideal unity of state and church. He moves alongside Hansli, epitomizing the sane, wise, and courageous national character of Switzerland that stands in contrast to the "underworld" creatures of Anabaptism.

Zwingli, as a world-historical individual, only appears as a secondary character in the novella. Ursula and Hansli, the leading figures of the narrative, embody the historical movement as representatives of the Swiss people. The struggle of the dominant faith and national solidarity over the perceived aberrant culture of Anabaptism is best observed within the community of average fellow countrymen. At the same time, the characters of Enoch and Hansli exemplify distinct archetypes, enabling Keller to sketch precisely the confrontation of two religiously and ethically differing ideas.

37. Keller, *Ursula*, 107.

38. *Ibid.*, 128-129.

39. *Ibid.*, 129.

ZIMMERMANN: *DIE FURGGE* – A COMMUNITY
OF IDEAL CHRISTIANS

Roughly one century after Keller penned *Ursula*, and with only a handful of authors addressing Swiss Anabaptism in their historical fiction since the publication of his novella, the Bernese author Katharina Zimmermann took up the topic of the religious minority once again. In her regionalist novel *Die Furgge*, Zimmermann attempted to capture the particularities of the Emmental landscape and its people during the “second flourishing” (*zweite Blütezeit*)⁴⁰ of the Anabaptist movement. She began to investigate the persecution of the group after coming across the name of an Anabaptist woman in the Schangnau baptismal records (*Taufrodel*). In a personal interview, Zimmermann recounted the events that inspired her to investigate the Bernese Anabaptists more deeply. While her husband served as pastor at the Reformed church in Schangnau, she decided to write a novel about this area “in which farms bear the same name they had over three hundred years ago.”⁴¹ The novelist embarked on extensive research, slowly assembling the picture of the historical Bernese Anabaptist group like a mosaic. Along the way, she sought contact with the Mennonite community in Amsterdam, consulted with scholars in the field of theology and folklore at the University of Berne, and studied Ernst Müller’s classic work on the history of Bernese Anabaptism.⁴² As a result of her commitment to thorough research, the

40. During the second half of the seventeenth century, the group’s significant growth, which is referred to as the “second period of flourishing” (*zweite Blütezeit*) by Hanspeter Jecker, was viewed both with admiration and animosity (208)—“Das Schweizerische Täuferium – Forschungsstand und Forschungsaufgaben,” *Schweizer Kirchengeschichte – neu reflektiert. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Prof. Dr. Rudolf Dellsperger*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, Martin Scallmann, and Hans Schneider (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 193-210.

41. Translated by author. Katharina Zimmermann further explained that when she discovered the name Madleni Schilt in a list of people who had been expelled from Berne during the time of the great Anabaptist deportation at the end of the seventeenth century, she contacted the municipal administration for more information. As she randomly opened one of the old baptismal rolls, she recognized Madleni’s name, a coincidence that fully convinced her to write about this former Bernese resident and her affiliation with the Anabaptist movement.—personal interview with author, March 26, 2012.

42. In the acknowledgement on the last page of the German edition of the novel, Zimmermann expresses her gratitude to Ernst Müller, who, as she asserts, started the process of rehabilitation of Anabaptism with his historical research.—*Die Furgge* (Oberhofen am Thunersee: Zytglogge Verlag, 2005), 256. Müller was committed to treating the Anabaptist movement with justice in his historical research accounts. In his scholarly investigation of the group’s history, he was concerned with the writings of early Anabaptist leaders and testimonies of persecuted believers. He stressed that he was concerned about an impartial historiography that took Anabaptist sources into account.—*Geschichte der Bernischen Täufer. Nach den Urkunden dargestellt* (Frauenfeld: J. Hubers Verlag, 1895), 4. Yet, the study of Anabaptist sources was not always possible since the Swiss congregations lost many of their leaders and literate members in the sixteenth-century persecutions. Delbert L. Gratz has

novel offers a historically sound portrayal of Anabaptist persecution in seventeenth-century Berne, while also addressing general aspects of peasant life in the Bernese *Oberland* such as birth and death, love of home and kin, and opposition to state authorities.

Die Furgge is divided into two narrative levels. The frame story is set in contemporary Emmental. Anna, a cellist from Zurich, visits the Bernese countryside as a relaxing retreat from the stress of her career and family life. While talking to a hotel guest in the small town of Schangnau, at the foot of Hohgant mountain (formerly known as "Furgge"), she discovers the region's Anabaptist history. The guest gives her some old records documenting the lives of local Anabaptists in the seventeenth century. Although Anna had not previously heard of the Anabaptists, she soon develops a great interest in their history, fascinated by the religious mountain folk and their simple life in harmony with nature. As she becomes more deeply invested, studying the old records more carefully, she starts reconstructing the life of Madleni Schilt, a member of the local Anabaptist group.

The embedded story centers on this young Anabaptist woman, who lives with her husband, Christen, in the area of the Emmental. Madleni suffers a serious depression after her first two children were stillborn. Only the presence of an old Anabaptist woman helps soothe the pain of her loss. Through her newfound religious views, Madleni slowly regains her strength and a sense of purpose. Although the young woman converts to the Anabaptist faith and participates in the fellowship's clandestine gatherings at night, her husband remains with the Reformed Church and allows his four children to be baptized by the local pastor. Yet even though he is an elected member of the morals court (*Chorgericht*), he helps to divert the attention of the authorities from his wife and her fellow adherents. When he is dismissed from his duties at the tribunal after the pastor finds out about his secret support of the local Anabaptist congregation, Madleni's husband takes off his sidearm, joins his wife at a secret meeting, and soon becomes a committed member of the underground church.

Living in the remote hamlet of the Bernese *Oberland*, Madleni and her family are able to avoid persecution by the state and institutional church until authorities dictate a stricter enforcement of mandates against those who refuse to bear arms or swear the oath of allegiance. When state officials employ Anabaptist hunters to ferret out believers in the rural

noted that Müller dealt with the lack of literature by bringing into his research sociological and psychological understanding for the development of the religious group that only a person closely acquainted with the "Bernese mind" could have.—*Bernese Anabaptists* (Goshen, Ind.: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1953), 5.

parts of the state, Christen is forced to flee the country, leaving behind his wife and children, who work hard to maintain the family farm. A year after his departure, the government orders the deportation of all resident Anabaptists to colonies in North America. Madleni is brought to the city of Berne and then shipped out of the country. Expecting to be gone for only a short time to look for her husband in the Dutch Mennonite community, Madleni leaves the care of the family farm to her children. But once she arrives in Holland after a long and grueling passage, she is not able to find Christen. Disappointed, she returns to Berne to reunite with her family. During her absence, however, the Bernese government has confiscated her property and hired out her daughters to families in the area. One of the spies in the neighborhood reports her to the state officials, whereupon she is captured and sent to the dungeons to face imprisonment and starvation until the end of her days.

The novel combines factual and fictional elements on the two narrative levels. While the embedded story fictionalizes historical figures⁴³ and incorporates songs and details characteristic of the seventeenth-century movement, the frame narrative presents information about the Anabaptist movement in a predominantly descriptive style through reports, citations, and historical discussions. This presentation of historical facts allows Anna to reflect on the Anabaptist theme, relating it to contemporary debates concerning, for example, Switzerland's compulsory military and alternative service, and the shortcomings of Switzerland's refugee politics during World War II.

Drawing a comparison between the exile of Jews in World War II and the banishment of Bernese Anabaptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Zimmermann perceives the discussion of the Anabaptist issue as a matter of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (consciously engaging the past). In her novel, she describes and analyzes the conflict between the nonconformist group and the state, openly addressing Berne's authoritarian history.⁴⁴ She explores reasons for the state's rejection of its Anabaptist past, explaining in the framing narrative that "people like to suppress bad things. And besides, there was fear, a lot of fear and it

43. The narrative fictionalizes well-known characters of the seventeenth-century Anabaptist movement, for instance Hans Bürki, the preacher in the Emmental, and Johann Ludwig Runckel, the Dutch ambassador to Switzerland.

44. In the personal interview, Zimmermann noted that she stirred to anger when she discovered that the state's persecution of Anabaptists has been largely ignored by Swiss historiography.

snuffed out all memory.”⁴⁵ Consequently, her engagement with Berne’s Anabaptist history initiates the process of resurrecting memories that had been suppressed and forgotten throughout the course of the past three centuries.

The great success of Zimmermann’s regional novel has been its contribution to the reconciliation efforts between the Swiss state and contemporary descendants of the Bernese Anabaptists. As the novel was reviewed by various Christian reading groups in the canton of Berne, it sparked discussions about nonconformity and religious toleration.⁴⁶ During the *Täuferjahr* in 2007—a year the authorities in the Canton of Bern devoted to commemorating the Anabaptists—public readings of the novel fostered a deeper understanding of the state’s Anabaptist history and called on Swiss citizens to treat this cultural heritage with care and respect.

Depicted as an undermined part of Switzerland’s cultural and religious heritage, the Anabaptists practiced an ethical faith rooted in a spiritual reform movement predating the Reformation. The term “Altevangelsingische,” frequently used in Zimmermann’s novel, alludes to the concept of a direct lineage between Anabaptism and the early church.⁴⁷ The novel links distinctive features of the Anabaptist separatist theology—particularly their isolation from the fallen world and their rejection of infant baptism—to the geographical specificities of the Bernese Oberland. The rural population of the Emmental has always lived at the edge of Swiss society, both spatially and in terms of social interaction. In lonely valleys and isolated hamlets, it was seemingly difficult to follow church practices such as baptism of newborn children and attendance of weekly church services. Zimmermann illustrates the challenge of abiding

45. Katharina Zimmermann, *Furgge*, trans. Ruth Schwertfeger (Morgantown, Pa.: Masthof Press, 2017), 6.

46. Walter Wieland, pastor of a Reformed church in the Emmental, for instance, has reported that Zimmermann’s novel raised the question of how this could have happened. Members of his parish discussed the Anabaptist theology and condemned the active role of the established church in the persecution of these fellow Christians. —“Täufer. Fröhliche und kompromisslose Nachfolger” *Jesus.ch* (Aug. 2007), www.jesus.ch/magazin/spiritualitaet/136228-froehliche_und_kompromisslose_nachfolger.html.

47. The term “old evangelicals” (*Altevangelsingische*) was introduced in the late nineteenth century by Ludwig Keller, who has identified Anabaptists as descendants of the primitive church. He stated that there was a succession of true evangelical groups in the history of Christianity. In this sequence of apostolic orders, Anabaptism marks the early modern continuation of the early church tradition. —*Zur Geschichte der Altevangelsingischen Gemeinden. Vortrag, gehalten zu Berlin am 20. April 1887* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1887), 41. The name *Altevangelsingische* was later employed by several historians, including Ernst Müller, who used the term to emphasize the group’s apostolic character as well as its split from the *Neutäufer*, members of the Evangelical Baptist Church, a Christian fellowship founded by Samuel Fröhlich in 1832.

by the rules of the state church with Madleni's struggle to take her newborn godchild through a ghastly winter storm to the preacher's (*Prädikant*) house for the infant's baptism. Raised in the belief that human beings are trapped in bondage to sin from the moment of their births, the young woman risked her own life for the sake of the child's baptism. After the preacher administers the ritual, Madleni expresses relief. She has fulfilled her duties as a godmother and can rest assured that the child's soul is saved.

But this view that baptism confers salvation, saving the infant from the stain of original sin, sparks an existential crisis in Madleni when her first two children die before the ritual is performed. The preacher's assertion that children who have not received the benefit of baptism are "not cleaned from original sin" torments the young mother.⁴⁸ In addition to the church's belief that non-baptized children are destined to hell, local myths about the supernatural powers of non-baptized infants— these "children's finger bones are supposed to be a good—yes, even the best charm"—cause Madleni to worry about her children's souls and the desecration of their corpses.⁴⁹

In this moment of deep despair, Madleni meets Ida, an old Anabaptist woman, who comes to her rescue. In the narrative, Ida is highly respected among the rural population. Despite—or perhaps because of—her affiliation with the Anabaptist movement, other women perceive her to be a spiritual healer whose presence and prayer have worked miracles upon other sick people. Ida's act of laying her hands on the forehead, which cures Madleni's feverish state, is reminiscent of shamanistic customs practiced in the medieval age. This healing ritual, however, does not suggest an intersection between witchcraft and Anabaptism. Rather, the narrator's presumption that "Madleni becomes calm, whether of the coolness of the hands upon her or because of [Ida's] prayer," alludes to the Anabaptist simple, practical conduct and firm faith.⁵⁰

Indeed, the novel portrays Ida's Anabaptist beliefs as a remedy for Madleni's troubled state of mind. Responding to the young woman's question of why God damns innocent infants, Ida explains the Anabaptist understanding of love, one that flows from the nature and example of Christ. The lesson of God's love and the Anabaptist conviction regarding the sinlessness of children soothe Madleni's worried soul and ease her

48. Zimmermann, *Furgge*, 57.

49. *Ibid.*, 55.

50. *Ibid.*, 61.

emotional pain: “the words of the aging woman fall like dewdrops upon her burning, wounded heart.”⁵¹

The discussion of pedobaptism arises once more when Madleni delivers her first son after having given birth to three daughters. Although her husband is depicted as a “true-hearted person” (*Treuerziger*), sympathizing with his wife’s Anabaptist congregation, he also complies with the baptismal practice of the Reformed Church. Yet when he takes his newborn son and three daughters to the local church for baptism, he intentionally dresses the girls in shabby clothes of poor quality, thereby expressing his disregard of the baptismal ceremony. By quoting villagers who suspect that he will fail to honor the occasion with a decent celebration, “to show the preacher that they [the baptisms] are not important,” the text illustrates the influence of his wife’s Anabaptist convictions regarding his attitude toward this state-sanctioned religious sacrament.⁵²

The church’s alliance with the state in matters of religious practices is reflected in the novel’s description of the children’s baptism. While the preacher ignores the late baptism of Madleni’s daughters, he is determined to enter the son’s name on the baptismal roll:

according to a mandate issued by the mayor and the council of the city of Berne, the transcription, the carefully entered names and dates of the male candidates of baptism were more important. . . . Because of their [the preachers’] careless handling of the baptismal registry they would hinder the military record of fourteen-year-old boys.⁵³

In the narrative, baptism marks the infant’s status not only as a member of the church, but also as a member of the civic community. More important, by entering the boys’ names on the baptismal roll, the church automatically registered them for military service.⁵⁴

Zimmermann also associates Madleni’s separation from the established church and her refusal to partake in sacramental rituals, such as baptism or the Lord’s Supper, with the unethical character of the Reformed Church. After learning that her neighbor, who is pregnant with the village

51. *Ibid.*, 61.

52. *Ibid.*, 67.

53. *Ibid.*, 68.

54. In the personal interview, Zimmermann described how she uncovered the connection between infant baptism and the state’s conscription system. Studying Bernese church history, she learned that the father and Godfather (*Götti*) were required to bear arms during the ceremony. She then realized that the church that obeyed the will of the state persecuted the Anabaptists because they insisted on the Christian principle of nonresistance.

smith's illegitimate child, will continue to attend the Reformed Church, Madleni proclaims that she will stop attending the Lord's Supper.⁵⁵ Her conviction that the true church ought to be separated from the world and that those who live in sin ought to be excluded from the sacrament reflects the Anabaptist longing to achieve a life of moral purity and integrity by following Christ faithfully and separating from the sinful world.

The narrative also offers a sympathetic portrayal of the Anabaptist peace witness, despite the fact that this conviction created social and political problems in seventeenth-century Berne. The consistorial councillor regarded their commitment to Christian nonviolence—expressed by their refusal to participate in military service—as a threat to the well-being of the state. Whereas the Anabaptists refer to themselves as “defenseless,” the state officials regard them as a “bunch of defiant farmers” with a “combative attitude,” refusing to defend their fatherland with a weapon, and, therefore, not worthy of Bernese citizenship.⁵⁶

The historical character of Willading embodies the government's fear of subversion among the rural population when he argues, for example, that “he who refuses to bear arms does not love the Fatherland, and was unworthy to dwell in it.”⁵⁷ Using Willading as a lens, Zimmermann shows how the faith group's commitment to nonviolence undermines the very foundations of the political order. This ambivalent conception of the Anabaptists as heroic pacifists and subversive traitors provokes Anna to further reflect on the issue of defenselessness. Through the profound experience of giving birth to her son, she comes to the realization that any killing of a human being, even as an expression love for one's country, is dispicable. Yet, she also realizes that she does not have a clear stance on the matter of nonviolence. When she hears that her son plans to become a military pilot, she is relieved that she does not have to worry about having a future conscientious objector in the family.⁵⁸ Thus, the historical conflict between the Anabaptist mission of peaceful discipleship and pressures

55. Anabaptist opposition to participating in the Lord's Supper due to the adulterous (and, more broadly, sinful) conduct of Reformed Church members is also mentioned in Müller's historical work. A 1690 consistorial report stated that the Bernese Anabaptists complained that no difference was made between the saints and sinners, but rather fornicators, adulterers, and those who swear and overindulge were admitted to the Lord's Supper.—*Bernischen Täufer*, 139.

56. Zimmermann, *Furgge*, 70, 68

57. *Ibid.*, 140.

58. In 1989, at the time when *Furgge* was first published, Switzerland did not yet have an alternative service (*Zivildienst*) for male citizens. Prior to 1991, when Switzerland introduced alternative service, several hundred conscientious objectors were jailed for several months each year for refusing to serve in the military.

from authorities to uphold the civil order initiates a contemporary discussion in the novel regarding the discrepancy between a citizen's obligation to serve the nation and the commitment to ethical and Christian values.

Furthermore, the novel points out the regional particularities of Bernese Anabaptism in terms of the faith group's relationship to the countryside of the Oberland. The spatial relation to the mountain symbolizes Madleni's tragic fate as a persecuted Anabaptist. Prior to her conversion, the mountain is described as an intimidating geographical formation, an obstacle to fully participating in social and church life of the village and securing infants' salvation by prompt baptism. After her conversion to the Anabaptist faith, Madleni develops a close relationship to the mountain as she spends happy years with her family on the alpine pasture (*Alm*). However, when the government expels all Anabaptists from the region, she is forced to leave the Oberland. The departure from the mountain is traumatic. Marching off to the city of Berne, she turns around once more "and came close to weeping from sorrow. There she stands—the Furgge mountain, wide and slightly sunken in the middle, with numerous vertical furrows."⁵⁹ The mountain reflects her deplorable condition as a banished Anabaptist, an existence marked by grief and despair.

When Madleni attempts to return to her home in the Oberland, she is caught by Anabaptist hunters and sent to prison. Her experience as a captive exemplifies Anabaptist endurance of pain. In the face of harsh persecution, the narrative creates an idealized image of the Bernese Anabaptists, faithful believers who seek to follow Christ's precept of forgiveness in accordance with Matthew 3:44-48:

The men pull her on a rope into the darkness. . . . Softly she utters the passage that now applies. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For if you love only those who love you, what is your reward? Do not sinners do the same thing?"⁶⁰

The determination of the seventeenth-century Anabaptists to bear witness to the New Testament commandments of loving the enemy and nonresistance, even if in the face of suffering, fascinates Anna. Her reaction to Madleni's story exemplifies the effect of historical works. According to Lukács, historical narratives allow readers to re-experience history "as a phase of mankind's development which concerns and moves

59. *Ibid.*, 130.

60. *Ibid.*, 159.

us."⁶¹ Anna develops an empathetic understanding for the social and human motives that led the Anabaptists of the seventeenth century to think and act in a distinctive way.

The frame story also illustrates the use of history as inspiration. As Anna learns more about the movement in Berne, she develops great respect for the believers' public testimony to their faith. The story of Madleni's steadfastness inspires her; she admires the courage of the people from Emmental "who quite simply took Jesus as their role model and were not to be removed from their conviction by any punishment."⁶² Just as Anabaptist martyr stories provided spiritual support for believers who endured torture and privations during times of severe persecution, Anna gains new strength for mastering her daily struggles through hearing about Madleni's perseverance.

The discussion of the state's repressive actions against Anabaptism suggests a process of coming to terms with the Bernese past.⁶³ As part of this Bernese—and, to a greater extent, Swiss—effort to engage in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Anna is determined to understand why the Anabaptists' tragic fate in the seventeenth century had been erased entirely from the state's collective memory. The state's unwillingness to acknowledge its wrongdoings in regard to the Anabaptist issue has significantly influenced contemporary conceptions of the Anabaptists—the historical movement is either unknown to the general public or it is dismissed as a seditious sect.

In the novel, Anna's friend, Petra, expresses some of the common prejudices. Complaining about "the narrowness of these sects, their superiority, and their contempt for the world,"⁶⁴ Petra simply projects negative characteristics associated with sectarian groups onto the historical Anabaptist movement without any insight into their distinctive theological concepts and practices.

Just as Anna attempts to inform and educate her friend about the historical conflict between the state and the persecuted minority, Zimmermann, too, is seeking to draw public attention to the matter of Bernese Anabaptism. Her historical novel on the Anabaptist theme contributes to a culture of remembering. Not only does the literary

61. Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 42.

62. Zimmermann, *Furgge*, 104.

63. Referring to the city symbol (Bern / *Bär* / bear), Zimmermann asks whether the bear really did "not have any ears back then? Was he deaf to national grievances? Why did the state fail to attend to all of its people?"—*Ibid.*, 65.

64. *Ibid.*, 104.

treatment of the movement's struggle with authorities revive the memory of Anabaptist persecution in Berne; it also provides guidance and inspiration for contemporary initiatives of defenselessness. Considering the Anabaptists' insistence on Christ's teaching of peace, the novel concludes that the group's nonresistance "seems to be the only possible position for the future."⁶⁵ It thus rehabilitates the marginalized group and promotes its pacifist position.

CONCLUSION

The use of the Anabaptist history as a vehicle to discuss national affairs is noticeable in both fictional narratives that treat the story of Anabaptism in the Old Swiss Confederacy. In their historical fiction, Keller and Zimmermann explore the Anabaptist objection to the unity between church and nation in early modern Switzerland. In both of these texts, a dichotomy is at work that draws force from the contradictory poles of radical discipleship and national unity. The contrast between the Anabaptists' strict adherence to Christ's teachings and the state's national politics generates an ambivalent picture of the Anabaptists, swinging between fanaticism/dissidence and exemplars of the Christian faith. By viewing the movement's development through the eyes of civil authorities and radical believers alike, the fictional narratives draw a literary picture of the complex context of contemporary debates on national unity.

This close reading of both the earliest and the most recent Swiss fictional narrative on historical Swiss Anabaptism reveals the critical role of historiography. In both fictional works, authors employed a subjective picture of the Anabaptists in order to express their personal positions on debates over contemporary national and confessional issues. Drawing information from Schuler's historical accounts, Keller was vulnerable to overly negative representations of Anabaptism. The Anabaptist-phobic attitude of sixteenth-century polemicists, paired with the interest of nineteenth-century historians to establish a sense of national unity, generated a severely negative perception of the religious minority in *Ursula*.

The re-examination of Anabaptism in twentieth-century Swiss historiography, on the other hand, has contributed to a revision of the Anabaptist image as depicted in Zimmermann's fictional writing. Müller's pioneering work on the movement's developments in early modern Berne helped to revise later literary treatments of the minority's historical conflict with the state. By elucidating the Anabaptist's

65. *Ibid.*, 150.

christological approach to issues such as nationhood and military service, Müller set the groundwork for a more sympathetic image of Anabaptism that found expression in Zimmermann's regional novel.

Both the historian Müller and the novelist Zimmermann sought to eliminate misconceptions about the movement and to nurture a deeper understanding and appreciation of its place within the larger history of Switzerland. Yet, Zimmermann's novel is not free of programmatic aims. While her representation of the faith group moves from demonizing to idealizing, she nonetheless shares with Keller a literary approach that recruits the Anabaptists for contemporary confessional, national, and societal objectives.

Keller's nineteenth-century fictional portrayal of Anabaptism as a fanatical fringe of the Swiss Reformation—associated with superstition and irrational conduct—contributed to an image of the Anabaptists as bizarre religionists. They served as a negative representation for Keller's national agenda, foils for Zwingli as national hero, that could mask political and religious tensions during the time of the *Kulturkampf*.

In comparison to Keller's fictionalization of the Swiss Anabaptists as religious fanatics, Zimmermann's novel portrays the Anabaptists in their conflict with state authorities as peaceful and upright people, regarded by their neighbors as spiritually superior. The confrontation between Swiss citizenship and ecclesial identity arises particularly around the issue of military service. Here, Zimmermann employed the principles of Anabaptist nonresistance to advocate for her own opinions on the matter of national identity. While her historical fiction presents the seventeenth-century conflict regarding compulsory military service from the perspective of the pacifist believers, she frames that historical struggle within the context of contemporary conscription laws and the struggle by Swiss conscientious objectors to gain legal recognition. In her attempt to create an awareness of the past and present suppression of principles of nonviolence for the sake of establishing a national identity, Zimmermann's sympathetic portrayal of Anabaptist nonconformism served as a way of proposing a pacifist stance that transcends citizenship. The literary depiction of the movement's peace witness enabled her to critically assess the role of military force in the formation of the Swiss national identity.

