

triumph of the Lamb comes through death *and* resurrection, he often settles for language that asserts “evil is conquered by the death of the lamb” (194) and that defines “victory as non-violent resistance to the point of death” (170). More explicit emphasis that victory comes through God’s *overturning* of death might have been helpful.

The author does persuasively argue that the Lamb Christology has ethical implications for Christians’ nonviolent resistance. The attention to exegetical detail and the thorough exploration of the religio-historical background of the lamb imagery is an obvious strength, even as it marks the book as more for scholars than non-specialists. Especially valuable is Johns’s balanced consideration of the merits and problems associated with seeing each Old Testament tradition as an antecedent for the Lamb Christology. The book’s critical engagement with current scholarship is also a strength, especially in the last chapter, where Johns forthrightly addresses difficult questions that might challenge his thesis. His scholarship will be welcomed especially by pacifist Christians troubled by the violence of the Apocalypse and unsure about its ethical relevance.

Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB

Jean Janzen. *Piano in the Vineyard*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004; David Waltner-Toews. *The Complete Tante Tina: Mennonite Blues and Recipes*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004.

Jean Janzen and David Waltner-Toews are two of the earliest successful poets in the late-twentieth century flowering of Mennonite literature. Both poets use the cruel experiences of their Russländer ancestors to fine effect. And in the two books under review, both offer their best, mature poems. But, otherwise, what an odd couple they make for a combined book review!

Waltner-Toews writes dramatic monologues in the swaggering, colloquial sprawl of Whitman. Janzen writes closely observed, restrained lyrics in the manner of Dickinson.

Waltner-Toews uses poems for social commentary, often drawing parallels between current events and Mennonites' experience in Russia; Janzen explores personal and spiritual conditions and uses Mennonites' experience in Russia as a kind of origins myth for tragedy. Because Waltner-Toews relishes the materiality of life, he alternates juicy recipes with his poems. Janzen embraces the created world, too, but also art and music as she reaches for the transcendent.

The Complete Tante Tina is a compilation of all of Waltner-Toews's poems that feature the *persona* of Tante Tina and depict her family's development through three generations—her own, her son Haenschen's, and his son Johnny's. Waltner-Toews says the book's purpose is to "make some sense of her life" (127).

As the sequence of poems unfolds, we learn about Tante Tina and her Low German immigrant culture; Haenschen's rejection of his background; and Johnny's quasi-return, thanks to developments in the Canadian counter-culture. As her children become formally educated, Tante Tina becomes self-educated enough to address people and affairs of the world—most wonderfully Salman Rushdie but also Maggie Thatcher, Pierre Trudeau, and even Rudy Wiebe. Tina seems to think the world's ills could be cured if only the movers and shakers could share a faspa with her. Her history concludes with her death, lovingly tended by her musician/poet grandson: "When life slides down the snowbank, / tobogganing, to frozen toes, and gone, / what can be said? Hang on. / Into the dazzling light, / hang on" (92).

Waltner-Toews implies that the genius of poetic utterance among Russian Mennonites resided in their immigrant folk culture. The poems of third-generation Johnny, for instance, are good, but not as good as Tina's. As in "Little Haenschen's Vision," Johnny tends toward explicit rant against the troubles of the world, less well redeemed by humor and charm. However, Waltner-Toews's own powers seem undiminished, since one of the finest poems in the collection, "My Map of the Promised Land," was written only recently.

Waltner-Toews has said he uses Tante Tina because he can "say" so much more through her persona. In the Thatcher poem he criticizes heartless conservatism. In the Trudeau poem he endorses liberalism. And in the Rushdie

poem he emphasizes that “God is in the story hiding,” making a convincing case for the religious value of art.

What makes such poems so appealing is the Low German vocabulary and syntax of Tina’s discourse. On the surface that can make things seem all “aufgemixed” (42). But Waltner-Toews is that rarest of poets who can create a new language or poetic diction. That it is “only” Plautdietsch-influenced English should not detract from his achievement—although it necessarily reduces his appeal to a mainstream English audience. Alas, his poems will not be published in the journal *Poetry*, as Janzen’s have been.

The voice in Janzen’s poems is quiet, self-effacing, and sensitive to the surrounding people and natural world. *The Piano in the Vineyard* offers abundant examples of finely honed form, consisting of page or half-page poems written in short, compact lines, occasionally in two- or three-line stanzas that sometimes jell into slant-rimed sonnets.

Janzen’s true *métier* is the sharply observed image that leaps into metaphor and then blossoms into transcendental insight. I expected to find that movement here, and did, but was moved first by the autumnal subject and tone of most of the poems. The first section, “Broken Places,” deals with the deaths of a baby, a friend by cancer, a squirrel by electrocution—“all of us shipwrecked / clutching what we can” (20). The second section, “The Garden,” presents the yearly cycle, but it begins and ends in winter. Most of the poems in “Carving the Hollow” are elegies for victims of the troubles in Ukraine.

The title poem for the book and for the final section, “Piano in the Vineyard,” emphasizes the redemptive turn found in virtually all of Janzen’s poems. Janzen depicts the vineyard in wintertime, following pruning, when its stark outlines suggest a cemetery instead. The bare vines suggest a broken body when the speaker’s husband winds them around grape stakes to make a crude cross for Holy Saturday.

But the old piano standing in the vineyard offers something even more than hope. Like the music of Chopin and Ravel (or the art of Cranach or Rubens), it affirms the “pause before the next movement, / which is the first and last fire” (67), suggesting Godself, as known by Pascal and the mystics. “Fire,” which also appears in other poems, is the book’s final word.

Janzen's physical images move one toward transcendent awareness and experience, not just insight. Images from the conclusions of her poems suggest the Hopkins-like plenitude characterizing her world: "seeds of stars," "the whole world is lit from within," "Love gazes at you," "spilling into the night," "a silence which is immense and open."

Piano in the Vineyard may be Janzen's equivalent to Keats's "Ode to Autumn," but her poems move beyond Bach's (and Keats's) "It is enough" to the healing of the "broken heart" (18) through the forgiveness found in Schumann's "I bear no resentment" (18).

Janzen and Waltner-Toews *are* alike in a very important way. Both are faithful members of the Mennonite church, which can be grateful that the contemporary Anabaptist tradition is represented so well in the world of letters.

Ervin Beck, *Goshen College*

CONFERENCE NOTICES

June 8-10, 2006 Biennial Meetings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network and the Anabaptist Sociology and Anthropology Association. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN. Held under auspices of The Institute of Mennonite Studies. THEME: Holding Fast to the Confession of Our Hope: The *Confession of Faith* Ten Years Later. www.hillsdale.edu/Acad/Assoc/Soc/asaa/Confession.

June 11-13, 2006 Third Mennonite Graduate Student Conference. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN. Sponsored by Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. THEME: Exclusion. Send proposals (due Jan. 15) to www.mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca. Conference website: www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/tmtc/gradconf.shtml.