



Edited by Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast, ***Mothering Mennonite*** (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013). Paperback, 312 pages, \$34.95.

*Reviewed by Joanne Epp*

In the late 1980s, two Mennonite scholars, Marlene Epp and Magdalene Redekop<sup>1</sup>, issued an emphatic call for more attention to be given to the lives of Mennonite women. Since then, other scholars have answered that call, in particular by turning their attention to Mennonite family life. This richly varied collection of essays goes a step further in its focus on mothers. Its importance lies in how it situates Mennonite mothers within the larger concept of mothers as both transmitters and shapers of religion and culture.

The sixteen contributors, a more or less even mix of Canadians and Americans (and one from Japan), come from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, literature, education, social work, creative writing, and history. Most, but not all, are women; most, but not all, are Mennonite. The pieces in this volume are a mix of scholarly essay, memoir, personal reflection, and poetry. But whatever the style, almost all of the writers detail and analyze their own experiences as part of their examination of Mennonite mothering.

Editors Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast divide the essays into four sections. "Picturing Mothers and Daughters" comprises portraits by four Mennonite daughters, each of whom views her mother's life through a unique lens. Kirsten Eve Beachy, in "Milk," alternates between past and present tense, describing a morning spent with her mother-in-law in a dairy barn and reflecting on what her own mother showed her about being a woman.

The second section, "Mothering Across Generations," also involves writers reflecting on their mothers, but focuses more precisely on what these mothers pass on to their children. Susie Fisher Stoesz deals

with this theme most explicitly in her essay "Mimicking Maternal Gestures: Women's Memories, Narratives, and Intergenerational Identities." She describes how the telling of a particular story, repeated and reinterpreted by three generations of women in her husband's family, shapes both the family's identity as Mennonite and the women's sense of themselves as Mennonite mothers.

The third section widens the scope in an unexpected way. The three essays in "Challenging Mennonite Motherhood" explore how a community's expectations and ideals of motherhood affect those who are not mothers. Here the most compelling piece is "(In)fertile Encounters: An Autoethnography" by Christine E. Crouse-Dick. Having experienced how difficult it is to talk about infertility in a helpful way, both for couples facing it and for those around them, she argues that infertility poses a challenge to the Mennonite ideal of community.

In "Mothering In And Around Culture(s)," five authors explore specific ways in which motherhood is shaped by its religious and cultural context. The section begins with an account of a disempowering experience: how Mennonite women's experience of "scientific motherhood" led to the devaluing of their traditional knowledge of childbirth, and of domestic work generally. But it ends on a note of strength and hope. The final essay recounts the work of the Mennonite Church of Teusaquillo in Bogotá, Colombia with victims of political violence, drawing on motherhood as a metaphor for this congregation's work of healing and reconciliation.

One strong point of this collection is that it includes a range of Mennonite cultures, both urban and rural, from the conservative to the more assimilated, spanning most of the past hundred years. In particular, it presents a more nuanced picture of conservative Mennonites than many readers might be accustomed to. Doreen Helen Klassen, in "I always played restaurant: Mennonite Childhood Play as Anticipation/Antithesis of Motherhood," shows that, in a culture that outsiders tend to think of as sombre and hard-working, the boundaries between work and play are far more

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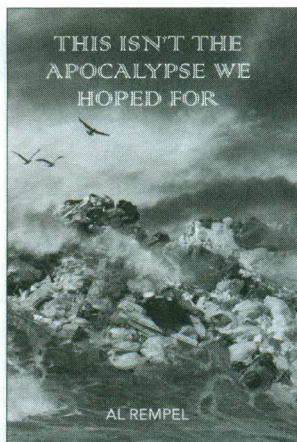
fluid than one would think. In “Home’ schooling,” Wendy A. Crocker offers portraits of three Old Colony women who achieved a post-secondary education and embarked upon careers. She asserts that, although their choices went against the community’s norms, it

was their Old Colony upbringing with its emphasis on responsibility for others, belief in a wider family, compassion, and so on, that enabled them to succeed in their chosen occupations.

For Demeter Press, which has maternal studies as its sole emphasis, *Mothering Mennonite* is part of a larger project of broadening the conversation on mothering to include a multitude of cultural and religious groups. The editors hope that Mennonite scholars, too, will see the potential for further study in this area. This volume makes an excellent beginning.

1. Marlene Epp, “Women in Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the ‘Underside’” in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5 (1987); and Magdalene Redekop, “Through the Mennonite Looking Glass” in *Why I Am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity*, ed. Harry Loewen (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1988).

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Al Rempel, ***This Isn't the Apocalypse We Hoped For*** (Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press Inc., 2013). Paperback, 72 pages, \$16.95.

*Reviewed by Landon Erb*

This is how the world ends: not with a bang, but with a freezer full of bananas. Al Rempel’s second collection of poems, *This Isn't the Apocalypse We Hoped For*, tends to the everyday realities of a world filled with

consumer detritus. The apocalypse in Rempel’s vision is not one of nuclear wastelands or rising sea levels, but one that we experience daily—in mall parking lots, basements stuffed to the rafters, and “desktops awash in icons.” Our consumer culture is already littered with apocalyptic images, like those found in blockbuster movies and alarmist environmentalism, but Rempel’s latest work shines amongst all the debris.

Rempel exposes our world as it is with both critique and care. He resides in Prince George, where he writes and teaches, and one can observe the tension between Rempel’s desire to go out into the wilds of interior British Columbia and his sense of being embedded within a landscape covered in asphalt and plastic bags. His poem “Sunday Morning Drive” captures this tension, ending on the note, “but what propels me back into the town is this: / when the chill of quartz fully enters my bones, when / an itching and aloneness envelopes me and my car and the park.”

Amongst the fragmented visions in Rempel’s poems, there are moments of insightful clarity. Throughout the collection, Rempel holds in tension the natural world and our own garbage, whether it is literally litter or creeping anxiety. Some poems are dense with adjectives and adverbs, while others are spare and marked with absences. The latter are more potent, allowing the reader to find a glimmer of beauty within austere landscapes. In “Have a Bath,” Rempel expresses a sense of dread that washes over any parent fearing the loss of a child. A tender and sweet love is found within the rubble of his apocalyptic visions in poems like “In Rain, In Love” and “A Novel in Excerpts: Chapter One.”

One of the standout poems is “Survival Kit.” In it, Rempel observes that “every poem written is a list.” This is the best avenue into his work. The poem itself is a list. It gathers together disparate images and fragmented thoughts and heaps them together; yet there is some order to it: “. . . and what doesn’t all fit / into the back of a car— / handlebars of mountain bikes / recliners on their sides, strips of wooden trim . . .”

At times, Rempel’s poems read like a grocery list written with a pen that’s already run out of ink, capturing the vision of an apocalypse brought on by capitalistic consumerism, which emptily desires things void of substance. In between the fragments there are apparitions of meaning that readers must fill in on their own. “A Novel in Excerpts” executes this approach most effectively, while other poems, such as “Silver & Blue,” seem to lack cohesion. “Chock-a-block”