MENNONITE LIFE

DECEMBER 1992

In this Issue

Drama, poetry and the visual arts are all represented in these pages. *Dirk's Exodus,* the latest play by James Juhnke, Bethel College history professor and playwright, was published as the second-place winner in the 1992 edition of *Four Class Acts: Kansas Theatre* and produced most recently at the Sioux Falls meetings of the General Conference Mennonite Church. It is the subject of three articles here. John McCabe-Juhnke, Associate Professor of Communication Arts at Bethel, reviews the Sioux Falls production and discusses the play as drama. John Sheriff, Ernest E. Leisy Professor of English at Bethel, examines the play as literature, especially tragedy. Mel Goering, philospher and currently Director of Development at Prairie View Mental Health Center, Newton, Kansas, uses the play as a springboard to discuss the problems he sees with the Anabaptist attachment to martyrdom and current difficulties with that philosophical inheritance.

We are happy to feature the work of three poets. Leonard Neufeldt is a professor of English at Purdue University and author of two recent books of poems, *Raspberrying* (1991) and the upcoming collection, *Yarrow* (1993); both titles refer to the British Columbian hamlet where Neufeldt spent his youth. Julia Kasdorf, poet and instructor at New York University, won the 1991 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize with her new book of poems, *Sleeping Preacher* (Pittsburgh Poetry series, 1992); four poems from that collection are featured here. The poems of Naomi Duke of Tacoma, Washington, are the results of her genealogical research attempts to discover her grandfather.

The photos of the artwork of Merrill Krabill, Assistant Professor of Art at Bethel, along with his brief statement give a sense of his vision.

Raylene Hinz-Penner

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Front Cover
Dirk Willems rescues his pursuer, etching by Jan Luyken from the *Martyrs' Mirror*

Back Cover
Sculpture by Merrill Krabill

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John McCabe-Juhnke

Humility, Vulnerability, and Heroism in *Dirk's Exodus*

James Juhnke is fascinated with heroes. His dramatic writing has been dominated by works about heroes of the Mennonite faith. Juhnke's 1975 musical drama, *The Blowing and the Bending,* explores the heroic stance of a Mennonite youth who suffered persecution as a conscientious objector during World War II. His 1990 one-man drama, *Living Creatively,* pays tribute to a hero of Mennonite higher education, Dr. Edmund G. Kaufman. One can imagine the voice of the dramatist echoed in the words of Dr. Kaufman's character, who complains, "Nowadays, people don't have heroes. The best they can do is role models." If indeed heroes are unfashionable, Juhnke is audaciously out of style.

Juhnke's most recent dramatic effort, *Dirk's Exodus,* is a full-length play based on another hero of the faith, Dirk Willems, a sixteenth century Anabaptist martyr. Willems is perhaps the most compelling hero to capture Juhnke's imagination. With *Dirk's Exodus* Juhnke draws from the events surrounding the execution of Dirk Willems after his failed escape from a thief-catcher in Asperen, Holland. Dirk's story is an especially suitable nucleus for dramatic exploration because of the rich irony surrounding Dirk's capture. According to the account in the *Martyrs' Mirror,* as he fled, Dirk crossed over a river that was covered with a thin layer of ice. When the thief-catcher fell through the ice, Dirk turned back to rescue his pursuer and was then returned to prison, where he remained until he was burned at the stake in 1659. On one level, the event recalls for us the Christ story. On another, the idea of repaying an act of human kindness with an act of profane violence rankles our sense of poetic justice and seems to beg for literary exploration. I commend Juhnke bringing to light a dramatic idea based on a historical incident that is at the same time bewildering and absorbing. Dirk Willems is an ingenious choice for a dramatic hero.

In an inspired creative effort, Juhnke compares Dirk's flight from the prison warden with the Israelites' deliverance from Pharaoh's army. The drama begins with a chorus of readers—reminiscent of the Greek chorus in classical drama—who create a Biblical context for the central themes of the play. They represent the Israelites of the Exodus, who celebrate their triumph in the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. By introducing Dirk's exodus story with the Israelites' story, Juhnke combines images of baptism and drowning, cleansing and obliteration, while mingling thematic tensions between humility and zeal, submission and domination, martyrdom and heroism. The richness and complexity of the thematic development in the play clearly ranks *Dirk's Exodus* as Juhnke's most sophisticated piece of dramatic writing.

Dirk's Exodus was originally produced September 27-30, 1990, in Krehbiel Auditorium on the campus of Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas. The play's enthusiastic reception prompted discussion about a revival at the General Conference Mennonite Church Triennial sessions. This summer, five performances of *Dirk's Exodus* were presented in conjunction with the triennial sessions in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, July 22-26, 1992. I was privileged to be asked to review the Sioux Falls production for this issue of *Mennonite Life.* The particular perspective of this review reflects my response

to the play as theater, that is, my assessment of how the drama fares in live production.

The overall impact of any dramatic production is achieved in the combination of diverse production elements. The strength of the script, the aesthetics of the scene design, the skill of the actors, and the director's artistic vision mingle to create an overall impression of the theatrical event. While each of these aspects of *Dirk's Exodus* merits special attention in this review, my assessment of the general effect of the play is necessarily based on a pervasive impression of the production as a whole. Thus, I begin the review with attention to the specifics of writing, design, acting and direction in order to provide a context for my subsequent observations regarding the production's overall effect.

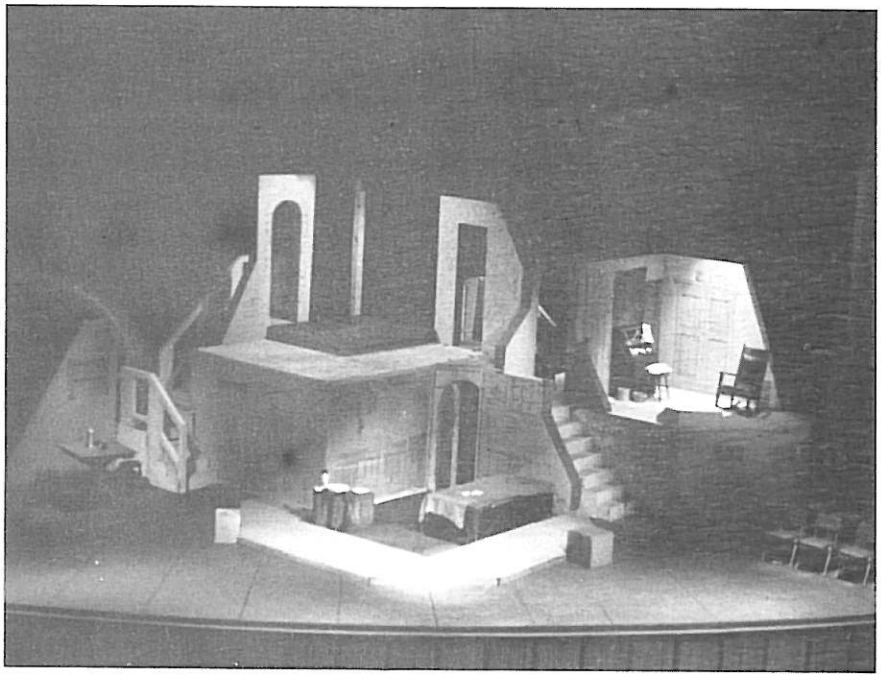
Before I address specifics of the July 24 production of *Dirk's Exodus* at Sioux Falls College, I should provide a brief synopsis of Juhnke's plot for those readers who may not be familiar with the play. *Dirk's Exodus* portrays the struggle between Dirk Willems and a Spanish Inquisitor who comes to Asperen to try Dirk's case. The action involves the Inquisitor's attempts to convince Dirk of the error of his Anabaptist doctrine and to make sense of Dirk's bizarre act of mercy in rescuing the prison warden, Hans Hendricks. When Hendricks is called to testify in the case, he frets over finding an explanation for Dirk's escape. Hendricks is unaware that his wife, Gretchen, an Anabaptist sympathizer, left the cell door open for Dirk. While the Inquisitor has ample evidence to order Dirk's execution, he is intriguted and challenged by Dirk's fervent adherence to Anabaptist belief. Hoping to convince Dirk to use his gifts for the Holy Roman Church, the Inquisitor offers him what amounts to a year's probation. The Inquisitor promises to rescind the execution order if Dirk agrees to place himself under the authority of the abbot at the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes. The Inquisitor leaves the prison door open a second time and stations a servant at the river to provide safe conduct for Dirk upon receiving Dirk's signed agreement. In the meantime, Gretchen Hendricks has requested baptism from Dirk and has promised to return with water early the following morning. Unable to disregard Gretchen's baptism and unable to consider compromising his convictions, Dirk remains in the jail cell. The next morning the Inquisitor arrives just as Gretchen's baptism has been completed. Seeing that Dirk has refused his offer, the Inquisitor orders Dirk's execution. The play ends as Dirk burns at the stake.

The production begins and ends with a defining visual image, that of Jan Luyken's engraving of the prison warden's rescue. At the opening, the image is projected on a scrim that is subsequently raised to reveal the chorus. In the final moments of the play, the enactment of Dirk's martyrdom is overlaid with the Luyken engraving. In combining the images of water and fire, baptism and drowning, salvation and death, this final depiction deftly encapsulates the central themes of the play, challenging the audience to reflect on baptism as a symbolic marker for our own exodus from the ways of this world, and our entrance into the often painful obligations of discipleship.

The audience's ability to appreciate the thematic significance of Juhnke's play is enhanced by Arlo Kasper's creative touch in almost every aspect of this production. I applaud Kasper's mastery of both the stage direction and the technical elements of the play. In the area of scene design Kasper, with the assistance of Gail Lutsch, has created a set that uses gray and black to evoke the austere imagery of Luyken's etchings in the *Martyrs' Mirror*. In addition, the pervasive gray hints at the climate of Holland's lowlands where, according to the Inquisitor, "everything is gray and murky."

Kasper's set complements the thematic development of the play in a variety of ways. Dirk's jail cell is down center with the cell door just upstage. The significance of the cell door to the complicating action of the play and the door's symbolic relationship to freedom, confinement, release, and escape are highlighted by its center placement. In addition, the openness of the set seems to reach out to the audience, drawing us into Dirk's jail cell and his life, thus reinforcing an identity with Juhnke's protagonist. Additionally, the set functions as a visual metaphor for the recurring theme: "the mighty shall be brought low." Kasper's intelligently conceived design accentuates the contrasts between height and depth. The Inquisitor's space, the courtroom, is at the highest level of the set while Dirk's prison cell is at the lowest. The distinction in physical height between the towering Terry Rempel as the Inquisitor and the medium stature of J. Aaron Rittenhouse as Dirk helps to underscore this effect. As the action proceeds, the Inquisitor is "brought low"—down to Dirk's level—when he entreats Dirk to compromise in Act II, and of course the final enactment of Dirk's execution occurs at the highest level, upstage of

Set of Dirk's Exodus *(Sioux Falls performance)*



the courtroom area. Throughout the play this multi-levelled set proves both economical and resourceful, providing a fitting environment within which the movement unfolds in meaningful ways.

The acting in the production displays the talents of a solid group of student actors. Terry Rempel's portrayal of the Inquisitor is exceptional. His dignified stage presence, intense focus, and commanding voice impel our attention just as his character commands the attention of his subordinates in the play. Admirably, Rempel resists the temptation to vilify the Inquisitor. Instead he evokes a subtle strain of compassion that tempers his intense desire to repress Dirk Willems.

J. Aaron Rittenhouse's Dirk is most believable in tender moments when he reminisces about his family or interacts with his children in a flashback scene. His contending with the Inquisitor is less convincing. Too often he falls into an affected style of speaking that is lamentably overdramatic. No doubt, Rittenhouse's stage accent reflects an individual performance quirk rather than a conscious choice for Dirk's character. Still the accent interferes with the important thematic concept of Dirk's identification with the local community. Though he is clearly an exemplary man of morals, Dirk is still a common villager. By suggesting Dirk's detachment from the community, the accent competes with the idea of the grass roots nature of the Anabaptist movement.

With the character of Hans Hendricks, Juhnke has essentially created a buffoon. F. Scott Thrift is consistently funny as the crafty prison warden. Thrift has a natural gift for clowning that is well-suited to Hendricks' continual yammering. At times, however, Thrift's cartooning is overly self-conscious and he tries too hard to get audience laughs.

Coralee Stucky's Gretchen is very deliberate, intentional, solid. We believe that she can, as she says, "take care of herself." Stucky achieves an essential trait in her portrayal of Gretchen—a spirit of determination that enables Gretchen to teach herself to read, and to take the initiative to seek her own baptism, even in the face of Dirk's persecution.

The supporting roles are well cast, lending strength to the overall dramatic effect of the performance. Of note were the children in the play—Jared Hawkley and Allison Graber as Dirk's children, Pieter and Nelleken Willems, and Jeffrey Graber as a young ruffian. These young actors were comfortable on stage and convincing in their roles. Ben Chappell and Mike Regier as the barflies, Joos and Jan, provide a welcome comic relief from the weighty issues of the play. Ken Hawkley as Garrit Jans plays a convincing bumbling clerk to the Inquisitor, throwing into stark relief the splendor and control of Terry Rempel's portrayal.

Dirk confronts the Inquisitor (Sioux Falls performance)

Arlo Kasper's stage direction is generally credible and artistic. The only noteworthy exception is his handling the speaking chorus in Act I. These first lines of the play should capture our attention. Because the language of scripture is already so familiar to a majority of the audience, our imaginations need to be engaged by a level of innovation in the interpretation and movement on these lines. Unfortunately the action and delivery in the opening are too tired and routine to evoke a sense of the Israelites' celebration of their deliverance from Egypt.

The opening readers' chorus in the second act fares better. Here the Old Testament image of God as a God of war is combined with the New Testament image of Christ humbled and obedient to death on the cross. The competition between these two Biblical perspectives is accentuated with a kind of vocal sparring between the voices representing each position. Kasper adds an interesting visual element as the chorus members appear with books in their hands to suggest an actual reading from the Old and New Testaments. Showing the "Word of God" in the hands of "the people" summons a significant theme of Anabaptism and the radical reformation: the priesthood of believers. Anabaptism affirms that all people have a hand in the discernment of the scriptures. At the end of the opening scene the speakers' chorus moves to Dirk's level and repeats in unison the passage from Philippians, "every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Here the chorus seems solidly aligned with Dirk's perspective on the Lordship of Christ. At this point, as elsewhere in the production, J. Harold Moyer's enchanting choral melodies provide an appropriate musical reflection on the central themes of the play.

One of the most striking visual images of the play occurs when the audience is able to look through the wall of the jail cell and see the Inquisitor in his study puzzling over Dirk's books. A scrim wall in the jail cell becomes transparent as a lighted candle illuminates the Inquisitor behind the wall. Aside from the pure delight of the technical wizardry of the "disappearing wall," the visual image has powerful thematic significance as well. In his attempt to know the mind of Dirk Willems, the Inquisitor has been "brought low" both physically and psychologi-

cally. The Inquisitor now appears on the same level as Dirk. At the same time, he appears to the audience to be even more entrapped than Dirk. While Dirk's cell opens out to the audience and to the ceiling of the auditorium, the Inquisitor is confined behind the wall and under a second level platform. The physical boundaries of this tight space reflect the limitations he feels due to the constraining tensions between his belief in the truth of his spiritual call and his appreciation of Dirk's earnestness, between his obligation to his office and his sincere admiration for Dirk Willems' character. The muted glow of a single candle and the obscured image as seen through the scrim create a profound visual context for the Inquisitor's question, "Who is this man who challenges my vision?" The isolated space, the dim light, and Rempel's exquisite touch with conveying the Inquisitor's dilemma make this one of the most memorable scenes of the production.

Some of the most compelling action of the play occurs in Act II, Scene 5, when the Inquisitor attempts to spell out Dirk's thought process during the prisoner's escape. Here the scriptural texts introduced earlier by the chorus resonate richly with the Inquisitor's overlay of the Exodus story with Dirk's flight from prison. The combined efforts of Juhnke's writing and Kasper's direction help the scene to achieve a marvelous sustained tension in the Inquisitor's continual prodding and Willems' silence—a silence that in comparison with his earlier contentiousness seems to betoken consent more than denial. The Inquisitor is brought, as is the audience, to this central question: Why did he do it? We empathize with the Inquisitor's burning desire to make sense of Dirk's motivations. When the question remains largely unresolved, we experience a meaningful sense of disorientation. The answer is obscured—as is Holland's God-forsaken lowland—in grayness. Thus we are left to ponder our own choices in situations where we may be tempted to interpret the demise of our enemy as a kind of divine retribution.

Kasper effects a powerful visual symbol in this scene with the presence of the Inquisitor in Dirk's jail cell. Indeed, the "mighty" person has been "brought low" as the Inquisitor moves out of the formal authoritarian space of the courtroom and into the crude jail cell. We see the Inquisitor on Dirk's level, sitting at times on Dirk's cot. For the first time in the production, Dirk appears to tower over the Inquisitor on the line, "It is you who hold the sword of death over me." The visual irony of Dirk's physical strength as he stands above the seated Inquisitor is richly significant in this interchange.

At the end of this scene the Inquisitor offers Dirk a chance to avoid the death sentence. Sensing Dirk's potential to be a leader in the Holy Roman Church, the Inquisitor offers him a year of study at Mount St. Agnes Monastery so that Dirk will have time to reconsider his position on Anabaptism. When the Inquisitor leaves the cell, Dirk watches him go, peering into the blackness of the space beyond the open cell door. Dirk's gaze into the darkness symbolizes the personal blackness he faces as he anticipates the gravity of his decision. From Dirk's perspective, whatever he decides, he loses. If he refuses the Inquisitor's offer, he loses his life. If he agrees, he faces an equally threatening loss—the loss of his spiritual identity.

Left alone in his cell to ponder his fate, Dirk feels incapable of handling this decision and appeals to God in prayer. Regrettably the poignancy of this moment in the production is intruded upon by the less than subtle comparison of Dirk's agony to that of Christ in Gethsemane. Dirk falls to his knees and cries out, "My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me." While comparison to Christ is a useful means of demonstrating Dirk's earnest discipleship, a more subtle suggestion would enhance the dramatic sensitivity and believability of the action in this scene.

In the baptism scene that follows, the play returns to a more subtle level of performance. The urgency of completing the baptism before the Inquisitor arrives necessarily forces a hurried ceremony. Yet this baptism is no less powerful for its brevity. The mingling of urgency and solemnity, fear and hope, portrays the kind of baptism that

Gretchen reads to Hans (Sioux Falls performance)

most probably was all too prevalent during the radical reformation.

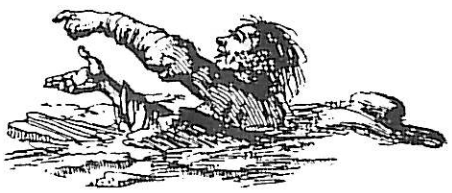
As expected, the Inquisitor appears in the prison door following the baptism's hurried conclusion. Rempel's exquisite control of character at this point keeps Dirk, the Hendrickses, and the audience guessing as to what he makes of the bowl of water. Does he suspect illegal activity? Will he arrest Hans and Gretchen as practicing Anabaptists? Does the baptism seal Dirk's doom? The Inquisitor's question, "What with this water, Dirk Willems?" rings with a multitude of meanings while masterfully resisting the disclosure of a single interpretation. Rempel handles the suspense expertly as we are left guessing whether or not the Inquisitor suspects the baptism. At the same time, Rempel's portrayal crystallizes the central issue for the Inquisitor in this scene, which is clearly not determining whether baptism has occurred, but rather ascertaining Dirk's response to the Inquisitor's offer. He asks, "Will you wash yourself for life or for death?" as if to extend the offer one last time. Here despite our knowledge of the historical resolution, one might hope for a final moment of suspense in which Dirk searches out possibility, poised in the tension between alternatives. However, the Dirk of this drama is poised only for martyrdom. Throughout the play we have seen no indication of weakness in Dirk's religious stance—no suggestion of a chink in his spiritual armor.

In assessing the overall effect of *Dirk's Exodus,* I find myself returning to a crucial question regarding Dirk's apparent invincibility: Does his role as hero of the faith necessarily preclude a level of vulnerability in his character? Juhnke's obvious admiration for his hero's tenacity comes through in the biting dialogue with the Inquisitor over interpretations of scripture. Dirk consistently outperforms the Inquisitor in the doctrinal debate thus establishing Dirk's intellectual heroism. However, the character falls short in the area of human sensitivity. Though Dirk is capable of answering every doctrinal challenge, he appears incapable of reciprocating the Inquisitor's attempt at personal disclosure. When the Inquisitor shares the story of his conversion—his vision of the Christ of the flaming sword—Dirk answers him with a scriptural proof of Christ's humility and nonviolence. Is it too much to expect that Dirk might instead reciprocate with the story of his own conversion? Surely our identification with Dirk and our sense of the sincerity of his struggle would be enhanced if we could see some measure of human insecurity in all his doctrinal zeal.

Near the end of the play, the Inquisitor concludes that Dirk "chose to burn at the stake." In light of Dirk's unwavering resoluteness, this conclusion seems inaccurate. We never sense a true moment of choice in Dirk's experience. Even when he cries out in a moment of self-examination in the jail cell, "I don't want these choices," we remain unconvinced that he really grapples with alternative possibilities. He dismisses the option of escape as well as that of accepting the Inquisitor's offer because he feels obligated to follow through with Gretchen's baptism. In actuality would Gretchen's salvation or Dirk's integrity be jeopardized by his leaving? Can Dirk really think he would be judged by Gretchen—or by God for that matter—for fleeing from prison to save his life? Somehow his earnestness lacks believability here as he routinely forestalls every option except for martyrdom. Indeed, the whole self-examination scene feels forced in some way, as if it is stuck in the drama in order to balance "grappling time" between protagonist and antagonist without careful attention to character or motivation.

Dirk's impenetrable conviction is clearly one of the central weaknesses of the play. There is little dramatic force, insufficient tension, and no compelling suspense regarding Dirk's response to the Inquisitor's offer. From the first time the Inquisitor suggests a year's probation in Mount St. Agnes Monastery until the final scene, Dirk is so consistently resolute, so absolutely unwavering, so convinced of his virtue that we cannot imagine him entertaining another alternative. This may be the stuff of which good heroes of the faith are made, but it lacks the complexity and interest essential to the stuff of substantive dramatic characters. While Juhnke's skill as a dramatic writer shines forth with the character of the Inquisitor, his touch with Dirk's character is much less artful. This unfortunate imbalance in the development of his main characters makes an otherwise good play seem cumbersome at times. While we may admire Dirk's conviction, we cannot identify with his spiritual struggle. With so little evidence of human imperfection, Dirk is an unapproachable hero—a person whose example is unsuitable to inspire us to faithfulness because we recognize all too readily our own vulnerability, imperfection, and uncertainty.

This production of *Dirk's Exodus* succeeds in many ways. It is well-acted, thematically stimulating, and artistically designed. Juhnke shows his literary strength in the depth and complexity of the central themes of the drama. Still the question remains: In light of the richly conceived character displayed by Juhnke's antagonist, would it have been possible to create an equally sympathetic hero in the character of Dirk? Would giving the hero a sincere desire to make himself vulnerable to the Inquisitor compromise the drama in some way? Perhaps my difference with James Juhnke on his treatment of Dirk's character reflects an essential distinction between our views on heroes. Juhnke apparently admires unwavering conviction, whereas I esteem a measure of uncertainty and self-doubt. I would be more enamored of Dirk if he struggled with some level of insecurity in facing the Inquisitor, rather than continually sparring with him over whose ideas are right. A measure of humility in Dirk's spiritual struggle would go a long way to improve his heroic stature. Perhaps *Dirk's Exodus* would benefit from an additional image of water from the New Testament—the image of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Surely the complexity and interest of Dirk Willems' inner struggle would be enhanced if he could reach out to the Inquisitor in the same gesture of humility that he offers the drowning Hans Hendricks.



Dying to Be Pure:
The Martyr Story

by Melvin Goering

Dirk's Exodus invites Mennonites to ask a fundamental question. What does it mean to be a Mennonite (individual or institution) in North America in an urbanized, interconnected, professionalized, information age? What does it mean to be Mennonite, when one is immersed in the "secular" culture?[1] The play does so by retelling a particularly gripping martyr story. The retelling gives power to familiar Mennonite theological and ethical themes. By so doing, it portrays a perspective with which to compare contemporary Mennonite practice.

The comparison reveals a great dissonance between the theological and ethical features of *Dirk's Exodus* and the lives of an increasing number of contemporary Mennonites. The theological assumptions and social context of Mennonites at the end of the 20th century are so different from the world of Dirk Willems, a comparison raises doubts whether the martyr stories can provide guidance for the 21st century. The theological framework implicit in *Dirk's Exodus* is in increasing contradiction with the lived experience and the needs of the contemporary culturally immersed Mennonite. The martyr stories provide dramatic images of a heroic past but do not provide culturally immersed Mennonites with an integrated "theology" for the 21st century. The problems contemporary Mennonites face require stories which provide a framework for being "faithful" in the *midst of culture. Dirk's Exodus* is not such a story.

I will address these issues in three ways. First, I will draw attention to a radical shift in social and cultural patterns of Mennonite life which have created a gulf between the traditional theological assumptions and the contemporary social and cultural context. Second, I will examine some of the major messages which *Dirk's Exodus* and the martyr tradition portray as models for Mennonite living and note their inability to address the contemporary need. Third, I will offer hints on the type of stories that would be helpful.

Mennonite Cultural Immersion

Some form of two kingdom theology has been central to the way in which Mennonites have seen themselves. Loyalty to the kingdom of God and the church and separation from, indeed, opposition to "the world" have been guiding principles for social structures and individual life.[2] Increasing numbers of Mennonites are becoming immersed in societal institutions in ways that challenge the assumptions of two kingdom thought.

Social Context

I grew up during the 40's and 50's in central Kansas. The distinction between the Church (more broadly Mennonite life and values) and the World (more broadly anyone not a Mennonite) was prominent. The boundary between the two communities was relatively clear, though always subject to challenge and changing rapidly by the 50's. Members of the church community had little need for sustained interaction with social institutions beyond the transaction of business—selling wheat and buying groceries. Many of the socially accepted behavior patterns served to decrease the chances for interaction. If one could not dance, play cards, drink, participate in athletics, attend movies, etc., one was less likely to have social interaction with "the world."

Mennonites even developed psychological character traits which were functional and necessary in such a homogeneous ideological/cultural context. These traits have become so integral to the Mennonite personality they often go unnoticed. Others notice them very quickly when the traits persist well beyond the social context in which they were functional.[3]

First, there is a lack of openness to outsiders. This reinforces the cohesion of the group and decreases the chances of a successful challenge to one's beliefs and actions. From the standpoint of the outsider, however, it often appears to show an arrogance and superiority, a moral smugness which puts down the life of the other person.

Second, purity of belief and action is very important. One demonstrates membership and loyalty to the community by showing a lack of compromise with other positions.

Third, a rhetoric of superiority often covers a sense of inferiority. There is a need to convince the primary group that it is not "wrong," even though it is different from the dominant culture. The more interaction with the majority culture, the more the inferiority is felt, and the more the habit of assuming superiority comes through—often in the form of subtle put downs of others.

My experience with the Mennonite Congregation of Boston in the late 60's provided a vivid contrast to my Kansas youth. Members were primarily professionals (or budding professionals) who lived and worked in "secular" institutions. The meetings served as time for reviving memories, since most had come from more traditional Mennonite backgrounds. In many ways, we had little in common, except some need to connect with our past. In some ways the meetings functioned more as a family or class reunion than a traditional religious organization—though reli-

Mennonites find themselves with a highly developed individual ethic, but one whose sharp edges are not very functional in a world of systematically interrelated institutional settings, especially in contexts where diversity of belief and action are the order of the day—yet Mennonites are increasingly living in such contexts.

gious elements were certainly emphasized.

Contrast the early experiences of the young Mennonite growing up in Moundridge in the 40's and 50's with the young Mennonite growing up in Boston in the 60's. In the 40's in Moundridge nearly all interaction took place within the context of Mennonite dominated settings: home, elementary school (one or two rooms with nearly all teachers and students Mennonite), church, work (family farming or small town business). In the 60's in Boston, nearly all interaction was outside the context of Mennonite dominated settings. One might spend 2 hours a week in a Mennonite social or institutional context, at best.

By the 90's the children of the urban congregations of the 60's are adults. They do not have the common "Mennonite experience" from Inman or Freeman to define their identity as Mennonites. They have been raised and shaped by the institutions of American mass culture.[4] They are children of parents who had great motivation to succeed in their chosen professions—and have often done so. To be a successful professional means adopting the values and standards of the profession and "playing by those rules." Often the professionals judge themselves by the upwardly mobile standards of the culture and implicitly teach their children to be conscious of those images.[5] The Mennonite heritage becomes a quaint part of the parents' tradition but certainly not one that fits with the world in which the children live. It is precisely the children of the urban professionals that are most difficult to recruit to church related institutions. Such institutions are a symbol of the parents' history, but they do not have sufficient prestige for modern life. The church college may have launched the parents into the world, but once there, the world has a variety of "better" options for success.

An increasing number of Mennonites are caught in a lived contradiction. They have an inherited theological framework which is not consistent with the reality they live each day. The framework is grounded in a clear distinction between the church and the world, between good and evil. It is a framework that reinforces and is compatible with a life pattern in which Mennonites live in semi-isolated communities. They no longer live in such communities.

The first generation of urban professionals could "live off" the heritage, much as the Boston Congregation noted above. By the second and now the third generation, in some cases, that heritage of shared memory is no longer present. Even more important, the illusion of the separation of church and world can no longer be sustained. Urban Mennonites are committing their lives and energies to the care and sustenance of secular institutions or "church related" institutions seeking to care for the world. Many Mennonites have crossed a fundamental "Rubicon." If Mennonites ever were living for the "church" in the church/world distinction, they are increasingly living for the world, its values, its institutions, and its benefits—at least sociologically speaking.

Church Related Institutional Context

Some Mennonites feel less "compromised" by the culture if they work within a church related institution. Many of these institutions were formed, in large part, to provide education, health care, or social services for those within the church. Others were formed more explicitly to serve the needs of others. Whatever the motive for creation, church related institutions of higher education and service became major avenues by which the broader culture and the Mennonite culture came into a new relationship.

The Mennonite mental health experience provides an instructive illustration. Mennonites did not begin work in the mental health field to bring more humane and just treatment. They found themselves assigned to mental hospitals as a result of their sense of Christian obligation to avoid "taking up the sword." Once involved, they soon realized expressions of individual love for the patients was not enough. It was the institution, the system which needed correction. The realization led to at least two types of response. First, there were efforts to expose the conditions in the mental hospitals. Second, alternative mental hospitals were begun. Mennonites were not yet ready to enter the political process and reform the existing secular institutions. Establishing alternative models allowed some psychological distance from full involvement in the institutions of the world.

The establishment of Mennonite mental hospitals provides an interesting

transitional response. It shows increasing awareness of three elements. First, Mennonites have some obligation for the injustices in the systems of the world. Second, institutional/systems approaches are required to address some problems. Three, professional secular wisdom may be critical to deal with problems, even those within the church. The church/world distinction was becoming more blurred.

After nearly 40 years of operation in a highly competitive environment, there are some who wonder whether Mennonite mental health facilities (and many other Mennonite institutions) have any distinctive features to warrant their continuation—at least their continuation as church related.[6] In order to remain viable they are required to use the best in care and techniques as defined by the variety of accrediting agencies and the standards of the professional organizations in the field. In order to receive favorable governmental funding and regulation, political involvement and lobbying become essential. The facilities have become culturally immersed in ways that make the question of mission a central question for Mennonite Health Services as well as the individual hospitals. One could trace a similar movement in education and other church related institutions.

The transition from "church based" service, such as Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), to active participation and involvement in the social service structures of government demonstrates a qualitative change. MDS style service allows one to move from a protected church base, following the requirements of faith, to speak to human need without being required to be accountable for the social structures which may have created the need. It is still within a general framework of two kingdom theology. One is not responsible for the broader social structure, but one is responsible to the church. Such responsibility requires one to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and comfort the lonely.

When caring for the hungry, poor and depressed means providing new models of social structures or working within the social service structures, service assumes a different foundation. The individual has now taken responsibility for the social structures of society. One is now immersed in, shaped by, and required to be accountable for the social order. One has begun to care for the world in a new way.

Developing alternative models of social agencies and structures is something of an intermediate step which quickly leads to immersion. Anyone who has worked in a Mennonite higher education context or seen the struggle for a sense of unique mission in the current mental health field should recognize the shift and the difficulty.

More and more Mennonites and Mennonite institutions are living in the heart of society and culture, not in isolated rural or urban enclaves, but as individuals, families, and institutions attempting to be effective, successful, useful, and even faithful in the midst of the world. Where are the stories which provide models for this new interaction between church and world?

Authority, Ethics and Institutions

Mennonites have emphasized an individualistic ethic in the context of a history of opposition to authority and institutions. Now they find themselves in positions of authority within institutions attempting to deal with secular social realities. They are no longer developing activities or institutions to serve only the church. A common religious commitment cannot be assumed. The lack of a positive view of authority (power) and leadership coupled with an individualistic ethic creates dissonance as people work and act in contexts where groups of diverse populations attempt to address social, structural, and political problems.

General Conference Mennonites have a deep distrust of authority and institutions. After all it was the institutional authorities of the church and state which sought to eliminate the Anabaptists. The very identity of Mennonites has been shaped through opposition to the established religious and governmental authorities and institutions.

This long tradition of opposition creates a psychological dilemma. Mennonites often feel most comfortable in standing over against an idea, leader, or institution. This historic expectation results in an internal conflict for those Mennonites who are in positions of authority. They are in a role that is not valued by the tradition. They are in a role which comes with few positive guidelines on how it can be filled without contradicting the religious and ethical dictates of the tradition. Mennonites have some sense of how to be accountable for their personal lives, but far less sense of how to be accountable for institutional life.

Such a view of authority and institutions makes Mennonites very good at saying "no" to what is, but much less adept at establishing sound alternatives among those who do not accept their version of Christianity. It fosters a critical negativity without a corresponding sense of responsibility. One cannot lead an institution by saying "no." Good leaders see the positive opportunities in a situation and work to incorporate others into the vision of what might be.

Mennonites often have a reflexive response to authority and leadership. Authority and power become confused. Anyone in authority seems to rely on the use of power. The exercise of power seems to contradict an ideal of self-sacrifice. Yet power is an integral element in social roles, especially leadership roles in institutions.

Equally important, authority implies a social context in which a different ethical style is required. Leading a group often entails coordinating diverse perspectives. One sometimes must take a position that is not "pure" but allows the group to move forward. Thus institutions and their leaders become morally suspect, by the very nature of the context in which they must operate.

Anyone who has been in a leadership role in a Mennonite institution has seen this historical consciousness in action. When I moved from a faculty position to an administrative position, one of the faculty members said, "It is good to see some who are willing to make the sacrifice." The context and tone made it clear. A person in administrative authority in an organization, even a church related organization, inevitably is assuming a morally tainted role.

The traditional ethical admonitions of the Mennonites are applicable to the individual or to the relationships among believers. There are few indications of how one lives among those who are not believers, other than avoidance. Even so-called Mennonite institutions are no longer "just for believers." It is this mixed situation which cries for a new response.

With those within the Church one can appeal to a religious framework. To those outside, one can justify one's personal action on the basis of a religious framework. Such a religious stance is often admired, even if socially unpopular. As soon as the person begins to use the religious foundation to tell others how to run societal affairs, a negative reaction is more likely to be evoked.[7]

This transition has taken place in the Mennonite positions on governmental policy and issues of peace and social justice. Mennonites are no longer content to avoid participation in public policy. Mennonites have become increasingly activist. Mennonites make pronouncements and take public policy stances with an eye to affecting the actions of governments and societies. These positions are expected to be effective in securing a better world, not just a better church. In important ways, there has been a rapid movement away from the call "to be in the world but not of it" to a call "to be in the world and to transform it." The new involvement in public policy reflects a new sense that governmental and social structures are a part of the responsibility of the Mennonite.

Historic Mennonite ethics have had sharp edges. The world was fairly black and white, with a minimal number of grey areas. Such an ethic is more suitable for individuals than for institutions. If movies are sinful, one can avoid movies. If killing is wrong, one can avoid killing.

Institutional ethics are more openly complex. Seldom do all participants in the institution agree on the correct behavior or position. The leader, however, is charged with preserving and fulfilling the mission of the institution. To wait for agreement would be to destroy the college or the church or the business. Therefore, when institutional leaders take action, it often appears to compromise some ethical universal and often does so at the expense of individuals either within or without the institution. The choice is seldom between good and evil, but among evils or among goods. From a traditional Mennonite perspective, persons in such complex contexts cannot continue to be faithful or ethical. Withdrawal to the realm of the personal is required.

At the end of the 20th century, Mennonites find themselves with a deeply rooted psychological and religious distrust of societal authority and institutions coupled with an ethic developed largely for the individual or the community of believers. At the same time Mennonites are increasingly called to live within and to provide leadership for societal institutions or church related institutions that wish to be effective in the larger society. Mennonites find themselves with a highly developed individual ethic, but one whose sharp edges are not very functional in a world of systematically interrelated institutional settings, especially in contexts where diversity of belief and action are the order of the day—yet Mennonites are increasingly living in such contexts.

This prelude leads us back to *Dirk's Exodus*, one important illustration of the martyr tradition. Will the martyr stories provide guidance for a people immersed in culture, for persons living in the contexts noted above? Will the martyr stories provide guidance for a people in need of a positive vision of authority and institutional ethics?

Messages of the Martyrs

The martyr stories are gripping tales of humans struggling with life and death issues—literally. *Dirk's Exodus* brings the story of one such martyr to life in a special way. In so doing it portrays many messages typical of the martyr tradition. I will mention five especially relevant to the Mennonite context of increasing cultural immersion.[8]

Two Kingdom Dualism

Martyr stories dramatically portray two kingdom thinking.[9] The Inquisitor belongs to one kingdom and Dirk to the other. One cannot participate in the structures and politics of the civil state or the state religion and be loyal to Christ. In part the dramatic tension of the play has less to do with the potential loss of life than it has to do with the struggle for loyalty between the two potential kings seeking the allegiance of Dirk and others like him. Dual citizenship is not an option. Two kingdoms are a presupposition of the martyr tradition in Mennonite thought.

> INQUISITOR: Then whose side are you on? Do you support King Philip, emissary of God? Or are you with that rebel, William of Orange?
>
> DIRK: "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, not of any worldly king or prince."[10]

Good and Evil: A Sharp Dichotomy

Dirk is clearly the symbol of good. The Inquisitor is the symbol of evil—a religion gone wrong.[11] Typically the martyr stories present a very sharp, clean, separation between good and evil. The options are not ambiguous. Good and evil do not reside in the same person in some tangled web. There are some doctrines, beliefs and actions that are right and some are wrong. Evil is associated with those persons and institutions who care for the civic, social, cultural, and religious welfare of the people. Good is associated with those who embody beliefs and actions which separate them from those typical demands of society, those who follow Christ.

Rejection of Earthly Authority and Institutions

Dirk rejects the appeals to consider the teaching of the established church. He rejects the appeals to accept the commands of the civil authorities. It is precisely the rejection of civil and religious authority and institutions which is required in order to be faithful. Look what religious and civil institutions did to the early church. Look what religious and civil institutions did to the Anabaptists, so shouts the martyr tradition. The use of the Bible is, in part, an effort to affirm a direct relationship to a source of authority without need for civil authority or religious institutions.

Purity Over the Prudential

The Mennonite martyr tradition places a heavy emphasis upon remaining pure. There is no room for compromise or for accommodation, either to save one's life or to provide for the continuing needs of family, friends, community, or church. Personal purity of belief and action are of paramount importance. One could save one's life, but to do so would require compromise

and accommodation to outside forces. Such persons are weak and less faithful. The effect of one's behavior on others is much less important than the effect of accommodation upon one's relationship with God. There is no room for a utilitarian ethic.

The drive for purity justifies a strict discipline within the church, a separation of oneself from those who do not share the same beliefs and actions, and a lack of involvement with the evils and injustice of the world. It also fosters one of the more interesting psychological features of Mennonites. It seems that Mennonites are only feeling good when they feel bad. If purity and perfection are required, even those Mennonites within the church can always feel "bad" because they are not living up to the ideal. One is never allowed to feel good about accomplishments, lest one show pride. One must always remain humble and unworthy.

Even the traditional opposition to war is based on a need to remain pure or faithful. Historically Mennonites do not refrain from participation in war because they have a better alternative to eliminating evil and injustice in the world.[12]

Preaching and Pronouncement, Not Dialogue

Martyrs project a clarity of belief, a sense of being correct against all odds. They are right and they know it, no matter the degree to which they are in a numeric minority. For those in agreement with them, their behavior shows courage and faithfulness. To those in disagreement, the behavior often shows an arrogance and a moral smugness.

Sincere dialogue implies the possibility of error in one's position. If there is doubt, would one give up one's life? Just as a martyr, as a model Christian, does not accommodate to the social context so a martyr does not entertain alternatives on the psychological or personal level—at least that is the way it is portrayed.

> DIRK: But I have read what the Bible says of Jesus' teachings, His life and His death. It is clear beyond doubt.[13]

One can profess a position or witness to another person if one has the truth in one's possession. Martyrs provide a witness, not a serious quest for truth or the meaning of faithfulness in conversation with those outside the church. If you have the answers you evangelize, if not you dialogue.

Individual over community

Martyrs are individuals. They make decisions for themselves, not for a community. The ethics of martyrdom is an individualistic ethic, however important the believing community may be in shaping their lives and convictions. Mennonite martyrs seldom provide a social ethic or way to resolve issues of social justice.[14] Faithfulness is a relationship issue between the individual and God in the drama of the moment.

Each of these messages reinforces a perspective that assumes a required chasm between the Mennonite life and the social and cultural context of the nonbeliever. They are messages that presuppose a life in which individual ethics can be separated from institutional ethics, where God's call does not include a need to be faithful for social institutions, where the political and social forces are not a part of the domain of the Christian.

The messages do not speak, in other words, to the problematic of the 21st century culturally immersed Mennonite. The messages call people to psychological patterns which do not foster cooperative institutional life, certainly not institutional life with those outside the church. Contemporary Mennonites need stories that provide guidance on how to be faithful while immersed in secular culture, in secular institutions, and in church related institutions immersed in secular life. Contemporary Mennonites need stories that assist with the development of character patterns able to have conviction in the midst of openness, to be effective without giving up ethics, etc.

The critic might suggest *the* important point has been missed. The martyr stories are essential just now as a clarion call for renewal. The description of the contemporary Mennonite trends is correct. The wrong conclusion has been drawn. Culturally immersed Mennonites do not need stories to help them live in the new contemporary context. Mennonite cultural immersion simply shows the problem to be solved. Urban Mennonites need martyr stories to call them back to faithfulness, since they have lost their way in the labyrinth of church related and secular institutional life.

First, to suggest a need for renewal

The Mennonite immersion in the world reflects a theological awareness that the Christian God is not only the God of salvation but the God of creation. Christians are called not just to assure their own salvation but to care for God's creation as well. Whatever the history of the movement toward Mennonite cultural immersion, it is an opportunity for a theological correction.

Contemporary Mennonites need stories that provide guidance on how to be faithful while immersed in secular culture, in secular institutions, and in church related institutions immersed in secular life. Contemporary Mennonites need stories that assist with the development of character patterns able to have conviction in the midst of openness, to be effective without giving up ethics. Where are the stories which provide models for this new interaction between church and world?

is to agree with a fundamental premise. The historic perspective implicit in *Dirk's Exodus* and the cultural immersion of Mennonites are in tension, nay contradiction.

Second, even those professionals most inclined to see the tension seem unwilling to alter their cultural involvement with church related or secular institutions in order to be more consistent with the tradition. It would require a reorientation of values. It would require a shift in identity.[15] Mennonites would be required to pay greater heed to the Amish and Church of God in Christ for models, rather than the educated professionals in institutional leadership positions. Intentional communities with a greater degree of self-imposed isolation would become more prominent. Such a renewal is unlikely. What does that mean for those who are not willing to accept such a version of renewal? Are they no longer "true Mennonites?"

Third, the transition to involvement with institutions and secular systems grew from the recognition of a genuine need and a realization of a weakness of the traditional Mennonite position. Individual love of neighbor is minimally effective in situations where institutions and systems shape the lives of people. The CPS experience in mental hospitals and other service efforts drove Mennonites to this realization. Institutions are sometimes the only vehicles which allow love and care to be delivered. Political involvement is sometimes the mechanism for bringing positive change to the sick, the elderly, and the oppressed. Genuine love of neighbor as your self in the modern context requires the incorporation of systematic, institutional, political approaches.

Fourth, there is a dark underside to the traditional position, seldom acknowledged by Mennonites but often pointed out by others. A social consciousness that focuses on believers tends to become self-centered. Remaining "theologically pure" implies a focus on oneself in contrast to a giving of oneself to meet the need of others, even at the expense of one's own purity. Promoting justice for the poor in the broader community can become an endeavor in which one "compromises" some ideals in order to achieve the possible. Promoting a more peaceful world, not just avoiding personal participation in war, requires deep involvement in social and political movements that soil the purity of intention and idea with the reality of action. Avoidance of such involvement, implicit in the assumptions of the martyr tradition, places purity of self above the cry of the poor and oppressed.

Fifth, the extent of the cultural immersion has exposed the inherent contradiction in two kingdom theology. One can deny the contradiction when life is lived in self-imposed isolation from the broader social systems. When nearly all of life is lived in such systems, the fact becomes obvious. Going back to the isolated community will not solve the inherent dilemma. It is now too apparent.

Sixth, the Mennonite immersion in the world reflects a theological awareness that the Christian God is not only the God of salvation but the God of creation. Christians are called not just to assure their own salvation but to care for God's creation as well. Whatever the history of the movement toward Mennonite cultural immersion, it is an opportunity for a theological correction.

New Stories

Dirk's Exodus performs an important service. It calls people to a social, cultural and theological life which is inconsistent with the life lived by an increasing number of contemporary Mennonites. By doing so in a dramatic public arena, it focuses the discussion on the central dilemma of modern Mennonites. Can the Mennonite religious tradition, developed through years of opposition to the "world," transform itself and retain distinctive characteristics which differentiate it from others while still maintaining some continuity with the tradition? Or does the growing cultural involvement of Mennonites, both in Mennonite institutions and in secular institutions inevitably mean the end of the heritage? Is there a Mennonite "identity" and role beyond the demise of two kingdom theology?

Addressing the questions will require creative thought, whatever the ultimate answer to such questions. Mennonites will need different stories to focus the future. The stories need to be authentic to the heritage. They need to be stories which assist Mennonites to obedience with flexibility, beliefs without dogmatism, faithfulness within culture, ethical leadership within institutions, love and justice within social structures, conviction in the midst of ambiguity, dialogue without arrogance, care without condescension, openness without

disintegration. It will require stories that encourage responsible caring for God's creation—the world. *Dirk's Exodus* and the martyr tradition which it portrays is not such a story.

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[1]I use the phrase, "urban Mennonite" and "culturally immersed Mennonite" to identify a growing number of Mennonites who live and work in social settings in which most of the social interaction is with those who are not Mennonite; and/or in "church" institutions in which the standards for professional competency are set by regional or national agencies with minimal regard for Mennonite beliefs; and/or in institutions serving the common needs of society, not the church.

Most contemporary North American Mennonites fit into one of these categories. The transition has been most rapid and startling among those Mennonites with a strong rural heritage who, until recently, lived in relatively isolated communities (the 1874 migration).

[2]For a more detailed historical/theological analysis of many of the themes noted in this paper see J. Lawrence Burkholder's book, *The Problem of Social Responsibility From the Perspective of the Mennonite Church* (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute for Mennonite Studies, 1989).

A recent respondent at "Dialogue '92," offered a contemporary version of the "two kingdom" assumption in talking about health care. "Personally, I do not think we can change the system. The world's systems will never be redeemed. I think our job is to create alternative systems." Beryl Brubaker, "Dialogue '92," March 6-8, 1992, Indianapolis, Indiana.

[3]While culturally immersed Mennonites have lost the social context where such behavior is useful, they often retain a psychological profile of a minority culture—traits that served well in rural Kansas but do not serve well for institutional and individual life immersed in the broader culture. They are displayed most often in transitional settings where an institution seeks to be Mennonite and the majority of institutional members are Mennonites but they are trying to serve a broader population of those outside the Mennonite tradition.

[4]Clearly children growing up in Freeman and Inman are children of contemporary mass culture as well in the 90's, compared to the 40's, but with a less obvious domination, and more room to continue to feel distinct from the rest of society.

[5]The Mennonite who grew up in Freeman and becomes successful in a secular institution in a large city may wonder whether they have "sold out" in some way. They may have qualms about authenticity or integrity with their religion. The Mennonite who grew up in Buhler and becomes acculturated in the educational world and returns to a Mennonite institution often develops a sense of being a "failure." The really good professionals are at Carleton or Harvard. "I am at a small unknown church college. Therefore I am not O.K." This feeling of inferiority has profound effects on the life and culture of Mennonite institutions.

[6]See the interesting article by George Dyck, "A Critical Look at Mennonite Health Services," presented at the Association of Mennonite Psychologists Conference, March 1992.

[7]The current discomfort among many at the way in which the religious right is moving its agenda into the political process illustrates the point.

[8]Alan Kreider's article, "The Relevance of *Martyrs' Mirror* to Our Time," in the September 1990 issue of *Mennonite Life* suggests a number of messages provided by the martyr stories. The *Martyrs' Mirror* is praised as "arguably the most important book produced by the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition." Kreider claims a long list of virtues which any Christian should adopt to be a faithful servant in the modern era—all illustrated by the martyr tradition.

[9]"Despite certain melodramatic tendencies, the *Martyrs' Mirror* is a valuable source for the theology of suffering. The fact that the Mennonite church devoted itself to the collection and illustration of stories of horror indicates more than a morbid psychology. It indicates a profound belief in a theology of the two Kingdoms, the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Diaboli* of St. Augustine, though with an eschatological rigor which went beyond Augustine." J. Lawrence Burkholder, *The Problem of Social Responsibility From the Perspective of the Mennonite Church* (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1989), 47.

[10]*Dirk's Exodus* (Topeka: TK Printing, 1992), 131.

[11]In *Dirk's Exodus* the author makes room for shades of grey, seeds of doubt, especially in the character of the Inquisitor. Those who tortured and burned the Anabaptists were never given such ambiguous features in my youth. They were symbols of an evil religious and civic kingdom.

[12]The traditional position has been modified a great deal in some circles. Through the Korean war the Mennonites focused on the political implications of their religiously based positions of nonresistance. Since the Viet Nam era, Mennonite pacifism often blends with a political discussion of the most appropriate public policies to achieve a peaceful world. The shift is one of degree, but the shift in degree has become a shift in kind.

I remember a conversation with a faculty member at Bethel who found it difficult to understand the discussions of the Gulf War. The positions of some of the Mennonites seemed to be based on political and pragmatic reasons, but when challenged they were not open for discussion. What sounded like prudential political discussion, was not. When I suggested that the real driving force in the positions were religious, though heavily camouflaged, he understood why open discussion was so difficult.

[13]*Dirk's Exodus* (Topeka: TK Printing, 1992), 133.

[14]I suspect the popular term, "Shalom" was seldom used by Mennonites prior to the mid to late 20th century, or at best, was used to describe the life of the "true believers." It is not uncommon to hear Mennonites in the 1990s suggest the Mennonite concern for social justice is a defining characteristic. Historically Mennonites have not been concerned for social justice. They have been concerned for the church, the community of believers. Social justice was the domain of the princes and popes.

> INQUISITOR: You would disarm all Christendom and allow the infidel Turks to overrun all of Europe? Who would defend you Dutchman then?
>
> DIRK: Let God see to the defense of His people. Followers of Christ must trust God and live by the law of love.

Dirk's Exodus (Topeka: TK Printing, 1992), 131, 132.

[15]There was a time when faculty members at church related colleges found their professional identity in the college. Increasingly, faculty now find their identity in the discipline of study. Earlier one was more likely to modify the standards of the discipline to accommodate the mission of the church related college. Now the pressure is to modify the church related college to accommodate the needs of the discipline. I suspect a similar phenomenon is taking place among professionals in all church related institutions.

Dirk's Exodus

Morality Play and Modern Tragedy

by John K. Sheriff

James Juhnke's latest play, *Dirk's Exodus*, has much in common with the drama and literature popular at the time of the events dramatized, but the play's uniqueness and power lies in the fact that Juhnke's mirror reflects a twentieth-century perspective on the story of this sixteenth-century martyr. Inevitably this mirror reflects Dirk's story differently than did *The Martyrs' Mirror* of 1660. Or, to shift the metaphor, *Dirk's Exodus* is like a double exposed photograph of Dirk in his world and the playwright and us in our world.

Plays based on Bible stories and saints' lives had been integral to church worship and community festivals in Europe for more than two hundred years when Dirk's pursuer fell through the ice. One of the most popular forms of religious drama in sixteenth-century Europe was the morality play.

The morality play told a story about spiritual struggle and eventual triumph over sin, and it frequently incorporated into its content the religious and social controversies of the period. The hero, a man symbolizing mankind (as in the most well-known morality play, *Mankind*—a play translated into English from the Dutch), is typically confronted with a choice between good and evil, is tempted by forces of evil (the chief of which is called Satan, Vice, World, or Flesh), and then is saved from destruction by his own virtues or by the mediation of some superhuman power. The other characters in the play are little more than personifications of virtues and vices contending for his soul. Hence, the plays are allegorical. Meaning, not verisimilitude, is most important. The main action of the play is typically accompanied by farcical elements and low comedy that portray the moral conflict more realistically. A stock comic character was the jester (whether as storyteller, wit, or fool), who humorously spoke the truth in and out of season and wore a costume denoting that he was a servant to no one.

Because Juhnke subtitles his play "A Historical Drama," I am reminded that another popular form of literature in the sixteenth-century was "lives." For example, in 1559, the year of Dirk's martyrdom, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* was first published in translation in Europe and *The Mirror for Magistrates* was already in its second or third edition. The latter presented itself as a compilation of "instructive tragedies," a looking glass wherein readers might see how particular vices have been punished in others and thereby be moved to amend their own behavior. Stories of real persons, whether kings, princes, martyrs, or saints, were particularly valued as guides to moral and prudent conduct in this age because of the commonly held belief that human experience was everywhere the same—like causes produced like results.

It does not take much imagination to see that James Juhnke's play about Dirk in the hands of the Inquisition has all the marks of a morality play with a historical "life" at its center.

First of all, from the title on, the play is heavily allegorical and analogical. Hardly any character or action is believable to a modern audience. Dirk's returning to save his pursuer from drowning and his rufusing to accept the offer of the Inquisitor are as significant for their spiritual meaning as for their physical consequences.

Dirk is analogous to the Children of Israel. The comparison of Dirk's crossing on the ice and the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea is made repeatedly, in dialogue and chorus.

Imprisoned Dirk is analogous to imprisoned Paul. Dirk makes this explicit

himself and tells the story of Paul and Silas in prison to Gretchen Hendricks (I.2). Later (in II.9), Hans Hendricks, the jailer, finds that the prison door is unlocked and pretends he is going to kill himself. Even though Dirk and Hans have been talking for some minutes before the discovery of the unlocked door, even though Hans' act is purely histrionic (he has an imaginary knife), and even though Hans is blocking the door, Dirk says, "Don't do yourself any harm. I am still here"—which was of course what Paul had said to his jailer. Clearly, the analogy is important to Dirk or the playwright.

Moreover, Dirk is analogous to Christ as he cries out "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (I.9, II.6, II.11), to the plaintive Psalmist, and to the suffering Job (I.9). These overly obvious allusions would make for bad drama if it were not for the setting and central character of the play; here they work because they show how Dirk thinks.

Gretchen is the "born again" convert (the only member of the jailer's family baptized in this "parallel lives") whose allegorical role is to present a key Anabaptist concept (whether a sixteenth- or twentieth-century one, I do not know): baptism, being born again, and intellectual attainment are three versions of the same thing. For example, Gretchen's statement that learning to read is like being born again is followed immediately by her reading to Hans Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. The dialogue between Gretchen and Hans about Jesus' claim that "except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" puts the emphasis on water and shifts the meaning from the water of natural birth to the water of baptism.

The Inquisitor is perceived by Dirk as the "evil tempter." He is not as flamboyant as Vice in the typical morality play, but his interest in and insight into Dirk's psyche are acute. He sees immediately that the way to tempt Dirk is through Dirk's books, through Dirk's faith in his own understanding. He uses both the life of Thomas a Kempis and passages from *Of the Imitation of Christ* to tempt Dirk to "Come home. Return to the one holy Roman church—the body that gave you birth, that nourished you, that inspired your ideals" (II.5).

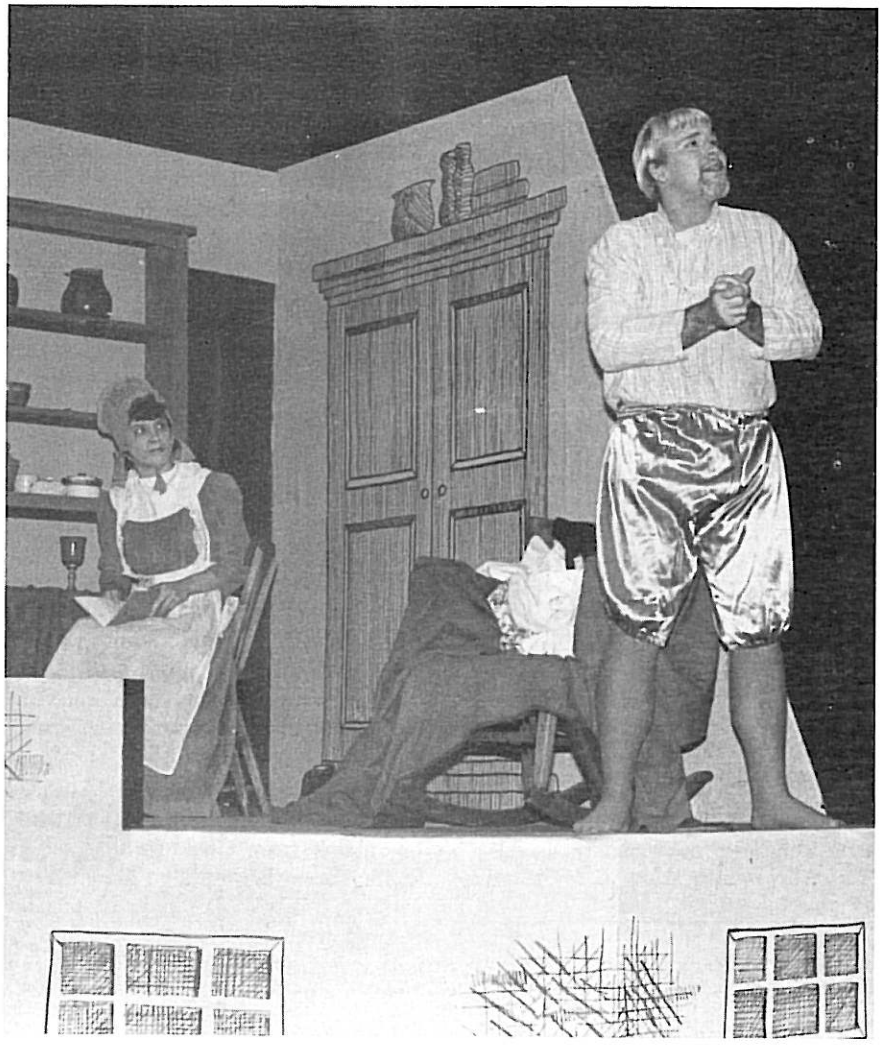
Hans Hendricks, like the archetypal jester, genuinely loves to entertain with his extemporaneous stories; he pretends to be a fool and curmudgeon to hide or disguise his true thoughts and character. Both his storytelling and masquerading are exaggerated and funny. But even Hans is pressed into service for the central analogies being developed. For example, Hans' "pretended" account to the Inquisitor of his dream of falling through the ice is an obvious reenactment of the Egyptians being swallowed up by the Red Sea. Hans, who appears to be illiterate and unknowledgeable about the Bible and certainly has never heard of Mr. Demus (Nicodemus), apparently knows well the story of the Children of Israel escaping through the Red Sea.

Other comic relief or low comedy is provided by the villagers Joos and Jan who are becoming increasingly drunk in the local ale house. The comic scenes always unaccountably pick up the theme of the preceding serious scene. Scene Nine of Act One ends with the Inquisitor telling Dirk, "I only want to know the truth," to which Dirk replies, "I have told you nothing but the truth." The next scene opens with Joos saying, "Let's drink to Menno Simons. He always told the truth."

More could be said about *Dirk's Exodus* as a morality play that uses allegory, exaggeration, and type characters at the expense of verisimilitude in order to teach a moral. Many persons with whom I have discussed the play saw the play pretty much as I have described it. For them, the play was about how Dirk stayed true to his faith and was saved in the end, even through death. Obviously, this was the way Dirk himself would have seen it.

However, I think we do not fully appreciate Juhnke's artistic achievement or the play's thematic complexity if we miss the ghostlier images of a modern

Hans and Gretchen (Bethel College performance)



tragedy amidst the bold, vivid, too stark images of the morality play. I suspect that if Juhnke had written this play close to the time of the events portrayed, he would not have made friends with persons identifying with either side of the dramatized conflict. The Inquisitor is presented too sympathetically and the martyr too ambiguously.

In the Renaissance, morality plays easily merged into history plays (e. g. Shakespeare's histories) and into tragedies (e.g., *Doctor Faustus*). A commonly held worldview continued to serve as a context to give unequivocal meaning to the passionate strivings of the heroes and heroines. However, aristotelian or classical tragedy in which protagonists gain perception into the truth of the human condition and of their own failings has not been written since the seventeenth century, certainly not in the twentieth century.

In modern tragedy, according to Oscar Mandel, "A protagonist who commands our earnest good will is impelled in a given world by a purpose, or undertakes an action of a certain seriousness of magnitude, and by that purpose or action, subject to the same given world, necessarily and inevitably meets with grave spiritual or physical suffering" *(A Definition of Tragedy)*. Accurate perception, correct understanding, *theoria,* the glimpse of something common to people in all times and places—that which principally accounted for the pleasure of tragedy according to Aristotle—is not part of modern tragedy.

In our time, according to Arthur Miller,

> The tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity. . . . Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly. . . . In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his 'tragic flaw,' a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing—and need be nothing—but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. ("Miller on *Death of a Salesman*," *New York Times,* February 27, 1949).

Dirk with his unwavering commitment to Anabaptist doctrine evokes a response like that evoked by Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* who was obsessed with an ideal of material success—the wrong dreams, his son called them, or like that evoked by Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge* who was driven by a subliminal incestuous love for his daughter.

While it is true that once we look through Dirk's eyes, we can never be emotionally indifferent to his fate, the judgments other characters make of Dirk and the thematic and psychological tensions implicit in the design of the play are ample evidence that there is something flawed about the character of Dirk.

Even though Dirk may be the most historically real character in the play, Gretchen and the Inquisitor are by far the two most believable, realistically portrayed characters.

Whereas Dirk always lives in allegory, seeing his experience as reenactments of all the biblical stories of right against might—with himself in the lead role, Gretchen is a very sane, observant, practical, and independent woman. She it was who left the prison door open the first time, who cuts through Hans' theatricality with the question, "Why do you pretend to be a fool?" (I.4) and the assertion, "I can take care of myself" (I.4). She is the first to question, perhaps upbraid, Dirk about returning to rescue her husband.

> Why didn't you run away, just leave him in the water? . . . He could have gotten out. He pretends to be helpless, but he always finds a way . . . he had to make a show of chasing you. But he'd just as soon be rid of you. Why didn't you realize that? Other people heard him shout. They might have pulled him out. You should have escaped. (I.2).

Near the end of the play when Dirk is alone in his cell (either in the wilderness or the Garden of Gethsemane in his own mind) wrestling with the Inquisitor's offer, he says,

> If I had not turned back at the river the first time, if I had somehow succeeded in escaping to exile, I would have forever remembered the cries of a drowning man I failed to rescue. (II.6)

Because of the disparity between his account and Gretchen's, we may remember a line from Chekhov that seems applicable to Dirk: "The illusion that exalts is dearer to us then ten thousand meaner truths" ("Gooseberries").

In her first appearance in the play Gretchen puts the question to Dirk that echoes in Dirk's mind and conscience (and the audience's) throughout the play: "If you are close to your children, why did you return from your escape?" (I.2). Dirk's immediate answer, like John Proctor's explanation for choosing death in Miller's *The Crucible,* appears on the surface to express concern for his children, but at bottom is concerned with his own identity: "They need a strong father, not one who is ashamed" (I.2).

Gretchen does not argue with others; she just goes her own way, providing a means of escape, asking questions, learning to read, reading the Bible, getting baptized. But the question she asked about the children has for the second time questioned Dirk's judgment and introduced the implicit conflict between Gretchen's practical morality and Dirk's rigid idealism.

Immediately following her question about his closeness to his children is the very sentimental third scene, a flashback to Dirk playing with his children, giving them hazelnut yo-yos, and teaching them the hazelnut song. The sentimentalism can be accounted for partly by the exaggerated, overly obvious "morality-play-character" of the play discussed earlier, but its more subtle function is to establish more fully the choice of living for his children or dying for his ideas.

In Dirk's "passion scene" after the prison door has again been left unlocked, this time by the Inquisitor, Dirk is thinking of his children, and comes as close as he ever comes to questioning his monomaniacal commitment to Anabaptist doctrine.

> Peter and Nelleken, where are you tonight? . . . [W]hat are you telling me? Are you saying, 'Be strong, father, resist the evil tempter'. . . . Or are you saying, 'Be prudent, father. Bend a little and survive.' (II.6)

The thematic trajectory of the play is clearly towards a respect for Gretchen, Hans, and the Inquisitor who bend a little, to survive yes, but also to reach out to people in need of help. The repeated motif of the children and the words of the hazelnut song are reminders of the dear relationships in the dynamic, multifaceted, wind-blown world that will be lost to Dirk if he refuses to accept it unless it conforms to his ideal.

The irreverence of Joos and Jan and Hans toward the Inquisitor has a quality of detachment that contrasts with the seriousness with which Dirk takes himself and the Inquisitor, which has ele-

vated a charge of heresy to apocalyptic proportions. Surprisingly, it is not Dirk's friends, but the Inquisitor who tries to bring a little objectivity and perspective to this singular case dealing with an obscure, potentially tragic person in the remote town of Asperen.

But Dirk who cannot bend if it means admitting he was wrong, can certainly bend his own perceptions of his experience to support his choice: "I would have forever remembered the cries of a drowning man"; "I could not look my children in the eye"; "I would forever remember the pleas of a believer I failed to baptize" (II.6). Here as elsewhere Dirk's perception of the events he recalls, of his own importance, and of the significance of his conflict are undercut by other elements in the play.

In the next to last scene of the play Joos and Jan at the ale house are drunk, speaking lines with biblical allusions, and singing the hazelnut song. The scene makes no sense and yet reverberates with the thematic tensions in the play that have been shown rather than stated. Joos and Jan have bent more than a little; they are expecting to hear the cock crow, heralding morning and perhaps their betrayal of themselves and Christ. Yet, in contrast to Dirk burning at the stake, their words take on a particular poignancy. Here is the scene in its entirety:

Joos: Drain the cup, man. The story's almost over.
Jan: I haven't heard the cock crow yet.
Joos: Tomorrow's another day, if we live to see it.
Jan: Will be, won't be, once has been.
Joos: Up on your feet now. Huup. We'll get there if you lean on me.
Jan: Forward . . . backward . . . .
Joos: Outside, in.

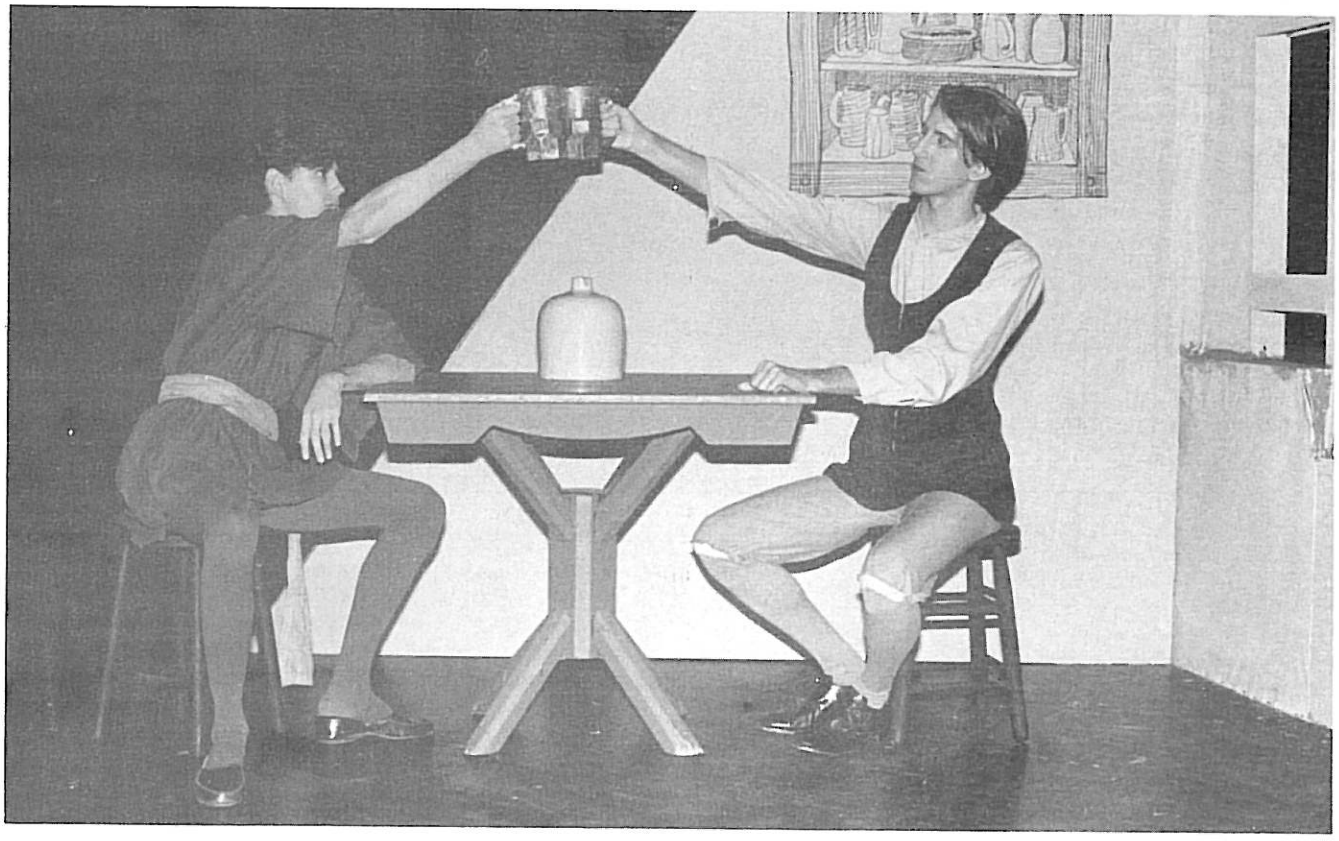
(They stagger out, singing,) "Hazelnut, hazelnut, how do you know,/ Wind on the windmill says we will have snow/ Turn like the windmill till wind doesn't blow/ Hazelnut, hazelnut, never let go."

Leaning on another, staggering, being whirled about, holding on are the images with emotions we associate with Dirk, the children, Joos and Jan, and our own lives. The lines of this scene stir us deeply, but we cannot say what they mean.

It's Dirk's tragedy because he couldn't walk away from a situation without feeling diminished, and he was unwilling to accept that at any price. We feel with him, but much in the play besides the words of the Inquisitor push us toward an understanding of Dirk as a man with "Children-of-Israel-in-one-man" and messianic delusions. By the end of the play we also understand and identify with Gretchen and the Inquisitor and even Hans, and our perceptions of right and wrong, good and bad are spinning like a hazelnut yo-yo. If we find ourselves powerfully moved by the children being led away by fostering adults as Dirk writes his last letter to them, it may be because we feel like they must have. What we most need is not accurate doctrine but loving relationships.

The achievement of this play is that no single interpretation, or series of interpretations, can be equal to the play. *Dirk's Exodus,* like all true art, is a sign of possibility, of possible meanings. One of the reasons this play about a Christian, Anabaptist martyr is powerful for a modern audience is that many of the emotions evoked by the play are inconsistent with the surface theme. The play makes us feel, but does not say,

Joos and Jan (Bethel College performance)



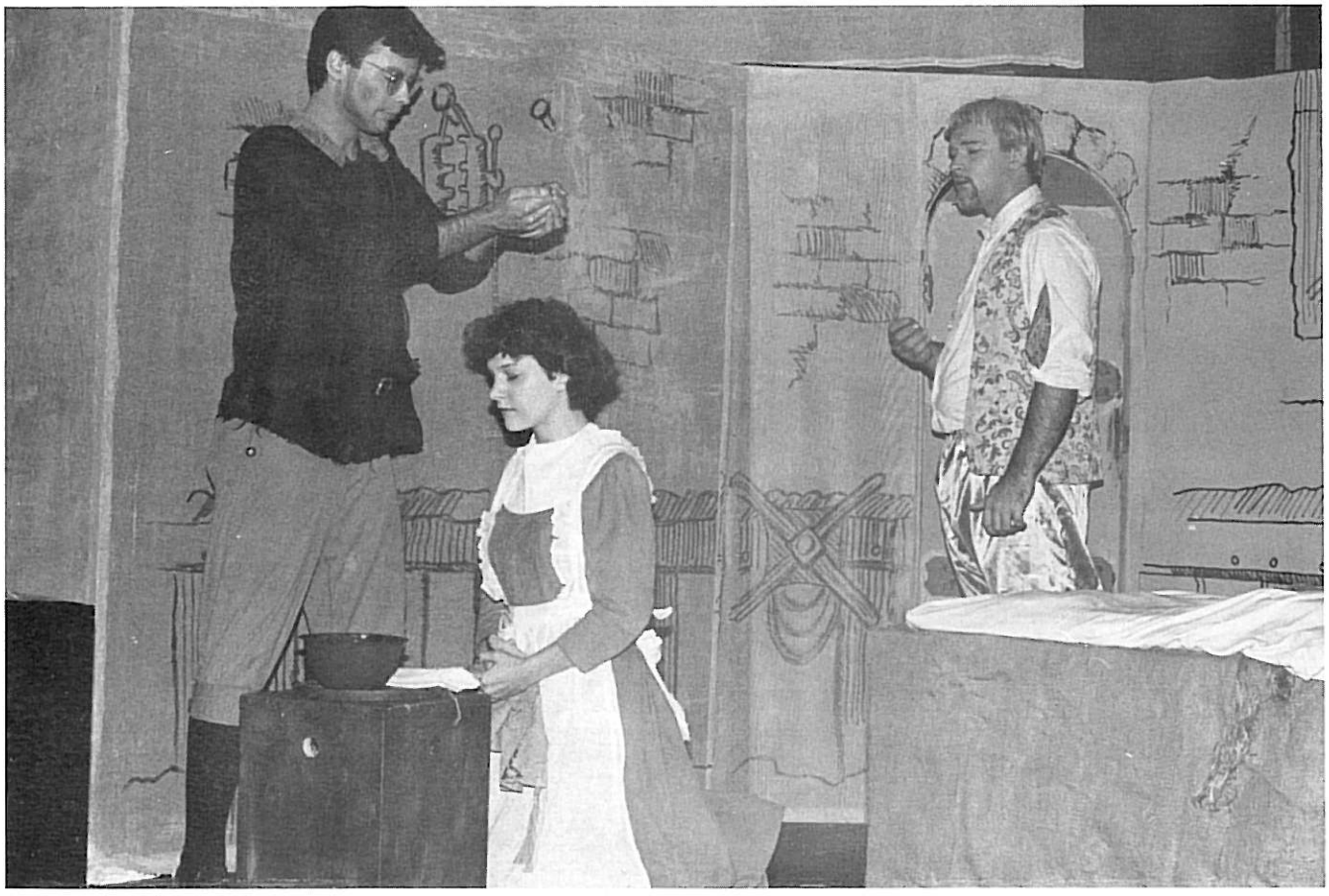
that a less prideful Dirk might have chosen to "love life more than the meaning of life" (Father Zosima in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*).

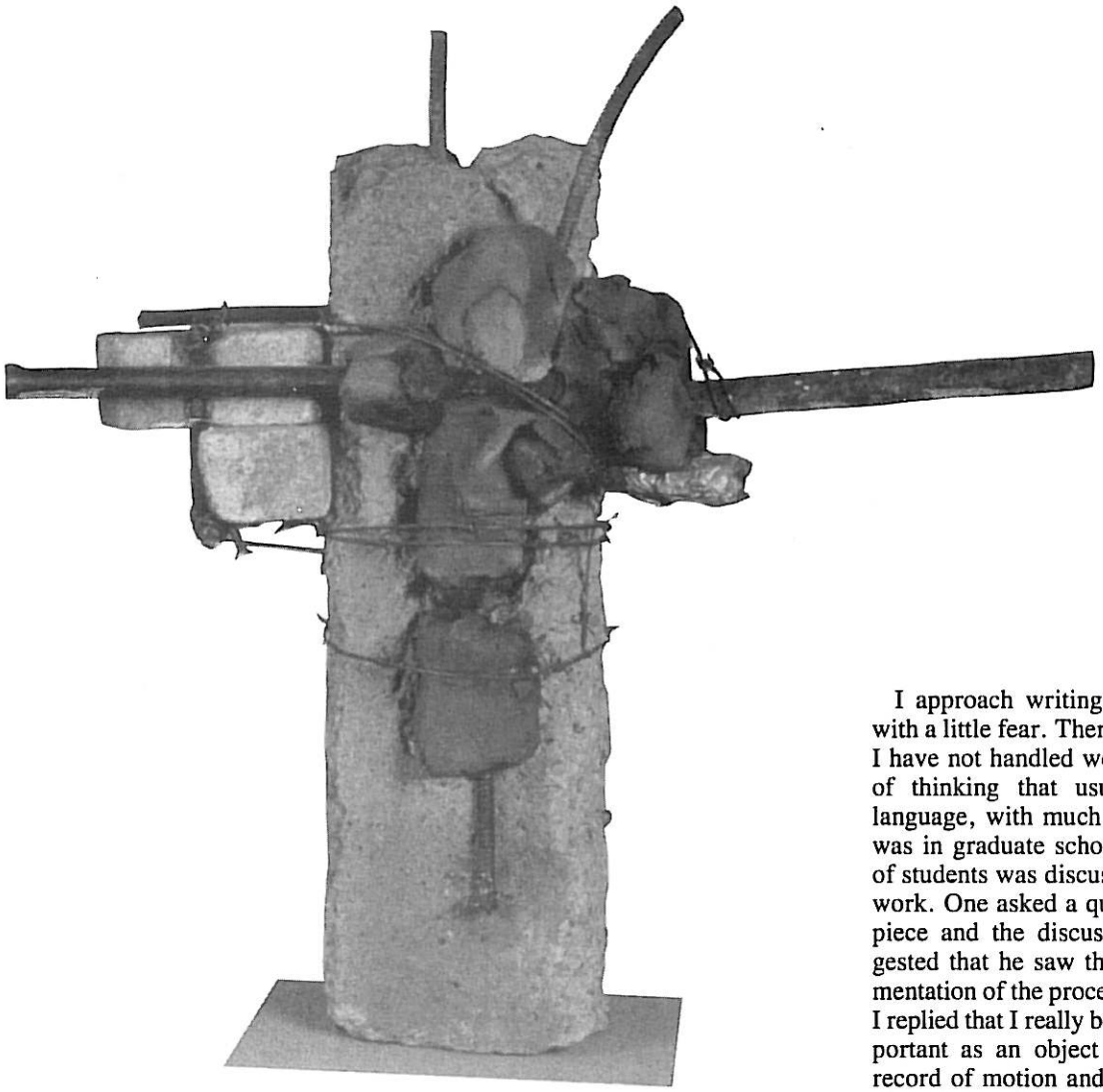
If Juhnke's play is read as a modern tragedy, the significance of the play for a Mennonite audience can hardly be exaggerated. By raising the possibility in the readers' and viewers' minds that Dirk is flawed, that a wiser, humbler, more loving person might have acted differently, the play raises to conscious awareness an unbroken myth that is fundamental to Anabaptist/Mennonite identity and culture—the myth of moral and intellectual superiority. This myth is implicit in the play in the comparison of Dirk crossing the river and returning to rescue his pursuer to the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea and celebrating the deaths of their enemies; it is implicit in the very title of the play. Dirk the Anabaptist is not only one of God's chosen people, but he is morally superior to other of God's chosen people. Dirk's faith in the superiority of his understanding and morality is everywhere apparent and made explicit by the Inquisitor. This faith has never been lost among Mennonites. Any student attending a Mennonite college who is not a Mennonite, any person in a community shared with Mennonites will affirm that this is true. The feeling of superiority accompanying this faith has been deeply ingrained over several generations and is not diminished even when religious faith and Mennonite communities are left behind. Harry Loewen's *Why I Am A Mennonite*, a collection of essays by a cross section of Mennonites, is contemporary evidence that if there is anything common to all Mennonites it is not to be found in religion, community, or biology. The commonality of all thirty-six contributors, the answer to the riddle posed in the book's title, is the myth of the superiority of Mennonites. For the writers in Loewen's book and the audiences at Juhnke's play who see the work only as a morality play, the myth is still an unbroken one.

If good art emerges when a culture is ripe for it and shows what has never yet been said, it is very possible that Juhnke, a Mennonite among Mennonites, has expressed more in his art than he could have consciously intended. Whether Juhnke meant for it to be or not, his mirror of the martyr is a modern tragedy that brings to awareness and refutes a myth that has been nurtured for four hundred years and has defined who Mennonites are up to the present day. Only time will tell what effect *Dirk's Exodus* will have on the Mennonite psyche, but I suspect it will bring some loss of faith and pride in a tradition that stretches back to Dirk, and some liberation from our jail cell of intellectual pride, from our messianic delusions, and from our persecution complex that has cut us off from our own children and the rest of Christ's kingdom on earth for hundreds of years.

The paradox and the power of Juhnke's play is that it celebrates one of the revered, courageous martyrs of the Anabaptist tradition and shows that Dirk was, after all, *not* like Christ.

Baptism of Gretchen (Bethel College performance)



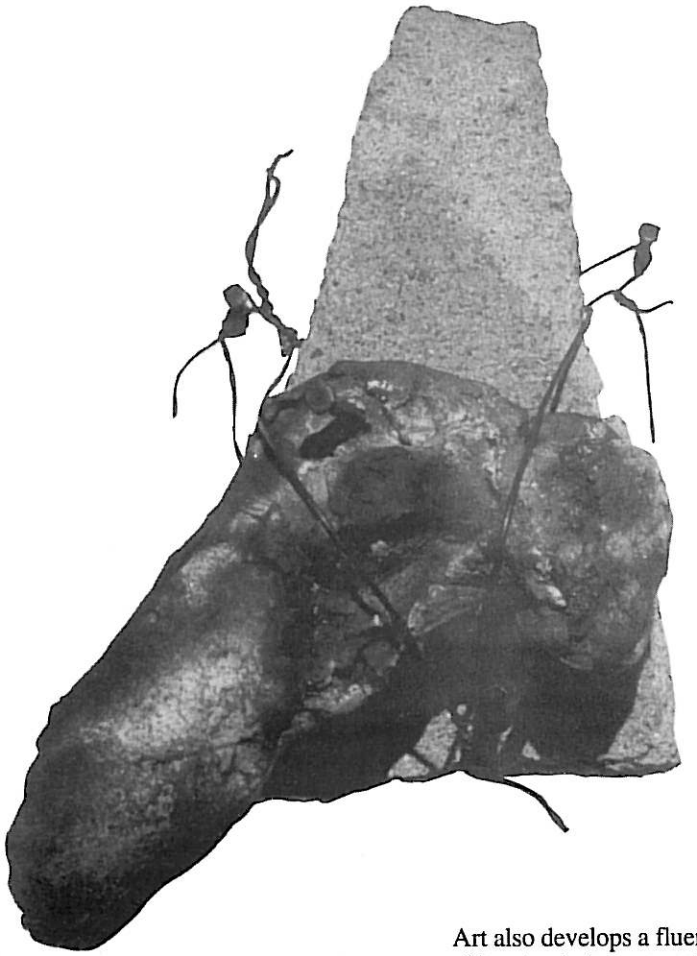


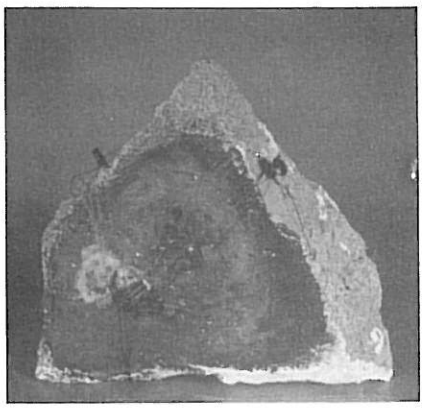
Merrill Krabill

Sculptor

I approach writing about my work with a little fear. There are times when I have not handled words, or the kind of thinking that usually undergirds language, with much finesse. When I was in graduate school a small group of students was discussing each of our work. One asked a question about my piece and the discussion leader suggested that he saw the piece as documentation of the process that formed it. I replied that I really believed it was important as an object more than as a record of motion and force. Thinking about it later in the day I changed my mind completely. That disconnectedness between what I do and what I say is an important initial comment. I do the work and then I have to figure out what words make sense.

I believe art teaches through its exploration of images; images like John Wayne, our grandparents' kitchen, Anne Frank, E. G. Kaufman, the park swing, and summer grass. An image can be a little package of experience that becomes a stencil we use to find pieces of meaning in what is happening around us. Our interpretation of a group of people coming down the street is significantly changed if the image we use is that of a gang instead of a party. The image we choose depends on the images we have stored. Part of art's potential significance is its juxtaposition of old images in new ways and its development of new images to add to the catalog.





Art also develops a fluency with composition that is important in understanding life. Composition is about establishing and refining relationships between stuff, as well as deciding what to include. Exploring a complex weave of relationships is how life and art are both done. They both benefit from experience in the other.

Once these arguments are made, however, I am never sure I have changed the significance of art for anyone who believes it is decoration on the substance of life. More importantly, I also have the feeling I have lost the heart and soul of what the endeavor is all about. I wish I could write more in verse instead of prose.

What I hope happens when I talk about the work is that connections are set up for viewers to follow into the pieces. The most that I want from the writing is to encourage more looking. I want to raise questions much more than I want to answer any.

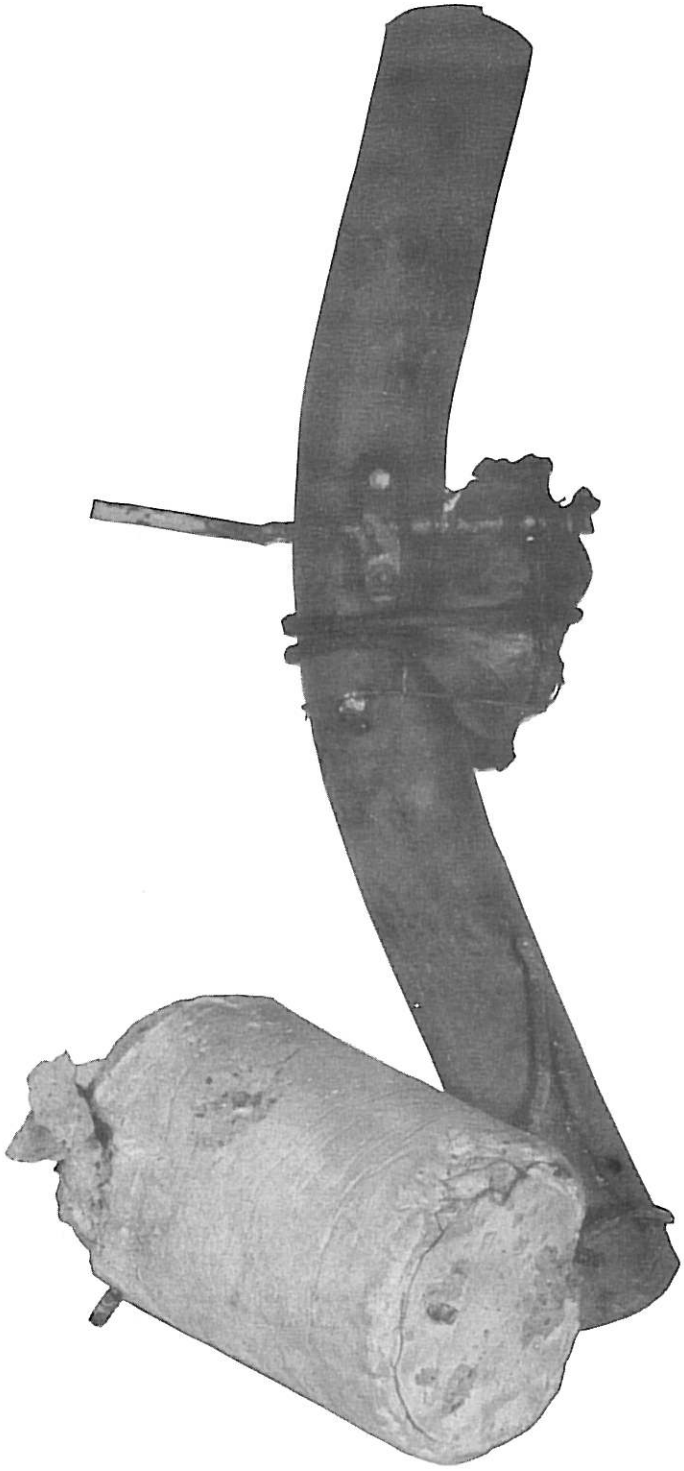
I usually begin talking about my work by describing several images that seem central to my understanding of life. I am not sure how it happens, but I know those perspectives end up in the work somewhere.

One is that the experience of life has, somewhere deep in its core, a profound sadness. Not to deny life's joy and richness as well, but everybody suffers in one way or another and some suffer terribly. To not feel the pain, even if the pain is not your own, is to cut off an essential connection with people around you. The paradox (maybe) is that feeling that pain sometimes touches the truest beauty. I think it was Poe who talked of a beauty that excites the soul to sorrow.

That core in some of my pieces is a hidden center. Sometimes it is a void or vessel and sometimes it is colored glass. I feel it is precious, and often it is broken and bleeding.

The primary image in much (and perhaps all) of my recent work at one level or another is the crucifixion. For me it is the ultimate paradox and embodiment of life's mystery. It is the end nobody wants and the model of life lived with integrity. It is complete suffering and complete peace. It is the most horrific of images and the purest expression of beauty. The list could go on.

Somehow all of the pieces are connected to a search for how to live well in a broken world. The pieces are bound and nailed together. But they have the strength of your grandparent's saw or sewing machine that will outlast the one you bought last year. They do look for beauty, for an ideal, but it is a different kind of beauty than we usually think of. It is strength that comes from healing and persistence. It is complex, reworked, broken, reassembled. It is an order that comes out of struggle. The beauty I seek is that of the person who with integrity endures; who is willing to tackle life in its fullness—good and bad, who is not avoiding the pain that is inevitable, who still works towards wholeness and grace.



Naomi Duke

Finding my Grandfather

I grew up in a Mennonite home in Oklahoma. On my father's side there were grandparents and many aunts and uncles and cousins. But my other grandma, my mother's mother was an "Enjelscha" and there were few relatives. I knew there was something unspoken in my mother's history, stories untold and forbidden. Her mouth would tighten and her face become pale and drawn and she would say, "You don't have to know everything," when we asked questions about her father. My oldest sister came home one day with the knowledge. She had learned it from a neighbor woman. Our grandpa had killed himself.

I understood then why I felt like such an outsider. It wasn't because I couldn't sing or play the piano like some of my cousins. It was because I had an English-speaking, non-Mennonite grandmother (though she had been baptized and joined the church), and my Mennonite grandfather had killed himself. When we left there as a family and moved "into the world," 1200 miles from that community, I was excited to leave it behind.

But I didn't leave it. I carried my "mixed blood" and my "mixed loyalties" with me. I was like my Mennonite father and more like his sisters, my aunts. When I looked at their old pictures, I saw my own familiar face. And when I had sons I wanted them to grow up to be pacifists like my father. But my mother's father was missing from my life, his family line like Jung's shadow, repressed and negative. He died before my birth and all I knew of him was how he died.

After my own father died my mother began to talk about her early life in Oklahoma, about the way her father preached at funerals and took her with him to sing when she was a girl, and about the young pacifist men who came to him for help in World War I. She talked about his sickness before his death—how he cried and couldn't work, and how her brother found him one Saturday morning, hanging from the barn rafter. The family had a quick funeral the next day and he was buried off in a corner of the church cemetery away from other Mennonites—and they never talked about him after that.

In 1990 my sisters and I went back to Oklahoma. We stopped at Newton for two days to use the Bethel College Library to try to fill in the gaps in our family chart. I looked under my mother's name and there was a listing—the name of her father and the title of a document—the minutes of a meeting that had been held in December of 1920 to discuss the teaching of German, forbidden during World War I. Both of my grandfathers were at that meeting, and my mother's father was designated the "Schreiber." I learned that my grandfather was a literate man with a concern for the education of children. The pages of Old German script were an important find—the story of his life, not just of his death, was unfolding for me.

Letters to my Grandfather

For some word of you who died
before my birth, I asked a cousin,
"Do you remember my grandpa?"
"I was twelve, went to his funeral,
saw his body in a coffin,
the rope burns on his neck."

I have your image, a large man
wearing a dark suit, the house
you built a backdrop. You posed
with Grandma and three well-kept children.
The camera caught some chaos,
a shed unpainted, tufts of uncut grass.

In archives at Bethel College I found
words you had written, with a pen dipped
in black ink, more than seventy years ago—
old German script my mother read to me.
Your hand had written across the lined
paper, touched the page I held.

The farm and the house you built,
the knoll with the Arapaho grave,
its bones disturbed, settled in against
the Oklahoma plain after your dying.
I sat in a wooden pew at your church
for your mother's funeral. Fifteen years
she grieved your spirit's quick leaving.

In the cemetery where a son
had your bones moved, your plot
sinks toward an unknown center.
There in the valley full of bones
your bones are dry bones
and I wish for flesh and sinews
and breath for your words.

I wait for sleep hoping that if I shape
your image in a dream, you will grace
it with your spirit. Awakening to your
name I have dreamed of footprints in blue
carpet leading to my bed, a deep touch
at the juncture where thigh meets hip,
as the angel at Bethel touched Jacob.

Naomi Duke

#2

Seventy years ago you talked
of ending it all. This year we found
where your bones were buried.
As bones do, they remained years
beyond your burial. Clever with knots,
you stopped your own breathing,
knotted a rope around rafter and neck,
put an end to your heart's beating.
Blood and flesh decay, next to earth
become dust; bones hold up.

My sisters and I drove
down the road past where
a gate you hung once swung
under the words, "Pleasant Vale."
Years later the corn crib decayed,
and the barn burned—
burned the rafter away.

We talk of you with Mother,
your daughter, now eighty-seven,
of the way your children
walked to school, ate and worked
with you absent, not there, not at the table
eating, not at the barn milking, not
at your chair kneeling to pray,
your voice not humming or scolding.

Not there. And the large memory
you wrote for them was of the way
you died, quickly, alone, no note,
no apology, no expression of love.

Though your name is hidden
in my family chart behind a father's
and a husband's, you remain large
in my mind as Joseph the dreamer
in the mind of Jacob.

#3

Antigone confused me, her persistence,
even to death, in dusting the corpse
of her brother. A body buried
or unburied decays, is abhorent
after the soul slips out like a birthing.

But bodies demand disposal and where
they're left tells a story. Those pushed
into a pit near Tolstoy's woods, tell
of Stalin's mania for seeing farmers, some
with our family name, as alien and enemy.

This spring my three sisters and I
wandering around Hatchett cemetery
found your grave where you
had been buried the second time,
moved to respectability by an heir.

Your first burial had been five miles down
a back road in a churchyard where
prickly pears and crabgrass moved in closer
to the head-stones of your Polish parents
at peace next to each other in Oklahoma.

There, too, other family graves—Amilie,
your sister, who died in childbirth at thirty.
The children who survived her were charred
in the heat of a morning house fire, buried
in one plot with no stone—three boys and a girl.

When you stopped your life, your body,
large and healthy looking, was deacon-carried
to the churchyard fence, your grave
where cows could reach across a wire
to graze uncut grass, yards from the sanctified.

Your second grave the unchurched yard
at Hatchett Cemetery. A stone marks
your place next to the daughter who would
die young of an abortion. Together you lie
under headstones and clipped green grass.

Julia Kasdorf

How do we know who we are? We tell ourselves stories.

As a community, Mennonites say we are *this* and not *that* because Jesus was crucified and because a handful of enlightened intellectuals rose up against city council and cathedral early in the sixteenth century. We repeat stories of our biological or spiritual forebears who stood firm in the face of persecution, fire, famine, and emigration on dank, reeking ships. We believe that the stories from our collective past may somehow teach us how to live in the world today. We tell our children those stories so that they, too, will feel bound to a long line of narration that reaches back to Amsterdam, to Zurich, to Jerusalem, to Babylon, to Egypt, to Eden.

Many of our stories share an obsession with the loss of a place—whether through expulsion, deliverance, or escape—and a fear of extinction. In telling stories, we maintain our connection to places in history and preserve a sense of ourselves in the world. In these ways, they resemble my poems, which seem to come almost always as a consequence of loss. In writing, I often seek to restore some kind of connection. Moreover, recent work has been preoccupied with preserving an endangered world—bearing witness through a careful account of particular details.

Perhaps this is because my parents grew up in a small Amish/Mennonite community and then left it. As a child, I spent summer months there wading in pasture creeks, surrounded by grandparents, cousins, and cows. Looking back, I see that my home was flavored with a kind of realistic nostalgia, an ambiguous feeling that contained almost equal portions of sadness for the loss of a seamless, safe world, and relief in having escaped its confines. The sense of separation was probably too fresh to lapse into the ordinary sort of quilt-collecting sentimentality.

Poetry's subject might always be nostalgia, poet Gerald Stern has written in "Notes from the River"—not simply remembrance, but a concurrent sense of loss and imagined union.

> I see it (nostalgia) as an intense desire to be reunited with something in the universe from which we feel cut off. I see it as a search for the permanent. As a celebration of lost values. As a reaction to war, crisis. As a reaction to disenchantment. As an escape from faceless society. As a reaching out for life. As a hatred of estrangement. As a quest for that "other place." As a response to nonrecognition. As a response to bourgeois indifference and lying, to totalitarianism, to complexity. As a dream of justice and happiness. As a product of slavery, of the orphanage, and the jail. As a smell from another world. As a combination of absence and presence, the far and the near, the lost and the found.

Perhaps Mennonites have always been a nostalgic people, slightly estranged from the dominant culture. We carry on our bodies "the smell from another world"—not just the Old World or an ancient one, but one that only exists in our noblest imagining: a peaceable kingdom where we are not separate from one another, nature, or God. All of our stories of loss and leaving approximate this loss, and in telling them we express our longing for that "other place." It is what we remember *and* what we desire that tells us who we are.

It follows then that I began to write the poems of Mennonite memory that are published here while I was a graduate student at New York University, long after I'd left Goshen College. Though not conscious of it, I needed to carry the smell of the Mennonite world into a strange place before I could begin to recognize it, both putrid and sweet. As one finally sees the grammatical structure of his mother tongue by learning a foreign language, so in New York City I began to see how stories construct and support Mennonite identity. Marrying a Mennonite Brethren of the Dutch/Russian tradition, I encountered other stories—familiar yet strange—and another community.

These poems are the result of discontinuity and a fierce desire to forge connection. What they have taught me, finally, is that every group defines itself through difference, and that all groups can claim that they are *this* and not *that* because of what they do or what has been done to them. Buried within such assertions are the seeds of violence and intolerance, whether in the communities that border my Brooklyn neighborhood or elsewhere on the globe. Although distance may show a thing more clearly, indulging in nostalgia for comfort and not for understanding amounts to intellectual and spiritual sloth. A knowledge of our history and a fondness for our own difference that does not lead us, lovingly, into the world is brutally incomplete.

Julia Kasdorf

The Body Remembers

Before they were married, Opa slept
on the floor beside Oma's bed.
The wedding feast was just
cabbage soup, not a bone
to cook in the village.
Even in Canada, Oma stewed borscht
without beef. In California, among orchards,
your mother cooks *geschmuade Bonen*
without ham. The body remembers
famine, but I make *Kartoffelsuppe*
thick with cream and stroke
your white ribs with my lips.
I kiss your stomach, innocent as a fish,
and crush my small, olive breasts
on your chest. The blades
of our pelvises collide
as we pull and thrust
against all the suffering
sown in our cells, all those stories
of bodies enduring torture and hunger
for God. We knock together
like two muddy shoes, knocking
history loose from our limbs,
knocking through Zurich and Danzig,
knocking off kulak and milksop
(all the names they once called us),
knocking until we are nothing special,
just a woman and man on a floor
in Brooklyn where Arab melodies
and Burmese cooking waft
through our windows like ghosts.

(for David)

Mennonites

We keep our quilts in closets and do not dance.
We hoe thistles along fence rows for fear
we may not be perfect as our Heavenly Father.
We clean up his disasters. No one has to
call; we just show up in the wake of tornadoes
with hammers, after floods with buckets.
Like Jesus, the servant, we wash each other's feet
twice a year and eat the Lord's Supper,
afraid of sins hidden so deep in our organs
they could damn us unawares,
swallowing this bread, his body, this juice.
Growing up, we love the engravings in *Martyr's Mirror:*
men drowned like cats in burlap sacks,
the Catholic inquisitors,
the woman who handed a pear to her son,
her tongue screwed to the roof of her mouth
to keep her from singing hymns while she burned.
We love Catherine the Great and the rich tracts
she gave us in the Ukraine, bright green winter wheat,
the Cossacks who torched it, and Stalin
who starved our cousins while wheat rotted
in granaries. We must love our enemies.
We must forgive as our sins are forgiven,
our great uncle tells us, showing the chain
and ball in a cage whittled from one block of wood
while he was in prison for refusing to shoulder
a gun. He shows the clipping from 1916:
"Mennonites are German milksops, too yellow to fight."
We love those Nazi soldiers, who, like Moses,
led the last cattle cars rocking out of the Ukraine,
crammed with our parents—children then—
learning the names of Kansas, Saskatchewan, Paraguay.
This is why we cannot leave the beliefs
or what else would we be? why we eat
til we're drunk on shoo-fly and moon pies and borscht.
We do not drink; we sing. Unaccompanied on Sundays,
those hymns in four parts, our voices lift with such force
that we lift, as chaff lifts, toward God.

Along Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn

Three Hasidic boys talk like Amishmen,
hands in their long black coats that flap open
at the knees, heads nodding under hats.

They do not raise their pale, Prague cheeks
as I walk by. I am the world to them
as I would have been to my father

who once stood like this, speaking low German
in a knot of boys at the edge of an auction lot.
Which of these will be the one to leave

our neighborhood of lavish bakeries
closed up tight for Passover,
as though leavening might leak into the streets

and keep the Children of Israel in Egypt.
I bless the one who leaves in anger or hurt,
bless the memory of his first cheeseburger

and the mind that returns for the rest of his life
to this corner, to the Hebrew storefronts
where old men drink dark tea in tumblers.

I praise equally the ones who stay
clustered like Amish farms in the dusk,
no phone lines running in, no circle

of light in the farm yards—
house, barn, coop, and crib
on the edge of their fields.

Clear Night at the End of the Twentieth Century

The light we call stars has traveled
a great distance to shine above this field
rimmed by black pines in New Hampshire.
Whatever we see in each other must be
the distance we've come in our lives
and all we've brought with us. Though we shared
the same dinner tonight, the food that sustained
our parents still sustains us:
    the pig slaughtered and smoked
    in a cold November farm yard,
    the tray of herrings in sour cream
    from a chilled case at the Appetizing.
Though we cling to the few words of Yiddish
that match Pennsylvania Dutch,
our mothers could never have spoken,
and that distance also exists between us.
It is as though we try to make love
and our bed keeps filling with forebears
who bicker at such a furious pitch
we cannot tell the oppressors from victims.
Jews rode in cattle cars east to their deaths,
and the wives and children of Mennonites
rode west in those cars, bound for Berlin,
delivered from Stalin. Opa wore
a Hitler moustache and slicked his hair
in the thirties, reading German propaganda
in Canada, refusing to speak
one more word of Russian. Old and blind,
he still detests red, even in sunsets.
You said if you saw someone drowning,
the only kind of person you might not save
would be German, but you probably would
throw a rope even to one of us.

(for Jerry)

Leonard Neufeldt

I Hear Voices

The prospect of sitting down to work on a poem usually brings on feelings not unlike the anticipation aroused by planning a visit to a floral park. Perhaps these feelings are inversely proportionate to the frequency of sitting down to compose or of driving, say, to the Chicago Botanic Gardens. I wish I could test that possibility. Which is to confess that, among other things, my duties as researcher, editor, classroom instructor, dissertation director, committee-drudge, conference drone-bee, visiting lecturer, and sporadic administrator have left little time for poetry writing. This condition would be a godsend if I agreed with those who view poetry as a form of dissipation in civil society. But I care deeply about poetry, and have caught myself imagining what life would be like if the avocation of poetry writing were my vocation. Not that academic life is unfulfilling. Far from it. Nonetheless, I search for time to work on poems these days. When I find it, I more often than not pay attention to voices somehow implicated in my ethnic history and in the culture of Yarrow, British Columbia, a hamlet of Russian Mennonites most of whom emigrated from the USSR in the 1920s.

It hasn't always been so. Although born and raised in a home in which the arts were respected (my father was a businessman turned music teacher in the central Fraser Valley in B.C.), respect for poetry meant memorizing passages from major poets in English literary history—and some lines from Kipling, since Canada belonged to the British Empire, and later to the Commonwealth. We recited poetry in the classroom and in the privacy of our own thoughts. I don't recall shouting Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, or Goethe across the rows to other pickers in the berry fields or hopyards. And I never read a poetry book cover to cover as a teenager unless it had been assigned, although I normally read two or three books a week.

Introduced as a college undergraduate to Victorian and modernist poetry, I was impressed enough to start a few poems—in the style, I thought, of my new mentor, T. S. Eliot. In my case this mentoring was a surefire recipe for failure. But some failures turn out to be guardian angels.

It was as a young assistant professor of English at the University of Washington when I completed and published my first poems. Today I'm uncertain as to what prompted this effort: perhaps something that had been waiting within, perhaps the ghost of Roethke (who had died a few years earlier) or the aura of his many disciples in the Puget Sound region, perhaps the procession of visiting major poets who taught at Washington for a semester or two, perhaps my office neighbor, David Wagoner. In any event, I published just enough poems to become an object of concern to my chairman, Robert Heilman, who reminded me that I had been hired as a literary scholar and that my tenure review would rest on that fact. But Heilman loved poetry. I shouldn't have been surprised that he secretly sent Arnold Stein my way with a poker-faced request for permission to thumb through my thin folder of poems. Stein, a master of diplomatic candor who had read and edited many of Roethke's preliminary and intermediate drafts, always tested but never alienated those whose work he critiqued. He helped me identify several poems potentially strong enough for a published collection. These soon became the core of my first book of poems, *A Way of Walking* (1972). An associate editor of a poetry

books series nowadays, I would recommend that this book not be accepted for publication.

During the next 15 years I made poetry writing a regular avocational activity. Retrospectively I can discern a development during these years of experimentation and muddling that yielded no new poetry book or distinctive subject or voice despite my pursuits of numerous impulses and agendas. I was intent on finding my very own voice, and I was flattered by a few editors who charcterized my work as "original." Although this search for the holy grail of originality produced many poems and publications in literary journals and magazines throughout the U.S. and Canada, I have to say the search was misdirected. It kept me from *hearing* voices that speak to each other, to me, and within me in behalf of stories to which I belong, which I cannot deny, and which have become the living matrix of *Raspberrying* (1991) and *Yarrow* (1993). These books consist of many poems, yet each book is also a single poem. Working on these collections has been the most enjoyable and spiritually rewarding writing experience of my life.

Since ethnicity is a familiar analytical category and desirable personal accouterment in American universities today, it's deceptively easy to declare or explain one's ethnic roots. Moreover, a one-eighth Jewish or one-quarter Shawnee quotient or an Azerbaijani in-law serves better than a family connection to British royalty. "Nobody but us ethnics here." Fine and dandy, but that hasn't been my point. As individuals, I'm convinced, we are not unitary, unified, self-sufficient, and separate beings. Each of us is a plurality, a large, inconsistent, dynamic, and richly suggestive compendium of interests, convictions, values, and voices. North-American Mennonites, with their incredible reaches of cultural memory and complex horizons of historical and social experience, should have little difficulty consenting to what I've just noted. Why I didn't claim this archive sooner or explore it more energetically I can't say. It should also go without saying that any attempt to define the essential Mennonite writer or writing or the distinctive Mennonite voice is both misguided and unhelpful.

I hear each voice seeding the stillness
of the spirit.
But listening to each I hear many
voices,
Even my own—it is never quite the
same. It is always
Surprising, like the sailboat's loneliness at noon,
And I want to take out my violin,
two strings broken,
And play like Paganini.

Leonard Neufeldt

YARROW

you pass through me,
scattering wind inside trees,
softest shudder in the spine
not letting go,

with your damp green fields, small roads,
simplest paths, people stepping out the door

to orchard grass growing
through fallen blossoms
at evening we shook a tree
until the unripe fruit
fell, startling birds,
and they rose together
emptying the sky. Behind the cry
of the birds we heard the moon rise.

Still waters of an early summer,
canals always filled,
and choirs grown large with those who have
returned. You prepare tables.
You know whose children we are
A psalm wanting to speak its love
to those who learned it by heart
but forgot the words, too much expected.

This valley of mountainous shadows,
roses along Stewart Road
red with remembrance, the golden cedar
darker on its other side, splintered edges
of planks across the stream.
When an uncle helped me from the stream
because I was drowning, he said
we have our angels, even Yarrow.

The path sliding down to the right,
away from the mountain, a rope silver-knotted
waist high, swinging vacantly
in a melee of stones and grass,
through a tangle of skeletal boy and wire
where the channel shifted years ago.
If not overcome by water,
you will live among blue mountains
and green trees. The fields start here,
bending suddenly up
from the water, like young boys at nightfall
finding their clothes in the high grass,
certain they hear voices calling.

Something to catch the sleeves
of those who remember the path to tables
by the stream—
uncertain of their places
and the words of the psalm others begin
in four parts and a descant rising together
like birds to fields beyond.

THE SCIENCE OF SIGNS IN YARROW

> "the activity of interpretation is a sign
> of life, and its suppression or silencing
> is a sign of death"—Patrick O'Donnell,
> *Passionate Doubts.*

Already there and gone, through ruined choirs
of poplars on Cemetery Street. You're now
on the other side of the dyke, by the river,
remembering long epitaphs that surprised you,
gave too much of you away
in the silence of the trees.
"Dich will ich preisen du ew'ge Liebe,
Dich will ich loben so lang ich leb' ":
so many new graves. Perhaps skeletal hands
locked forever in prayer have let go;
perhaps sand-filled stares
no longer argue justice.
Because you didn't stay and many others did
they won't bury you there.

The river seems closer now.
A salmon drifts downstream belly up,
its red-and-white washed by broken shadows
at the shore. A gull below you
steps sideways over stones,
waiting for the fish to beach
and you imagine
a boy on a high bank waiting.

With a spade he measures distances,
starting where the Vedder bends north,
where the sand has always been dry,
where it withdraws into itself
like a gull no longer hungry;
where water never before stuttered in
from under the dryness riverward.

The blade shines with water and light
as he digs out of sand collapsing
on all sides. Here, by the Vedder,
another specific way for a boy to begin to die.

You walk back to the top of the dyke
and remove your shoes. Poplars shimmer
in the heatwaves.
Far off, beyond the cemetery, you hear a cry
and you wonder where you left the spade.

Leonard Neufeldt

FRASER VALLEY STRING ORCHESTRA

Our tightwad violin teacher, also conductor,
would hitch his pants twice *larghetto*
ritardando so they could settle down
to where they'd been,
and then his hands were over us like a holy man's,
benediction that could hush any audience,
even Yarrow's berry pickers,
loggers, hopyard slashers, dairy farmers,
and volunteer firemen,

and music streamed from us.
We moved together in a breath
like an endless field of grass in wind
or quiet rollers of an earthquake
in the schoolyard, the stage floor
near the cellos and double bass alive.

At intermission we couldn't remember
a single entry or note in advance,
but we were unafraid.
Take those nights when mosquitoes
wheedled through my bedroom window screen,
tuning in the dark in twos and threes
and starting together as one,
exchanging melodies, positions, tempo
like new orchestra members practicing
face to face in the wings.
Too warm in bed after the final concert
I could hear violins singing out
with the mosquitoes to the edge of town,
across the U.S. border, through the mountains,
under the faint arc of the Lion's Gate
suspension bridge, beyond the Pacific
toward a small blue planet, well-lit overhead,
revolving slowly with sounds, resinous
with open notes, double stops,
crescendos, muted refrains, *ritardandos,*
perfect vibrato in the upper positions,
and six cellos indistinguishable,
the way I dreamed for years of playing,
without teacher

or conductor. Out there,
everything memorized in the dark blue
of the new world, fingers came down
where they pleased, no matter how much was left
of our former life. No one
could stop us.

No one.

HENRY BARTSCH

Why did you smile at the three of us kids
if we watched without a word?
Did you take our silence for genius?
Although you knew stories from memory,
every detail, you never knew
what you were going to say, hose in hand
in the evening, watering overgrown flower gardens.
I thought you didn't like to speak
because you knew everything,

having learned to read in Siberia,
Winnipeg, Belgian Congo, Niagara
Peninsula. In Yarrow you read Pushkin,
Tolstoy, Goethe, Rilke, Buber, Tillich,
Niebuhr, and preached on the waters
of Babylon, how the world loses us,
why believers in exile don't crack up,

and crowded departments of a small
psychiatric hospital you'd directed.
The evening you explained to your neighbor
a new book you'd almost finished
on why people in Canada and the States
don't get better, he smiled and nodded.
You must have thought
he was remembering books he kept
on the day's receipts, Funk's Meat Market,
and the beautiful young girl he had hired
only yesterday.

You walked home to this room, this very bed,
dropped of sheer satisfaction, the clumsy pain
of the heart keeping you awake, pairing itself
like man and wife, giving strength
to look closely at the gray-flowered wallpaper,
cluttered desk, and door open as always
for muffled sounds that used to catch hold
like a fire in the stove and help you sleep.
"It's alright," you said;
"actually everything's fine."

RENT IS TEN PERCENT LESS FOR RETIRED MINISTERS

It's not that he ever was careless,
but now
he forgets his key in the lock.
When his wife was alive
they never locked a door.

He looks for someone sitting nearby
or standing outside half in sun
and half in the shade of the red beech.
Like elephants, he thinks
and hunts again in desk and closet
for letters he knows he wrote to young men
who left for university right after baptism.
And the long letter to his daughter.
Why did she study opera
in Europe against his wishes?
He knows how important this search is,
to have something you wrote speak to you
when you find it.

In his sleep
he still hears himself writing,
sometimes ahead of himself
like the songleader dragging the pianist
along, but Mr. Sawatsky's Steinway
was always a nod of the head behind
my children were left only
with happiness, out of control
like our country
and he sits up wide awake
almost smiling.

Book Reviews

Sara Stambaugh. *The Sign of the Fox.* Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1991. Pp. 182. ($16.95—hardcover)

Sara Stambaugh's second novel, *The Sign of the Fox,* follows the adventures of Catherine Landis, eighteen-year-old daughter of Gideon and Elizabeth Landis, Mennonite farmers in 1828 Pennsylvania. When Gideon falls on hard times, Catherine is hired out to the kitchen of "The Fox," a nearby inn run by the Carpenters, a German family who have anglicized their German name—Zimmerman—and assimilated into society. Squire Carpenter has become a social climber who schemes constantly both to enrich his house and to rise to higher social stations.

The Fox provides the central stage for most of the novel's actions, and there Catherine encounters a cast of interesting characters: Eleanor, the Carpenter's flighty daughter, who has separated from her husband; Nick McMaster, an aspiring politician; Gumbo Jim, a freed slave; Jake Good, a drover who vies for Catherine's affections.

Two main plot lines control the novel. One is the disintegration of Catherine's family, progressing from the need to hire out the children, to the mother's death, to the threat of Gideon's livelihood as the result of Carpenter's manipulations. Acting on privileged knowledge about a railroad proposed for their area, he tried to cheat Gideon out of a tract of land and an adjacent quarry, both of which will be valuable when the railroad comes through. The other main plot follows Catherine's developing independence and romance with Good, which proceeds despite her initial inclinations to the contrary.

Across these two stories, the novel skillfully spins a web of interrelated subplots, including a brief affair between Eleanor Carpenter and McMaster that results in a disconcerting pregnancy; the passage of Cassius, Gumbo Jim's brother who is escaping from slavery and fleeing to Canada; an attempt by Sophia Passmore, Squire Carpenter's headstrong sister, to force Eleanor's unborn child onto Catherine.

The plot most fully resolved by the story's end is that of the love story between Catherine and Good, but readers should not dismiss this book as a mere formula romance. More accurate is the location of the novel within the genre of Historical Fiction with its overt foregrounding of historical detail. In a brief preface to the book, Stambaugh acknowledges her debt to the libraries and staffs of the Lancaster Historical Society and Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society. That she researched thoroughly is apparent in her smooth inclusion of much historical and folkloric detail. Readers learn, for example, that the long sideburns fashionable at the time denote aristocracy; they witness the presidential campaign between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson; and they are treated to full description of a George Washington's Birthday ball. Stambaugh also incorporates much interesting folklore: for example, to prevent homesickness, Elizabeth sews bread crumbs into Catherine's petticoat when she leaves for the Fox. Later, she blames a difficult pregnancy, which will eventually kill her, on the supernatural "marking" of the unborn child.

Although *The Sign of the Fox* is not in the strict sense a "Mennonite novel" in which characters wrestle with issues of Mennonite identity, it is a story, however, that should appeal to those interested in literary representation of Mennonite life. Stambaugh's depiction of the historical Mennonites includes details that will perhaps surprise some modern readers' ideals: she mentions, for instance, that Mennonites did not endorse abstinence and were commonly involved in brewing and distilling. And, despite the modern Mennonite church's interest in social justice, Stambaugh points out that Mennonites for the most part were not involved with helping slaves escape to freedom.

In an essay now dated but still relevant, Elmer Suderman suggests that Mennonite fiction is that which "comments on and helps us to understand the society it refracts, though not necessarily reflects."[1] *The Sign of the Fox* does provide such refraction, for it involves at a larger level the interactions between Mennonites and their neighbors. In depicting the clash between the Mennonites and the secular world, Stambaugh steers pleasantly clear of the tract mentality so often found in Mennonite fiction. Gideon Landis, for instance, appears naive in his stubborn position against Carpenter, for although Carpenter conducts a dishonest land survey which will ruin the Landis family, Gideon declines to challenge the action because it would involve a lawsuit and a court appearance.

Sara Stambaugh, a native of Lancaster County, is Professor of English at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, where she specializes in nineteenth-century British literature. Stambaugh has also written *I Hear the Reaper's Song* (1984).

David Sprunger
Morehead, Minnesota

[1]Elmer F. Suderman, "Fiction and Mennonite Life," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 10 (1969): 17.

Jean Janzen. *The Upside-Down Tree: Poems.* Henderson Books: Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada, 1992. Pp. 77.

In this book of four parts and some forty poems which range geographically from California to Minnesota to Kansas, Saskatchewan, Amsterdam and the North Sea, Kazakhstan, and the Ukraine, picking up the trail now and again of wandering Mennonite forebears, the journey and search is laid out in the first poem, "Potato Planting," in reference to the cut potato pieces coming alive underground

> with that nourishing fire
> like those losses we think
>
> we bury for good, that begin
> to smolder in their dark sleep
> and extend their thin, white roots.

This book of poems is that search "underground," that digging for memories, the traces of ancestors, their lives and the meanings of their deaths. There is throughout the book the memory of loss, reaching far back in the Dutch poems of Part Two to the loss of martyrs of the faith, and echoing everywhere in the Russian poems of Part Three where losses of land and life are pervasive. Remarkably, the book accomplishes this theme without bitterness, but rather with a certain luminosity seen even in this first image of whiteness in potato roots. That "white" becomes illumination in this book and transforms itself from snow to moonlight, angels to linen. In one poem titled "White," winter is white, and so is the satin of a wedding dress turned ice-cold when it must serve as coffin liner for an infant's burial. Under the white, according to this poem, is what we need—memory, life:

She wants winter
to give herself up,
to open her gown
and give him back
from the folds of her body,
which, under its locks of ice,
holds what we need,
even in its darkest place.

When I read these poems, I had the keen sense of being witness to a melting of the cold, an *unlocking*, unfolding, restoration of the traces which provide the continuous thread. Like William Stafford's image of the trace, the connection which runs through the natural world, which it is the poet's job to find, ethereal and real, wending its way through history, place and time, Jean Janzen's poems refer often to threads and ropes and lines. Perhaps that is why one feels such satisfaction from reading the poems; it is the singular joy of grasping momentarily the continuous thread of lineage which steadies, which gives one a rootedness. (In this way, too, "Potato Planting" is a good beginning poem.)

Part One and Part Four, each constituted by a dozen poems, frame the inner, shorter sections—Part Two, the Dutch poems, and Part Three, the Russian poems. Part One is a series of poems related by image and theme, poems of family members, first-person poems, two beautiful "nature" poems, "Fox" and "Osprey," sensual and lush in description. From "Under the Brilliant Snows of Childhood," which pivots on a central melting image that is tears and water trickle, come these lines:

After we buried my father,
I let the water run hard
into the tub to drown out
my sobbing. But I
can still hear it,
and, now and then,
on first warm days,
melting snow
in an icy trickle
under the drifts.

It is the undercurrent of loss in the small trickle which haunts the speaker of the poem. There is a realization throughout the book of the long stream of history running deep if we listen for it.

I appreciate also in this first part a humorous, sensual rendition of Mrs. Nachtigal, Mrs. Peters, and Mrs. Tieszen, Minnesotans canning peaches they have received from California, all three firmly under vow not to eat a one fresh!—and there is the vivid language which makes the peaches so desirable canned: "breasts of peaches under glass to be brought up/from the dank cellar when it was time,/the syrupy flesh delicious in the mouth/as snow ticked against the windows, cherished/like the low sun of January" ("Peaches in Minnesota"). Even this poem "freezes" the image in time, preserves for another day and future relish, as does the entire book. There is also the sensual beauty of the language in the poem, "Fox," which ends with a lonely woman's striking dream-image of being ravished by the sharp-toothed fox, taking her even as it has taken the ducks and geese.

My favorite poem in the *The Upside-Down Tree*, I believe, is "Flowers of Amsterdam" in Part Two, the Dutch poems. In powerful images, martyrs become flowers: "Their bodies flare out in a triple bloom,/ still flare out in the mind, the recalcitrant/ flesh still acrid. And Catherine drowns/ in the canal, her skirts billowing out/ over her tied legs like a lily." Amsterdam is made to be a city of choices, by Catherine's cries, by Van Gogh's ". . . what do you want?" The poem ends with an image celebrating martyrdom, standing against the tide:

The dark elms dip their hair
into the rising tide and the laden boats
drift with the current. But here
and there
one moves against it, one figure in
a boat,
the twin oars quietly opening the
water's
glistening petals, opening a secret
passage
in the deep and watery place.

Several of the poems in this section describe works of art by Ruisdael, Rembrandt, Jan Van Eck, Vermeer; I found these especially vivid, visually stimulating.

Part Three, the Russian poems, is the darkest set in the book and those with the strongest emotional impact. These are deep yearnings from the heart toward cousins and aunts who suffered and died while part of the family survived in a new land. "Eating Stones" contrasts "the small dramas of the Depression," for example, receiving government cheese, with the Ukrainian famine of the 1930's during which three aunts died. This section begins appropriately with "This Moonless Night" and generally depicts a barren, cruel Russian landscape, as discovered by the poet in her visit and reunion with family members there in 1989. The landscape is often depicted as means for escape, (in the following example, into the white birches): "I think of the women and children,/ the grandfathers, who tried to hide/ among them [the birches], how they were pushed/ from cattle cars onto the empty steppe/ of Kazakhstan, how some survived/ on field mice in their earthen huts." To be sure, there are small miracles, a loaf of bread which slides off a military wagon into the snow to save a starving family, and now and then, music, but these are overshadowed by the images of pain and loss: "dirt huts on frozen steppes,/ the Urals where father starved/ to death". . ."the pages [of an album] stacked with bodies". . ."Aunt Margaret and her children . . . pushed off freight cars . . . a diet/ of vermin, and hymns, rising/ in the dark, tones they clung to/ like a rope."

In a way these poems are the poet's attempt to rewrite history ("I want history to veer in their behalf"), linking together as she does the family members who have been long separated. In one poem they literally trace the map together: "Nothing between us now/ but our warm breathing, . . ."

The last part of the book is a series of personal poems, recording daily events, dedications for family or friends. Though not so filled with the urgency of strong feeling as some earlier sec-

tions, they are lyric, crystalline, and fix in memorable language those moments that tell us that we are alive.

The Upside-Down Tree is a book filled with longing and the many joys of a world newly-perceived. The poems are varied, and they do not stand still. Where they grow out of history, travel or art, they are not reliant upon exotica for their interest, but are always artifacts themselves because of the skillful use of language and image, the pureness with which they are crafted. Others have noted in this book of poems a kind of radiant appreciation of a world which draws us to it. There is in many of the poems a kind of holiness, a blessing, and a coming to peace with even the distresses of history.

Raylene Hinz-Penner
Newton, Kansas

Peter P. Klassen. *Die deutsch-völkische Zeit in der Kolonie Fernheim, Chaco, Paraguay, 1933-1945* (Bolanden-Weierhof, Germany: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1990). Pp. 148.

The subject of this book has for decades drifted like an iceberg in the consciousness of Paraguayan Mennonites and their friends and relatives in other countries. On the one hand, these events are well enough known to appear in a Mennonite novel (Rudy Wiebe, *The Blue Mountains of China*), but on the other hand, the details necessary to begin to understand the events have been hidden below the surface. Klassen reports that the third generation since the events he describes, persons with no direct memories of the time, are asking "What really happened? How could it have come to that?" (p. 17) The historiography of the *völkische Zeit* has been characteristically secretive and hidden: a 1948 manuscript that was never published, a 1969 series of articles in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* that provoked a sharp condemnation from the Paraguayan Mennonite leadership, a 1974 thesis that may be read only with the permission of the author or his thesis advisor. Klassen critically reviews these previous works, which range from moderately to viciously partisan. It is only in the 1980s, Klassen believes, that people have begun to write freely, although inadequately, about these events. Klassen has undertaken the onerous task of telling the complete story to the most difficult audience: the participants and their descendants.

"All polemical argumentation shall here be renounced." (p. 19) The author sets himself a high standard which he generally lives up to. Klassen promises to subordinate his personal memories of the time to the written documentation, which he does to such a great extent that the reader begins to feel Klassen knows things he isn't telling, things for which there is no written record.

However, Klassen isn't merely summarizing documents. Already in his title he takes an interpretive position. In his introduction (p. 20), Klassen explains that he has deliberately chosen to write in terms of *Deutschtum* (Germanness) and *völkisch* (ethnic or racial) ideas, rather than in explicitly political terms of National Socialism, because these are the terms that were used in Fernheim at the time. This is something he could have expanded on. Why were these terms used rather than explicitly political ones? The particular connotations of the term *völkisch* especially might be unclear to readers who are not familiar with German history in the first half of the twentieth century.

Klassen begins his narrative by looking briefly at roots for these events in earlier Mennonite history. Russian Mennonites, he argues, had a long history of entanglement of church with state, of religion with ethnicity. By implication, the struggle over Nazism was simply a more recent chapter in that long history. Klassen also points to the Russian Mennonite experience since 1917 as a major factor: their experiences under communism and their escape via Germany with German assistance. A third important element in the Paraguayan context was the brutal struggle for bare existence against the Chaco climate.

Klassen proceeds with a fairly straightforward recounting of Fernheim's encounter with Nazism. His chapter and section titles reveal a basic outline. "Enthusiasm and Reservations:" (ch. 3) The accession of Hitler to power in Germany in January 1933 found an "extraordinarily strong and positive response" (p. 26) in Fernheim, especially among the youth. At the same time, reservations and questions about the *völkisch* movement arose almost from the start. The "new *völkisch* ideas continually collided with traditional Mennonitism" (p. 37). "The influence of personalities" (p. 29) was particularly important; the whole *völkisch* movement centered around the teacher Fritz Kliewer.

Much of the open conflict in the Mennonite colony, according to Klassen, revolved around the possibility of accepting German citizenship and returning to Europe. This was in the context of an extremely difficult climatic and economic situation. Such a return clearly implied the giving up of nonresistance: those who were willing to do so would return to Europe while those who refused would stay behind in Paraguay in a colony that would no longer be viable because of its small population. Thus the *völkisch* movement became a matter of life and death, both physical and spiritual.

Klassen spends 39 pages of a total of 144 (27%) on the events of March 11, 1944, and its immediate antecedents. On the evening of March 11, two factions of the *völkisch* movement were involved in what might be called a small riot. Although this date clearly marked the denouement of the *völkisch* movement, excessive attention to the details (for example, who was or was not carrying a firearm) has obscured the ten years preceding it and the significance of March 11 itself. Indeed, this book has received criticism for such details, but Klassen has rightly paid attention to significance. "Contrary interpretations of the events" (p. 118) arose even as the incident was taking place. It was these countervailing interpretations that determined how the *völkisch* movement came to its ignominious, humiliating, and unintended end.

Following March 11, 1944, the *völkisch* leader and head of the colony school system Fritz Kliewer and the chief colony administrator Julius Legiehn were removed from Fernheim by the Paraguayan government, and the anti-*völkisch* group took power in the colony. It took several years, under the dominating influence of MCC, for open tensions to subside, and then the story was submerged in obscurity. Klassen summarizes his conclusion this way: "What has very often burdened the points of view on these events was the attempt—often unconscious—to contrast Good and Evil. The insight that this will never be completely possible on this earth—especially in historical descriptions—and that even the clean division of truth from falsehood causes great difficulties can be a point of departure for understanding and maybe even overcoming

the history of the *völkische* time in Fernheim" (p. 142).

Klassen reserves the most eloquent part of the book for the last section, "The Author," a brief autobiography. It is a litany of events in which Klassen was "exactly old enough" to experience. Born in 1926, "He was in 1933 exactly old enough" to feel the joy and enthusiasm over Hitler's accession to power in Germany. "He was in 1939 exactly old enough to enter the secondary school when the teacher [Fritz Kliewer] and his wife returned from Germany." "He was in 1944 . . . actually not yet old enough for the turmoil of colony politics, into which he willingly let himself be drawn. . . . The partisanship and active participation in the tensions of the conflict had the result that he had to share the consequences of the denouement and the burden of atonement to the bitter end as an eighteen-year-old." Klassen goes on to say that in 1953 "he was fortunately still young enough" to spend two years studying in Europe. In the formal study of history, in conversations with persons he met in Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands, in viewing ruined cities, he had the opportunity for greater understanding of recent history. "To this belonged the insight . . . that at the time when many [in Fernheim] prayed for the victory of German troops at Stalingrad, there already was an Auschwitz."

Mennonite historical writing (not only on this particular topic) has often been Mennocentric, defending Mennonites against real or imagined criticism and celebrating Mennonite superiority over the "world." Fernheim's encounter with Nazism has also been treated in a Mennocentric fashion, with Fernheimers portrayed as innocent victims of outside forces focusing their malevolent attentions on the Paraguayan Mennonites. Klassen has succeeded in largely avoiding the partisanship of earlier interpretations and has provided a good set of answers to third generation questions.

John D. Thiesen
Newton, Kansas

Donald B. Kraybill, *Passing on the Faith: The Story of a Mennonite School.* Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1991. Pp. 315 ($11.95—paperback)

This detailed and extensive history (1941-1991) of Lancaster Mennonite High School (hereafter LMHS) was written by an alumnus, presently a college professor of sociology, who in 1975 wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the same school entitled "Ethnic Socialization in a Mennonite High School." Kraybill expends considerable space setting the school in its ecclesiastical and social context of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, the underlying repository of the values which the school was created to embody.

At its origins among Lancaster Conference Mennonites, advocates of LMHS needed to achieve a meaningful degree of consensus between opponents of two groups—those who believed that secondary education (public or private) was not necessary, and those who felt that the public schools were sufficient. Kraybill describes how the advocates of the Mennonite school articulated their alienation from the increasing secularization of the larger consolidated public schools. In public schools, increased patriotism and support of armed violence during World War II made nonresistant Mennonites very uncomfortable in some of the public school settings.

The chapters proceed chronologically by periods which were marked by new directions in curriculum, staffing, or leadership. In the earlier decades, the staff and students lived and learned under what appears to contemporary eyes as a plethora of extremely detailed and restrictive codes of behavior and clothing requirements. In some instances these requirements were less or more stringent than those in the Conference, but that imbalance could never remain long since Conference leadership had a very direct role in setting the school's standards.

A series of detailed appendices complete this book; they include lists of all educational staff (including principals and assistant principals), members of the board of trustees, commencement speakers, and all graduates of the school from 1943 to 1991. The lists of class songs, mottos, and gifts provide some insights, but I wonder about the usefulness to non-alumni, in the final analysis, of the list of yearbook dedications.

A few weaknesses became apparent to this reviewer. The primary one is chapter eight (1983-1991) which has the flavor of a promotional essay by the school's information services department rather than the more insightful and objective analysis of earlier chapters. For example, in describing the 1989 purchase of an adjacent failing commercial mall by the school and its renovation as Conference offices, he describes it as the "hub of the local Mennonite world" (p. 217). Yet he conspicuously fails to mention the refusal of the largest and most influential Conference organization, the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, to move its offices to this mall.

In a few instances the author's desire to enliven the prose resulted in some overly dramatic clichés such as "deeper trends tormented the Mennonite soul" (p. 20) and "Individualism was stalking the Mennonite camp" (p. 56).

The formation in 1975 of Faith Mennonite School, a conservative response to the liberalization of LMHS, is tucked away in a footnote (p. 206). More attention to the rationale and history of the continuing conservative response would provide helpful insight into the position and constituency of LMHS within the Mennonite community. Yet Kraybill does not denigrate the conservative "moral discernment of former years." He calls rules that, for example, disallowed any public drama and banned musical instruments, "genuine attempts to inject value commitments into all dimensions of the school life" (p. 261).

He sees the concrete attempts at "holistic and value-laden" education as the basic thread which unites the thrust of LMHS throughout these fifty years. He asks many relevant and penetrating questions (p. 261) which required and still require a response from school administrators and constituency if LMHS intends to continue its goal of a well-rounded and discriminating education in the Christian context.

David J. Rempel Smucker
Lancaster, Pennsylvania