

## A View From Inside

Stephen A. Jones

*Often I have not known where I was going until I was already there.*

— Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow*

Well now, whatever have I got myself into?

This question kept churning over in my mind as I walked down a college hallway after a meeting with Grebel professor Marlene Epp in May 2002. Marlene had just invited me to serve as the managing editor of *The Conrad Grebel Review* (hereafter *CGR*)—and I’d accepted and signed a contract. It was an unexpected invitation, but not a hard decision to make. After all, I’d been copyediting the journal for quite a few years (I’d picked up that job from Wendy Stocker back in the 1990s<sup>1</sup>), I enjoyed my Grebel colleagues and the College environment, and I even had a background in management, so what was not to like about the new opportunity?

As things turned out, accepting that invitation was one of the best moves I ever made in a massively eclectic, non-linear career.

Yet on that initial day I couldn’t stop pondering what being a managing editor would entail in practical, daily-life terms. In the process I started to see that maybe I’d had some experiences that might prove useful in the new job and even function as building blocks.

One such experience, dating from the late 1970s, generated a productive relationship with several Grebel professors and administrators. At that time, I was a community liaison officer for the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo, a job that brought me into regular contact with Grebel personnel. Together with representatives of the University’s three other “church colleges”<sup>2</sup> we collaborated in offering off-campus credit courses in public libraries and other venues across Waterloo Region and in neighboring communities.

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1 Wendy and I married in 2000; we are equally yoked as editors. For decades we stitched part-time contracts together, operating in a gig-economy mode before the gig economy was even a thing.

2 St Jerome’s (Roman Catholic), Renison (Anglican), and St Paul’s (at that time, United).

Particularly noteworthy among these adult-education opportunities was a medical ethics course that Conrad Brunk, a longtime Grebel professor, had proposed offering at a local hospital.<sup>3</sup> Witnessing that proposal become reality after months of painstaking negotiations by institutions and individuals was gratifying to everyone. It was a learning experience for all, especially for me as a novice facilitator.

Come to think of it, I further ruminated, I had at least encountered all the Grebel presidents up to that point: Winfield Fretz, Frank Epp, Rod Sawatsky, and John Toews. That took some of the edge off the what-am-I-doing-here feeling. At the same time, another experiential element started drifting into my mental scenario, one that could bear more directly on what lay ahead.

I'd had the benefit, if that's the right word, of a very diverse—and arguably *CGR*-relevant—background in literature, philosophy, biblical studies, church history, theology, and other assorted disciplines at the undergraduate and graduate level. I'd even taken courses in graphic design and publishing in the 1980s, a gesture in the direction of lifelong learning and, more to the point, new employment opportunities. Some of that diversity could jibe with the journal's priorities. Indeed, it had already come in handy when copyediting *CGR* articles that cited New Testament passages in Greek. Before that, I hadn't used this arcane knowledge for decades. What's the adage—no learning is ever ultimately lost?

Okay, all that was looking positive. However, a bigger, more unsettling question was the elephant in the room: What did I really *know* about the Mennonite world? Wasn't I fated to be an outsider, perhaps too much of one? Possibly an imposter?

I was certainly aware of, but not well versed in, the manifold deep, intricate, and nuanced interconnections and relationships celebrated by Mennonites—their close bonds formed and nurtured over years, even centuries, via shared histories, common migration and settlement patterns, denominational distinctives, and ethnic and cultural identities. *Which ones are the Swiss Mennos? Who are the Russians? What are the key differences between*

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3 Our common philosophical interests later saw me acting as a tutor (aka grader of student assignments) in one of Conrad Brunk's Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) undergraduate courses for several years. Later I served in a similar capacity for professors Lowell Ewert, Larissa Fast, Dean Peachey, and Nathan Funk.

*the various Mennonite groups? And what about the Anabaptist-Mennonite scholarly network? How do I access that? ... So much to learn—I'll never master it, I thought.*

This gave me pause, but not for long. Like Donald Rumsfeld, at least I dimly perceived what I didn't know.<sup>4</sup> It wouldn't be a big imposition to commit to learning on the job—and not hesitate in asking dumb questions. I'd need lots of direction and I'd be obliged to take it.<sup>5</sup>

Mind you, I wasn't absolutely bereft of direct CGR exposure to the Mennonite ethos as it is embodied outside classroom settings. At the time of Marlene Epp's invitation, I was editing the newsletter for Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region, an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity Canada, which had set up headquarters in Waterloo about a decade earlier. Scores of Mennonites—ordinary folks and professional tradespeople expert in neighborly cooperation and community barn-raising—played key roles up and down the national organization and its local affiliates. They volunteered with people of other faiths and creeds in building houses side-by-side with needy families, practicing what Habitat co-founder Millard Fuller memorably called “the Theology of the Hammer.”

From that exposure I'd gained a profound impression of the Mennonites' compassionate, often life-transforming social ethic, so strong that I wanted to stay associated with their world. Managing CGR would be consistent with that desire, even if it was quite a leap from editing a newsletter to managing an academic journal!<sup>6</sup>

I started to grasp that all these multifaceted experiences, encounters, and exposures could very well come together in my new role. Perhaps a bit like a Mennonite quilt? In any case I'd better give it a good try, since I'd already

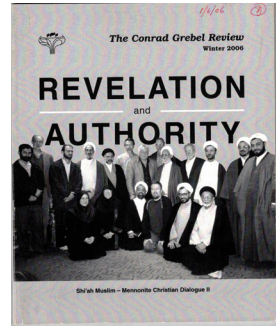
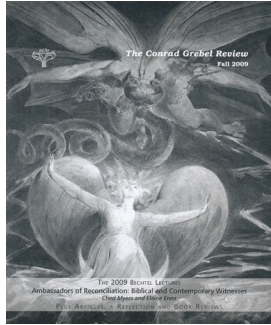
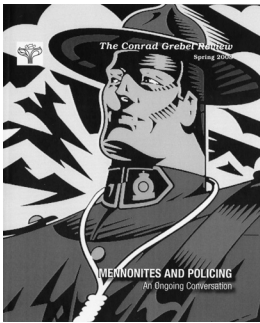
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4 Donald Rumsfeld (1932-2021), a US Secretary of Defense, is the acknowledged source of this opaque utterance: “There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.”

5 Heading into retirement I realized that the managing editor's tasks could be epitomized as the 5 C's: Contacting, Coordinating, Cooperating, Collaborating, and Communicating. I now offer this stunning insight to the waiting world.

6 Key animators were Mennonites. Among them were Milo Shantz, local entrepreneur and father of Grebel's current president, and pastor Wilmer Martin, who was named the Canadian office president. For several years Habitat's national and local offices shared space in the same building.

committed myself. There was no operations manual to rely on, so I'd be creating one as I went and improvising along the way, which suited my style. Soon I settled into a part-time three-mornings-a-week schedule. Over the years I worked out of several office spaces at Grebel, even a corner of the library during a major construction project.<sup>7</sup>



*CGR covers took a graphic turn for several years, as did special issues in subsequent years.*

## II

*If thinking is bound up with action, then the task of getting an adequate grasp on the world, intellectually, depends on our doing stuff in it.*

—Matthew Crawford, *Shopcraft as Soul Craft*

Since a highly detailed how-the-sausage-is-made account of *CGR*'s day-by-day internal operations is a pretty sure bet not to retain the reader's interest, in what follows I'll only touch on a few highlights of my association with the journal. A "lite" inside look, in short.

Much of my work fell under two overarching principles, "due diligence" and "quality control," which are universal across managing roles. Anyone

<sup>7</sup> Former Grebel Director of Operations E. Paul Penner observed that I'd been shifted around more than any other employee. This was no problem; in fact, it gained me new co-workers and comrades.

who has dabbled in managing an enterprise knows that it entails myriad tasks, large and small, vital to the sausage-making in the actual moment but too tedious to relate after the fact to even the most sympathetic listener. Accordingly, this section is subjective, impressionistic, a bit reflective, and not at all definitive.

For context, we'd be wise to note the Editorial Council's aspirations for CGR as set forth by Founding Editor Walter Klaassen in the inaugural issue in 1983<sup>8</sup>:

*With this issue we introduce to the academic and professional communities a new journal of reflection on a broad range of contemporary issues from the vantage point of the Christian, and in particular, of the Anabaptist-Mennonite traditions.*

*Everything that concerns human beings is the concern of Christians. No issue will, therefore, on principle be excluded from consideration in the Review, but the means and ends of it will be subject to the searchlight of Christian faith.*

[...]

*Our range is wide: the ethical and moral issues in farming, medical practice and research, teaching, politics, the fine arts, peacemaking, commercial and industrial management, institutions and their function, theology and philosophy and their role.*

*We also hope that as we carry out our mandate with care, this journal will be of interest beyond the Mennonite community both to readers and potential contributors.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Regrettably, Walter Klaassen passed away in November 2024 as this article was in preparation.

<sup>9</sup> The mandate's most recent formulation identifies CGR as "a multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal of Christian inquiry" devoted to "advancing thoughtful, sustained discussions of theology, peace, society, and culture from broadly-based Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives."

Klaassen ended with an additional hope—that *CGR* would prove “lively and responsible, intelligent and readable” and over time “develop its own personality.” Readers are invited to judge whether that early hope has been met during the journal’s forty-year run. Personally, I’m glad to have had a share in getting the journal into the hands and minds of constituencies within the Mennonite community and beyond.



*CGR Founding Editor Walter Klaassen teaching at Grebel in the 1960s.*

### **Sometimes Daunting: *CGR* Publication Schedule**

The journal always aspired to publish three issues per calendar year, both regular or “omnibus” issues and occasional “theme” issues. The idea of theme issues started as a response to a disturbing shortfall in acceptable submissions for regular issues and the consequent failure of *CGR* to come out on

time. “As a way of compensating for this lack, I began to publish thematic issues, inviting authors to contribute on designated topics,” explains Arnold Snyder (Editor, 1992-1997, 2003-2007).

From the production perspective, that was a good move. Theme issues both relieved anxieties—the “Horrors! We’ve got nothing in the pantry” problem—and offered an appealing way to pursue topics in depth, bring more scholars into *CGR* fold, and add a certain luster to the journal’s identity. Theme issues from roughly 2010 to 2020 were assembled by *CGR* editors and focused on such concerns as Teaching the Bible, Revisiting Mennonite Peace Theology, and Teaching History.

More recently, ideas for theme issues were often generated by scholars who offered to serve as guest editors. They would do the heavy lifting—corraling authors, setting guidelines, vetting submissions—and collaborate with *CGR* editors. This synergy not only spread the workload, it added breadth and freshness to the journal and burnished its reputation as a forum for leading-edge voices. Guest-edited issues included Paul G. Doerksen, *Anabaptists and Disability Theology* (Spring 2020); Joseph R. Wiebe, *Encounters with Jedediah Purdy* (Fall 2020, Winter 2021); and Paul C. Heidebrecht, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives on Technology* (Spring 2021).

The journal’s ideal publication schedule proved elusive at times, but on balance it was more often met than not. However, it suffered a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-22), a situation that no editor wants to see again. Nevertheless, *CGR* did trickle out as the pandemic abated and regular routines were reinstated.

For most of its existence, *CGR* appeared solely in print form. But in the 2010s, recognizing how radically transformed the publishing and scholarly worlds now were, the journal became available online via the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) database. This initiative, considerably extending *CGR*’s reach and usefulness, was spearheaded by Jeremy Bergen (Editor, 2008-2017).



## **What We Published: CGR Overview**

### *Articles and Book Reviews*

Scholarly articles commanded the largest share of my attention. Working jointly with the editor, I strove to ensure that these pieces, clocking in at about 7,000 words of text and notes, retained the author's voice, communicated effectively with "educated non-specialist readers" as our mandate required, and satisfied publishing industry standards. All of this was to honor Walter Klaassen's initial declaration of *CGR*'s aims and aspirations.

Mechanics of the process included sending anonymized submissions to two or more qualified peer reviewers, asking them to assess subject matter, suitability, advancement of conversation in the discipline, and compliance with accepted principles of argumentation. I sent reviewed papers back to the respective authors for approval before publication. Working collegially with all contributors and partners was the watchword. In my tenure, *CGR* published approximately 300 articles.

### *Book Reviews and Book Review Essays*

Book reviews summarized and briefly commented on a wide array of titles in numerous fields. A variant of the basic model, "Book Review Essays," was initiated a few years ago by then Book Review Editor, Kyle Gingerich Hiebert. These essays gave writers scope to engage at greater length with a significant recent book or multiple thematically linked books. Book reviews published during my time with the journal totaled approximately 420.

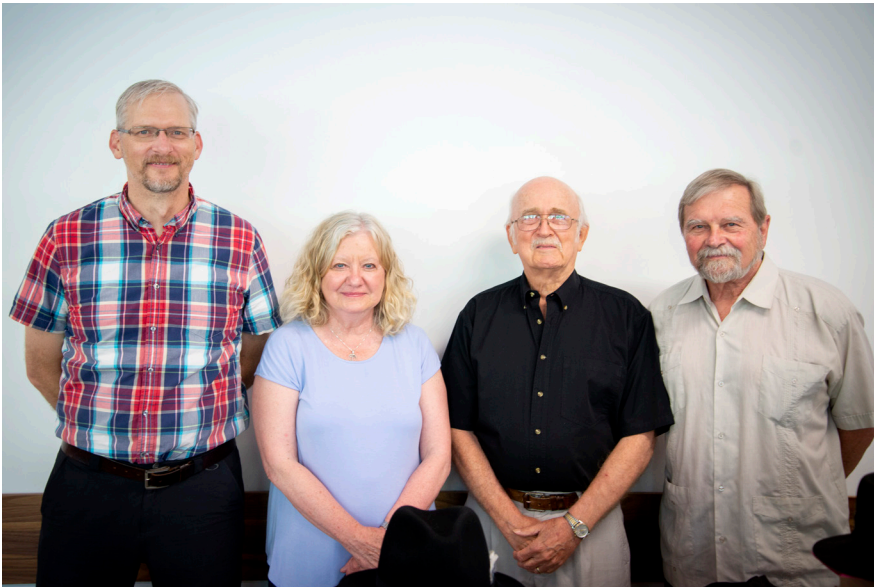
### *Reflections*

"Reflections" was *CGR*'s category for thoughtful, even provocative, pieces that drew on scholars' and practitioners' personal experience, but were not research articles and were couched in somewhat less formal language. Representative examples include Isaac Villegas, "The Anabaptist Prison" (Winter 2010); Waldemar Janzen, "The Classroom as Home" (Winter 2018); and Karen Sunabacka, "Composing Louis Riel's Dream" (Fall 2021).



*Literary Refractions*

This category, unique to *CGR* among its journal peers, I believe, offered a space for authors to present work that fit with *CGR*'s mandate but was manifestly more "literary" in subject matter and method than either "Articles" or "Reflections." For many years, submissions in this category had been adroitly handled by Grebel professor Hildi Froese Tiessen, celebrated for her leadership in Mennonite/s Writing Conferences.<sup>10</sup> Among the Refractions published later, during my time as Managing Editor, were Julia Spicher-Kasdorf, "God is Closer to Poetry than Religion" (Winter 2011) and Sofia Samatar, "On Dwelling: Shelters in Place and Time (Fall 2021).



*CGR Editors Derek Suderman and Marlene Epp, Managing Editor Stephen Jones, CGR Editor Arnold Snyder in June 2022.*

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<sup>10</sup> For the full story on the birth and background of the Refractions category, see Hildi Froese Tiessen's "A Retrospective Look at *CGR*'s 'Literary Refractions'" in this issue.

### **How We Did it: CGR Production Team**

From the outset, *CGR* was truly a team effort. In my tenure, the production team comprised both internal and external members. The internal group consisted of the editor, managing editor, book review editor, and circulation manager. These positions were part-time. We worked collegially and harmoniously—not always easy in the publishing business—to publish a quality product. In the 2010s we began meeting regularly at Grebel face-to-face for optimum reporting and mutual encouragement, but this became difficult when COVID-19 hit. Nevertheless, we stayed the course as a team, and Editor Derek Suderman and I developed a new routine: conducting much of *CGR*'s business by regular phone calls—even house calls.

Supporting us behind the scenes stood *CGR*'s consulting editors (12 academics from Canada and around the world offering advice and counsel) and *CGR*'s Editorial Council—five academics (three Grebel professors, two from other institutions). More in the foreground from my standpoint were Grebel staff who helped us get things done. In early days, that included Carol Lichti and Ruth Steinman, and later Mandy Macfie, Birgit Moscinski, and Jen Konkle. External members of the team comprised not only authors whose work graced *CGR*'s pages but scores of diligent peer reviewers, plus the agency that ensured the rubber would actually hit the road, namely Pandora Press in Kitchener. The design, production, and problem-solving skills of Pandora staff—Christian Snyder, Chris Yellow, and earlier, Karl Griffiths-Fulton—were crucial to the journal's very existence, its "appearance" (timely arrival and physical look), and its impact.

Finalizing edited manuscripts for the press demanded close scrutiny and corrections of successive page proofs. I stress that this means *literal* page proofs, not on-screen proofs, which could produce surprising anomalies and annoying gremlins. Theme issues and issues featuring public lectures (see below) received special attention. Again, readers can determine if we hit the mark.

My prior experience in getting credible products out into the world plus an ingrained bias toward technical prowess—I'd grown up in a manufacturing business—made me perfectly comfortable with our Pandora partners. We enjoyed the camaraderie arising from a shared commitment to the job at

hand. And we liked to have fun: publishing an academic journal is a serious and professional business, but nothing says it has to be solemn. Accordingly, after publishing an issue, we'd always heartily celebrate our joint achievement.

To round out this sketch, I'll comment on an especially engaging challenge and say a word about my editing toolbox.

### **Public Lectures in *CGR***

A great pleasure of serving as the managing editor was the opportunity to work closely with speakers who presented in one of Grebel's annual lecture series (the Bechtel, Eby, or Sawatsky lectures). They were alerted to the prospect of possible but not obligatory publication in the journal when invited to deliver the lecture. *CGR* would be the medium for reaching an audience far beyond the College walls. To follow up, I made it a habit to attend the live lectures, indicate *CGR*'s tentative interest—no firm commitments at that stage—and then report my impressions to the editor. We'd typically conclude that a lecture showed real potential. I'd then contact the speaker to restate our interest in more definite terms and outline how we might convert the lecture into a viable article. The choice was totally the speaker's.

If we were going ahead, I'd obtain the lecture script and, as directed by the editor, I'd ask two or more "Qualified Readers" to peruse it and to offer, in a collegial spirit, their observations and recommendations. I'd route their comments to the lecturer for any adjustments deemed appropriate.

That's when it could get really interesting, and most engaging for me. As a longtime newsletter editor, I was always keen to combine words and images for maximum impact. So, if a lecture employed slides, photographs, or other illustrative materials—as most of them did—the speaker and I would winnow them down to those likely to communicate effectively on the printed page. This made for an energizing, creative collaboration, even more rewarding than theme issues, which were stimulating in their own right. Each lecture situation was unique, given the diverse array of subjects and academic disciplines, as well as the speakers' styles and idiosyncrasies and how they organized their material. On balance, I believe our process was successful, but readers can judge this too for themselves. Bechtel Lecturers whose talks

appeared in included Alfred Neufeld, Ched Myers and Elaine Enns, Roger Epp, and Christopher D. Marshall. Among the Eby Lecturers were Lowell Ewert, A. James Reimer, Leonard Enns, and Susan Schultz Huxman.



*Transition in 2017: Outgoing CGR Editor Jermy Bergen (left)  
and incoming Editor Derek Suderman.*

### **Copyediting: CGR Toolbox**

While managing editor, I continued as copy editor. It was always good, sometimes a relief, to toggle back and forth between the two roles. I tried to ensure that the text of each issue—the words on the page, the grammar and style that (ideally) held things together—upheld the journal’s standards, respected authors and audiences, and avoided stuffiness. As Walter Klaassen had stipulated, *CGR* had to be “lively, responsible, intelligent and readable.” To shape the journal’s disparate components—articles, book reviews, reflections, refractions—into a viable issue required varying amounts of editing time and different levels of input and intervention. But that was never a problem, just part of daily life—a challenge that just as often was a pleasure.

The pleasure arose from teasing out an article’s underlying but perhaps inchoate thought structure, clarifying an argument, finding the most apt lan-

guage—and much else, all in service to making both the author and *CGR* look good. My editing toolbox of course included *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the publishing industry’s sacred text. Alongside that massive tome which, surprisingly, doesn’t cover everything, the toolbox offered for guidance and inspiration E.B. White (*The Elements of Style*), H. W. Fowler (*Modern English Usage*), William Zinsser (*On Writing Well*), Iris Murdoch, and Wendell Berry, plus *The New York Review of Books* and leading *New York Times* columnists. Good company, all.

### *Ave Atque Vale*

I hope this sketch has provided a sense of *CGR*’s inner workings from this Managing Editor’s standpoint. Together, all of us on the journal’s production team strove to produce a worthy publication. What the future holds for academic journals generally I can’t say, but I can affirm that “whatever I got myself into” in 2002 turned out to be a thoroughly enjoyable twenty-year run.

*Stephen A. Jones*, Managing Editor (2002–2022), *The Conrad Grebel Review*.