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**The Unmasking of Arnold Dyck: An Exploration of the Dyck Letters**

by

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Master of Arts

Department of German

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE DYCK LETTERS

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CATHRINE JOYCE FROESE KLASSEN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## Abstract

Those who are familiar with Arnold Dyck's works and revere him as a writer find themselves so close to the issues he raises, the experiences he had, and the convictions he held, that they often fail to recognize how intensely critical he was or they fail to separate his motivation from his art.

The Dyck Letters not only substantiate one's perception that Dyck deeply regretted the increasingly apparent disintegration of the *Mennonitenum* in which he had grown up, but they reveal his disdain and even contempt for those who thoughtlessly and frivolously discarded its elements, and they give credence to what few critics and scholars have dared to admit — his shameless, indeed sometimes ruthless, critical spirit. The letters also reveal that these sentiments and inclinations eventually led to a deep disillusionment, which was not fully revealed in his works, since his writing of literary works ceased as the writer's disillusionment intensified. Failing health was also a contributing factor to both his state of mind and his cessation of writing.

A careful study of all the available correspondence has culminated in this assessment. A reading of a few selected letters may fail to lead one to come to this understanding, since it is precisely in the cumulative tone achieved within a distinct file and in the interrelational overview of the various correspondents that one perceives the genuine attitudes and beliefs of the writer common to all the files studied.



**Arnold Dyck**  
**1889–1970**

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## Introduction: The Unmasking

Scholars and critics who have examined the works of Arnold Dyck have usually been restricted to a *werkimmanent* approach, both those who did not have personal access to the writer, as he was a most private individual, and those who knew him, for they were either not willing or able to dissociate the gentle and gentlemanly individual whom they admired and loved from some of the intense and unpopular convictions and views which he held. The subtle undertones and overtones which intimated resistance to the commonly-held conservative or traditional Mennonite views and values were not easily accepted as being an intrinsic part of the person who seemed in all his efforts to do what he could to preserve the very essence of Mennonitism.<sup>1</sup>

To see the unmasked man requires an examination of a medium which is generally one used for expressing one's most intimate thoughts, highest aspirations, and profound experiences. This medium, the letter, is one which Dyck used extensively. As a medium of communication it is unique, because it freezes the writer's thoughts of the moment, and while it has a life of its own, to a certain degree it is also dependent on the reciprocal letters preceding and following it for its correct interpretation. An exploration of Dyck's letters allows one to peel away the mask and see the man as he was. The examination of the letters has been enhanced by the presence of both the letters received by Dyck and the carbon copies of Dyck's originals in the files. While the thesis will utilize the correspondence as the primary research material, it will not be restricted to a positivistic approach altogether, as references to Dyck's works will be used as secondary sources to support the observations made.

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(1) This Mennonitism is not to be confused with the notion of a Mennonite faith, which in itself is a dubious notion.

The letters described in Chapter 1 are catalogued in Appendix A. The Appendix lists all the files in alphabetical order and gives the dates of the years during which Dyck was corresponding with the named person. Each entry has also been coded for parenthetical footnoting purposes. The letter files used in this work are primarily those released by the Dyck family for research and publication purposes. Additional files were obtained from the CMBC Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, and from the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

A few clarifications are also required regarding the editorial details of the quotations which are included in this thesis. The letters, for the most part, were written in High German, although a few correspondents wrote in English and most of the letters between Gerhard Wiens and Arnold Dyck are in Low German. Most of Dyck's are also typewritten, while responders' letters are either typewritten or handwritten. Dyck's handwritten letters, primarily appearing so in the last few years of his life, are usually in Gothic script, as are some of the responder letters, and in the case of Gerhard Loewen, all. The letters typewritten in Germany were written on a typewriter which has symbols and letter combinations not found on an English or American typewriter. Dyck probably brought a German typewriter to Canada in the 1950's, because some of the letters from the last decade written in Canada use the *Umlaut*.

The letters contain inconsistencies in spelling, not only among the various correspondents, but in Dyck's letters, too (GW 19. 2. 1960). The handwritten letters also include variations, even in the spelling of names, such as Dyck, which occasionally is written Dück. In this thesis the High German has been standardized, with few exceptions. There are also some inconsistencies in the Low German spelling; these, for the most part, have not been corrected, because it is not always clear what Dyck intended, whether for instance he would have used the "ß" instead of "ss" had it

been available on his typewriter. G. Wiens, with whom he corresponded in Low German, was not always certain of his spelling, which he openly admits and discusses with Dyck. This adds to the variations already present in the written dialect. Furthermore, the "official" spelling of H. Rempel's Mennonite Low German dictionary disagrees with Dyck's, especially of words which according to Dyck begin with the consonants "tj" or "tjr", which Rempel writes as "kj" and "kjr". The quotations from Dyck's works are taken from the four volumes of **Collected Works Arnold Dyck** published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society rather than from those published in the *Selbstverlag*, which employ a different orthography.

Letters which generally are not published works bear the errors common in works which have not been proofread. Where writers, including Dyck, have made obvious errors, corrections have been made.

## Chapter 1: Living By The Letter

Historically, it has not been uncommon for writers to have corresponded fastidiously with their counterparts and acquaintances, and it has been no less common to have had such correspondence edited and published, then used by later scholars and critics for the interpretation of the writers' works as much as for sheer reading pleasure. At the time of this writing, the letters of the Russian-born Mennonite, twentieth century Canadian novelist and playwright, Arnold Dyck, have not been the subject of an intensive, comprehensive study and expositional review. While the letters of Arnold Dyck may not rank as highly for their general historical value as say those of Ludwig Uhland or Lord Byron, they have an unquestionable value for the understanding of a smaller distinct population, namely the Mennonites, and in a more particular way, of the post World War I Mennonite emigrants from Russia.

Considering the volume of original work produced and published by Arnold Dyck, the number of works and articles which he solicited from other writers personally, and the number of such works which he himself published or enabled the publishing through other publishing agents, one can be truly impressed with the volumes of letters which he produced. They originated largely in the publishing work in the *Echo-Verlag*, founded and operated by him. His comment on this work was, "Das ist auch ein recht schweres Stück, wenn man sich jede Information mit langen Briefen zusammenbetteln muß" (DHE 11. 9. 1943) and this was well before the majority of the letters had been written. Aside from the letter files not made available to the public, the correspondence available at the time of this writing holds more than 2200 letters, including noteworthy cards, half of which were written by Dyck, to some 29 correspondents, excluding those to or from whom only occasional letters were written. (See Appendix A).<sup>1</sup> Twenty of the files contain at least 50 letters, six exceed

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(1) The exact numbers, despite extensive documentation and tallying, are

100, and one contains over 200. Living in a world, a rather private one by choice, in which many of his closest acquaintances were physically far removed from him and in which long-distance telephoning was done very judiciously for a number of reasons, one can easily conclude that Dyck lived by the letter, in the literal sense of that term.

While the number of people with whom Arnold Dyck corresponded was large, the majority of the letters were written to a relatively small circle of friends and acquaintances. Many of the ties with these persons were of a business or professional nature, relating to his publishing work and his book club, but the fact that the original association was made with them in his childhood and in his youth in Russia, especially his classmates in the *Chortitzer Zentralschule*, adds a personal dimension to most of the letters. With the exception of very few files, the demarcation between personal and business or professional correspondence is blurred, and perhaps inconsequential in a holistic approach to the study of this collection. Among the most significant correspondents are B. B. Wiens, Cornelius Krahn, Walter Quiring, Nick Klassen, D. H. Epp, Abram Friesen (Karlos), Victor and Elisabeth Peters, Gerhard Friesen (Fritz Senn), Kurt Kauenhoven, Alex Rempel, P. J. Klaassen,<sup>2</sup> Gerhard

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difficult to determine, since certain letters are missing from the files. Because reference is made to such letters, often by the date, one knows that they existed. Furthermore, photocopies of certain files obtained from Bethel College indicate the same.

- (2) The confusion surrounding the three different files of Peter J. Klassen can be explained in piecing together various pieces of information in the three files. There are two Peter Klassens, one residing in Paraguay who moved to Vancouver in the 1950's (PJK-V 21. 10. 1958, 18. 1. 1960, 20. 6. 1962), and the other residing in Yarrow, B.C. The spelling of P. J. Klassen's name is not consistent, and since there are three correspondents by the name of P. Klassen, it is necessary to distinguish among them. This P. J. Klassen whose ancestors spelled the name with double "a" will subsequently be referred to with this spelling, and in the abbreviated references will be indicated with a "V" to designate his place of residence, namely Vancouver. Dyck had to make this distinction clear when advertising Klaassen's **Bei uns**



Wiens, H. Görz, and Karl Götz.<sup>3</sup> The commonality of purpose and convictions with many of the named persons does not, however, suggest that his relationship with each bore similarities one to another. That the relationships were consciously pursued is verified in a letter to Nick Klassen on January 23, 1962, in which he writes:

Die meisten der Menschen, mit denen ich es seit Rußland zu tun hatte, befinden sich in Kanada. Ihre (geistige) Welt ist auch die meine. Im Verkehr mit ihnen, sei es auch der briefliche, fühle ich mich zu Hause, das einzige, was Heimatlosen, wie wir es nun einmal sind, geblieben ist. (NK 23. 1. 1962)

The signpost of the degree of intimacy which he felt is readily apparent by the use of the "Du" form, which he used only with B. B. Wiens, Peter J. Klaassen of Paraguay and Vancouver (2. 5. 1958), D. H. Epp, with his brother-in-law, A. A. Vogt (EV 2. 2. 1956), and with Nick Klassen, upon Klassen's request (20. 9. 1959).

What were the factors which bound Dyck to this group of people? Common origin was certainly one factor, but it was more than that. It was these people who had attended the *Chortitzer Zentralschule* at the turn of the century who emigrated from Russia shortly after the revolution and some much later. The fact that they were well educated drew them together. When a measure of normalcy was restored, especially after World War II, most of those named resumed their studies and earned doctorates. Their desire to preserve the distinct culture which had evolved during

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im alten Rußland, since the other individual by that name was also a writer and lived in British Columbia too (Steinbach Post, 19. 1. 1960). The latter is designated by "Y", an abbreviation for Yarrow. The confusion is augmented by the fact that the former appears in various files because of his moving from Russia to Germany, then to Paraguay, and finally to Canada. References supporting this information can be found in the P. J. Klaassen files: 15. 12. 1958; 6. 1. 1959; 10. 3. 1959; 8. 7. 1964. A third P. Klassen resided in Ontario.

- (3) Both of these names will be spelled with the Umlaut in this document.

their early years, a culture quite distinct from that associated purely with the "Mennonite faith",<sup>4</sup> was another factor which bound them together. For the most part, they endorsed and supported Dyck's efforts, contributing articles for his publications, reading, writing, and revising manuscripts, performing his dramatic works, and so forth. Because they had lived through the revolution together, they directly faced the issue of Mennonite adherence to non-resistance, and by popular standards, most failed the test, voluntarily or involuntarily.

Of the common factors which formed the basis of their kindredship, the age factor is probably the least significant, other than the fact that it determined, at least to a degree, their having become acquainted at school because they were of school age at the same time. Several letters make reference to the age factor and from them one is able to determine the ages of some of the writers relative to Dyck's age. The largest age-spread is represented by G. Loewen who was twenty-six years older than Dyck, having been born March 19, 1863 (undated, non-authored document).<sup>5</sup> The youngest correspondent was G. Wiens who was sixteen years younger than Dyck, having been born in January of 1905 (GW 30. 1. 1959). Relative to Dyck, B. B. Wiens was sixteen years older (BBW 31. 10. 1944; BBW undated, August-September 1951 by deduction), J. H. Janzen was eleven years older (JHJ 3. 9. 1943), P. J. Klaassen was seven or eight months older (PJK 16. 6. 1961; 26. 7. 1961), Görz

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- (4) The term is a rather dubious one and cannot be supported theologically. The faith of the Mennonites is the Christian faith, and the distinctive tenets, those which distinguish them from the mainstream, arise from their particular interpretation of the Bible, as Dyck argues persistently.
- (5) The document was likely an enclosure in the letter sent to C. Krahn by Dyck on February 2, 1954. The letter is a response to Krahn's request for an article on G. Loewen and the document is filed next to letter. It is also typed in Dyck's usual style. The letter indicates that Dyck had received the biographical material directly from Loewen. However, the year of birth stands in conflict with the date published in an article by Dyck in 1948 in *Mennonite Life*, namely 1864.

was two years younger (HG 7.4. 1958). Quiring was four years younger (AS 31. 10. 1962), G. Friesen was five years younger (GF 12. 6. 1965), and N. Klassen was six years younger (NK 20. 8. 1960). The age factor actually became more important as Dyck grew older, since many of his friends predeceased him, which added greatly to his loneliness.

What also remains an interesting observation is that in the majority of the files the writing was not initiated by Dyck, even in cases where only occasional reciprocal letters were written. Exceptions to this are B. B. Wiens, K. Fast, G. Friesen, and D. H. Epp. This observation presupposes that the initial letter was filed in each case, which can not be verified.

As Dyck grew older, the original reasons for writing may no longer have been of paramount importance. But in the light of the binding ties, Hedwig Knoop, Dyck's daughter, gives a most compelling purpose for his corresponding, saying that "letters were a writing obligation which he continued to the end, for his relationships with like-minded friends of many years gave depth and warmth to his otherwise lonely existence" (*At the End of the Road* 58).

That Dyck literally lived by the letter is not an overstatement. It may also be true that he apparently "lived by the letter" in the figurative sense of that term. Dyck knew only too well that many of the people for whom he was writing, or at least hoped to be writing, were people who lived by the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. They tended to be legalistic about many things, even about what one could and could not write, or even that one ought or ought not to write. In this context Dyck knew what his imposed limitations were, and when he, in fact, was deliberately overstepping those restrictions.

It is interesting to ponder how consciously Dyck dealt with his correspondence to preserve it. One might argue that it was something that drew his attention later on in life, which could be supported, in part, from an excerpt from a letter sent to Nick Klassen in Vancouver in December of 1962, when Dyck was once again living in Germany:

Auch ich werde nächsten Monat 74. Wenn ich müde geworden bin, so sind daran wohl weniger die Jahre schuld, vielmehr wohl ist es das Erkennen müssen, daß es zwecklos ist, gegen das Schicksal ankämpfen zu wollen: Der Russlandmennonit mußte untergehen . . . Was ich heute, und schon seit Monate tue: Ich suche Ordnung in meine vieljährige Korrespondenz zu bringen, sieht alles, — —<sup>6</sup> Belanglosigkeiten aus, von verschiedenem glaube ich, daß es erhalten werden mußte. Für welchen Zweck. Das ist grade die Frage, die mich in Verwirrung bringt — Aber, nun höre ich auch auf zu gromsaujen, man soll andern damit nicht lästig werden. Und wenn alles, darunter auch die Echo-Angelegenheit, erst erledigt und ein wenig vergessen werden kann, dann will ich mich auch wieder hinter andere Arbeit setzen.  
(NK 6. 12. 1962)

Having seen the need to preserve it may suggest that Dyck thought that it might some day be of some value, even for research purposes. That it was a thought that came to him this late in life is questionable, though. Dyck meticulously kept carbon copies of virtually all the letters he wrote, (possibly all, although a few are missing from the files, which may have been withdrawn for personal reasons). When they were filed is not so much the issue as that they were kept and filed. If he was not deeply convinced that they merited preservation, then one may question his reasons. He may also have been influenced by the published collections of letters from other writers with whom he was acquainted, for example Gogol, a Russian classical writer whom Dyck regarded highly. One may also conclude that this was simply the very essence of his journalistic inclination and talent, that it was a natural thing for

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(6) Word illegible.

him to do. A deeper exploration of his character traits supports this conclusion, too. He also had a strong sense of a mission to complete in preserving the history of his people and recognized the benefit that even the correspondence could offer in this regard. There is evidence that he himself made use of such material in some of this writing. In a letter to D. H. Epp, in which he tells Epp of A. A. Toews's request of Dyck to write the martyr story of his brother, Bernhard Dyck, Dyck writes: "Das sagte ich ab, versprach aber so die Daten aus seinem Leben zu geben. Er bat dann darum. Das war nun doch ein Stück Arbeit, da ich alles aus den Briefschaften heraussuchen musste" (DHE 5. 4. 1946).

Dyck's daughter comments on Dyck's purpose in letter-writing in her article, *Mein Vater, ein Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten*:

Die Abendstunden bei Lampenschein widmete er, wie gesagt, seiner Korrespondenz, also der kreativen Tätigkeit. Ich glaube, der ausgiebige und ausführliche Briefwechsel mit Persönlichkeiten der mennonitischen Öffentlichkeit, den er schon immer gepflegt hatte, wurde nun in seinem letzten Jahrzehnt zu dem Medium, durch welches er seine Gedanken zu aktuellen, vor allem zu kulturellen und historischen Fragen seines Mennonitenvölkchens artikulierte. (*Collected Works* 4. 493)

The genre of the letter covers a wide expanse, and the letter itself encompasses the largest domain of all literary forms. The letter is unique, for the letter has a life of its own as soon as it is written. While it is a substitute for a dialogue, it at the same time freezes the thoughts and feelings of the author exactly as they were conceived in a given moment. It is possible that the author is already another author, that is, he has changed to a greater or lesser degree by the time the letter reaches the recipient. The assumptions underlying the responding letter have to be called into memory by the author of the preceding letter in order to understand the responding letter. Furthermore, the letter is not always a substitute for a dialogue, but an extension and a retention of a dialogue. In the hands of a writer the letter be-

comes a work of art, which speaks to the reader actively and directly precisely because it was not intended for multiple readers but for a specific person. These factors add a complexity to an in-depth analysis. This complexity is heightened by the specific relationship which exists between the reciprocal correspondents. It becomes necessary first to examine each file in its entirety to determine the nature of the relationship which provides the context for the letters from which one receives a cumulative impression and a tone which one cautiously uses to assess the content. To a certain degree one can measure the accuracy of such impressions by examining one file or letter within the context of all the files collectively. The letter lends itself readily to pretexting, especially since each one is complete unto itself; yet, it is this very tendency which one must avoid when one performs a critical examination on a body of letters.

An additional concern which needs to be addressed in order to validate the use of the compiled letters as a primary reference source rather than the conventional secondary reference source is the relative strength or weakness of the correspondence. On the one hand, the letter is a common and highly intimate communication mode. Frequently, those things which may be most difficult to communicate in face-to-face situations are conveyed by letter instead. In such instances the letter becomes an embodiment of the writer's very deepest thoughts and emotions. On the other hand, there are also certain drawbacks under certain circumstances. Since one can think faster than one speaks and one can speak faster than one writes, there may be a tendency to condense issues in the letter. While this may sometimes increase the specificity, it may also leave vital details unspoken or taken for granted in certain contexts. This tendency is heightened in cases where the reciprocal correspondents have had occasion to meet and discuss between letters, the details of which the reader remains in almost total ignorance, apart from fleeting or

piecemeal references to the meeting in subsequent correspondence.<sup>7</sup> In Dyck's case, even when such meetings between letters did not occur, the very fact that he longed for such meetings suggests that not nearly everything that he would like to have discussed in person was transferred into writing for reasons which he set down in a letter to Nick Klassen:

Wieder hat es unverzeihlich lange gedauert bis es zu diesem Schreiben kommt. Und dabei enthält Dein letzter Brief (18.2.62) so vieles, zu dem man sich äußern möchte und sollte. Schöner wäre es wenn man sich zusammensetzen könnte und direkten Gedankenaustausch pflegen. Man spricht leichter und ungehemmter etwas mit der Zunge aus, das gesagt werden sollte, als daß man es schwarz auf weiß von sich gibt. (NK 21. 5. 1962)

A similar notion is found in a letter to Peter J. Klaassen in which Dyck discusses the issue of writers, writing, and the book market, and concludes the segment with "Doch das sind alles Dinge, über die man sich mündlich unterhalten müßte" (PJK-V 2. 5. 1958).

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- (7) One specific example is found in the D. H. Epp-Bote file. Dyck, in his letter of September 8, 1953, informs Epp that he is leaving for Germany shortly and makes a proposal of how the *Verlag* work will be continued and raises the question of what is to be done with the assets of the *Verlag* in the event of an accident or his own death, or even Epp's death. He makes some further suggestions and requests a response or a meeting with Epp, as Epp is planning to come to Winnipeg in October. The response is immediate: Epp decides that the matter can not wait and that he will be coming to Winnipeg in a week's time to discuss the issue. Arrangements are made and one can assume that the meeting took place, since the next letter in the file is written by Dyck to Epp from Germany on the 25th of November.

Another example is found in the Götz file where it becomes apparent in the 1956 correspondence that Dyck and Götz had occasion to meet during the previous summer, although by implication the meeting was brief. This may explain why there is only one letter between them in 1955, one to which Dyck never responded. In such cases one can hardly even speculate what transpired in their meeting.

In an earlier letter to Abram Friesen (Karlos) in Mainz while Dyck was writing from Darlaten concerning the complexity of the "Heimatsfrage" for himself and the lack of a solace in his state of homelessness, he, anticipating a personal meeting with Friesen within the next few months, says: "Doch darüber sprechen wir einmal am besten bei einem Schoppen Wein" (AF 8.4. 1956).

The letter as an art-form is less vulnerable to misinterpretation than the literary works, partially for the reasons already delineated. There is less of a tendency to read into the letter, which is the most common analytical trap of literary interpretation. It is common to utilize the personal correspondence of writers to interpret their literary works, but it is less common to examine the letter for its own unique interpretation. In instances where such letters elucidate the writer's intention, the work already has the necessary explanation in the form of a preface or an introduction. The intentional fallacy is the inherent danger in relying on the letter to interpret the work: what the author sought to achieve as it may be communicated in a letter may not be what he actually achieved. The author's intention must be perceived in the work itself. Summarily, the letter cannot explain the work, but it can help to explain the work. Hence, one can also not assess the artist as a craftsman of his works on the basis of his letters.

The primary object of the examination of the Dyck letters is not to enable the reader to understand Dyck's literary works more clearly, although it may contribute to the understanding, but to determine the value of the letters themselves, to enable the reader to receive a clearer understanding of the man and his views, and for the readership to assess the value of the writer. For this reason the literary works will be used as the secondary source in support of observations made in the letters.



Dyck's living by the letter has allowed his readership to get a closer look at the person behind the letters. That Dyck was an intensely private person is commonly known, and his private life has received very limited exposure in publications, both in his own and that of others. In his autobiography written in 1966 Dyck makes only fleeting references to his family and the last of these references is the birth of his son Siegfried in 1927 (*Aus meinem Leben*, **Collected Works** 1. 501). The rest of this work is devoted to his various literary endeavours. Roy Vogt, a nephew of Arnold Dyck, in an article entitled *The Most Widely Read Mennonite Writer*, makes reference to his private life, but again very briefly:

We knew him [Dyck] as a beekeeper and as a quiet but not unfriendly neighbor. During the war he lived alone in a small house near Toews' Bakery, close to the corner of Main Street and Barkman Avenue. The Second World War had tragically separated him from his family and we compared him, in his hermit-like existence, to his immediate neighbor Isaac Plett, the eccentric inventor. (**Mennonite Mirror** 3.5 March 1974: 6)

Even Dyck's daughter, Hedi Knoop, in *Mein Vater, ein Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten* makes only sporadic remarks concerning her mother's departure from Canada in 1938, and her disappearance during the war (**Collected Works** 4. 479, 481).

Dyck exercises discretion in divulging personal information, even in writing about his family. In some files it would have been unnecessary to give certain details because of the close relationship that existed between him and the correspondent or the proximity of him or her, which would have allowed them to receive pertinent information by other means, as in the case of his association with the Victor Peters family, or with B. B. Wiens to whom he writes: "Du weißt ja, wo meine Familie ist, und kannst Dir vorstellen, in welcher Unruhe ich gegenwärtig bin, da ich noch keine Nachricht habe. —" (3. 6. 1945). In the case of his writing to Karl Götz in Germany he gave some specific details concerning his family's emigration from Canada in

1938, his daughter's marriage, her profession as a schoolteacher (KG 20. 5. 1947; 9. 9. 1947), his residing at the Vogts, his sister-in-law, (KG 9. 9. 1948) and about his grandchildren (KG 11. 2. 1954). However, this information is not volunteered readily. Götz talks about his own family very freely, but receives only occasional details from Dyck as the dates of the correspondence indicate.

The reluctance to share personal information can easily be substantiated further. Walter Quiring, then in Germany, in his initial and unsolicited letter to Dyck, describes his post-war lot, having lost his only son of twenty-three years in the war, his own captivity and subsequent release, and his wife's leaving Stuttgart in 1944; he also mentions that he received a letter from Dyck's daughter, Hedwig Knoop, and so got his first news of Mennonites abroad in seven years (WQ 9. 6. 1946). Dyck's response is less communicative. Although he admits that Quiring's loss moved him deeply, he shares little of his own experiences: "Ich bin vor einem ähnlichen Schicksal bewahrt geblieben; wie nahe ich ihm gewesen war, erfuhr ich erst, als alles vorüber war" (7. 8. 1946). Even Quiring's continuing references to Dyck's daughter (30. 12 1946; 7. 4. 1947; 1. 9. 1947) evoke little more than remarks such as "Wir, meine Tochter und ich, unterhalten einen sehr regen Briefverkehr, ich hoffe dadurch dazu beizutragen, daß sie geistig regsam bleibt" (21. 2. 1947). Perhaps the most revealing statement silently expresses the reason why so little is said. In responding to Quiring's description of his visit at Hedwig's, Dyck acknowledges that for the first time since the war, he sees his family through the eyes of other people and adds: "Bei mir, in meiner Familie, ist ja alles, jawohl alles, irgendwie ganz außergewöhnlich . . . und Überraschungen sind für mich kaum noch Überraschungen" (3. 3. 1948).

Only with three individuals does Dyck, by letter, enter freely into his personal domain, namely with B. B. Wiens, Gerhard Wiens, and Peter J. Klaassen of Paraguay and Vancouver. With B. B. Wiens he shares many of his activities and decisions,

such as selling his house and beekeeping business (17. 2. 1947), selling his chicken business and barns, his concerns about the *Echo-Verlag* (18. 4. 1947), awaiting important news from his family in Germany (1. 5. 1947), announcing the publishing of his first dramatic work (29. 9. 1947), accounts of his travels (23. 6. 1951), and also his sentiments of displeasure, such as D. H. Epp's tardiness in responding to Dyck's letter. He explains that Epp does not write often: "Dabei geht es zwischen uns ja um geschäftliche Briefe. Aber auch die muß ich aus ihm fast mit Gewalt *herauswürgen*" (26. 1. 1952).

It was with Peter J. Klaassen that he shared the details of his own family, after Klaassen had imparted his own life-story to Dyck:

Was mich betrifft, so geht's mir recht gut. Nicht gut geht mir, daß ich hier in Canada allein bin, meine ganze Familie, Frau und vier Kinder, sind nämlich in Europa. Schon seit 1937/38. Die Kinder lernten dort alle, in Deutschland, dann kam der Krieg und alle blieben dort. Zwei, die älteste Tochter und der älteste Sohn, haben dort inzwischen geheiratet, und auch der Jüngste ist verlobt, obwohl er jetzt das vierte Semester antritt (in Göttingen). Ich will diesen Winter übrigens mal hinüber fahren und mir den Schaden ansehen, den auch mir der Krieg angetan hat. (13. 9. 1949)

In discussing other matters, Dyck admits his conscious openness with Klaassen, but, as in other instances, he requests non-disclosure, as in his May 2 letter in 1958: "Du siehst, ich bin sträflich offen mit Dir, froh, einmal einen aus jener Zeit vor mir zu haben, als man noch sein durfte, was man war. Übrigens ist dieses alles auch nur für Dich." The latter remark is found in a number of other letters, for example in a letter to D. H. Epp in talking about religious matters, he writes "Na ja, dieses denn nur so für Dich, und nimm es mir nicht übel" (5. 4. 1946).

While he offers less information to Dr. Kurt Kauenhoven, Göttingen, he offers some additional information, too, namely:

Mit dem Zusammenbruch Deutschlands wurden meine Frau und eine Tochter nach Schottland verschlagen, wo sie auch heute noch sind. Die beiden Söhne gerieten in Gefangenschaft, kamen aber bald frei und fanden dann nach kurzer Zeit ihre älteste Schwester. Alle drei sind jetzt in Nordwestdeutschland, wo die Tochter inzwischen geheiratet hat. Es geht ihnen (mit meiner Unterstützung) verhältnismäßig gut. Der Jüngste macht in diesem Januar sein Abitur, er wird aber seiner erst 20 Jahre wegen Schwierigkeiten haben, eine Universität zu beziehen. Allen ist das Schicksal recht gnädig gewesen, waren die Jungen doch beide an der russischen Front, der ältere vor Stalingrad. (30. 12. 1947)

The remaining familial details pertain primarily to Dyck's son Siegfried who was studying in Göttingen during the years of this correspondence and occasionally visited the Kauenhovens until his return to Canada (6. 6. 1950).

With Abram Friesen he communicated about his daughter Hedwig and his son Otto, but this is primarily because Friesen was in closer physical contact with Dyck during the time that they were both in Germany and Friesen had met Otto personally several times.

Dyck's inclination toward remaining private is also indicated through other details that emerge in the letters. In his correspondence with Dr. Cornelius Krahn, a professor at Tabor College when Dyck first began to write him and later at Bethel College in 1944 (23. 10. 1944), one notes an invitation to Dyck by Krahn to the production of Dyck's *De Opnoam*, offering to help him with travel expenditures and accommodation (11. 1. 1958). Dyck declined, much to the dismay of Krahn (22. 2. 1958). A similar invitation was extended the following year with complete travel costs covered for the production of Dyck's *Wellkoam op'e Forstei*. Again

Dyck declined but did not give a reason (4. 2. 1959). Krahn unrelentingly repeated the latter invitation, assuring Dyck of the friendliness of the audience and alleviating the assumed apprehension of having attention drawn to him, as Krahn presupposed in saying, "Der Beobachtungsort könnte da sein woimmer Sie ihn wählen" (7. 2. 1958). Once more Dyck responded negatively, this time with the request, "Aber nicht übel nehmen, wenn ich halstarrig bleibe. Nach Jahr und Tag wird Ihnen meine Unhöflichkeit bestimmt einleuchten" (11. 2. 1958). In response to the honorarium which he received, he also wrote:

Es ist mir immer schon ein *Lohn*, wenn man mir mitteilt, daß etwas von meinen Sachen aufgeführt wurde und es den Leuten Freude gemacht hat, mehr erwarte ich nicht. Würde es auch von Ihnen nicht. Dennoch weiß ich eine Anerkennung in dieser Form wohl zu schätzen. (4. 4. 1959)

Elisabeth Peters, in an article in *Mennonite Life*, also indicates that Dyck failed to attend a production of his plays staged by the Horndean Drama Group although he visited them frequently in Horndean (April, 1959: 88). When Dyck declined a similar invitation by Nick Klassen in British Columbia (20. 9. 1959; 5. 10. 1959), one is fully prepared for it. On another occasion when Anna Sudermann had invited him to an entertainment evening at the *Schönwieser* Church in Winnipeg in which he was requested to participate, he declined, unfortunately after the fact, not having realized the assumption made by her. He excused himself for not appearing and having misunderstood her and added: "Sie müssen wissen, daß ich ganz abseits vom großen Getriebe der Welt lebe und daher nicht immer mitkomme" (2. 12. 1958).

Other details which bear evidence to this assessment of Dyck's character appear sporadically. For instance, when Krahn requested a photograph of Dyck for Quiring's article, Dyck noted that "[ich] lasse sowas auch äußerst ungern machen"

(26. 3. 1960). When planning his trip to B.C., he explained to B. B. Wiens that he did not want all kinds of obligations when he gets there: "Ich will möglichst unbemerkt bleiben und ganz in der Stille meiner Arbeit nachgehen, was natürlich den gemütlichen Verkehr mit geistig regsamen und jungbleibenden Menschen durchaus nicht ausschliesst . . ." (BBW 17. 2. 1947).

In some instances Dyck's lack of communication and reluctance to engage with people socially is puzzling. When Dyck wrote Krahn in February of 1963, he indicated that his stay in Germany was almost over (11. 2. 1963). Later that month Krahn wrote Dyck to say that he was planning to spend another year in Europe and that he would like to meet with Dyck in order to finalize the plans for moving some of Dyck's books to the Bethel College Library (25. 2. 1963). In his next letter, April 18, Dyck indicated that this matter could not be settled in Germany. On May 24 Dyck wrote that he might return to Canada, and if he should go back to Germany thereafter, "würde ich mich von den Büchern nicht trennen wollen, und sie würden erst nach meinem Tode in andere Hände übergeben können, . . ." (24. 5. 1963). Krahn's letter of May 27 gives further details for his plans for travelling to Germany. The next letter in the file is dated January 31, 1964, which Krahn wrote from Germany to Dyck who was still in Germany. Dyck had not informed Krahn of his whereabouts, for the letter indicates that Krahn heard of Dyck's whereabouts from Regehr in Winnipeg. Dyck's reply gives the reason for his remaining in Germany as not being able to find a dwelling in Winnipeg. He adds, "Hier nun lebe ich sehr zurückgezogen, habe keinen Verkehr und suche ihn auch nicht."<sup>8</sup> In these latter letters Dyck does not make any mention of his family nor the proposed meeting with Krahn. An undated letter from Krahn just before Christmas in either 1963 or 1964 also notes that he had not heard from or met with Dyck. In instances such as this

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(8) An almost identical statement is found in a letter to Nick Klassen, April 16, 1963.

one can merely speculate on the reasons for Dyck's failure to respond. Considering Krahn's determination to acquire Dyck's personal library, which Dyck strongly maintained would remain in his possession during his lifetime (15. 5. 1962), it is possible that Dyck was simply insuring that Krahn would not have the opportunity to press for this in person.

It would be easy enough to dismiss this behaviour on account of his illness, which he mentioned in his letters to Abram Friesen (18. 8. 1964; 2. 10. 1964); however, this is somewhat later in the year, and in the same letter he stated that his digestion problems and poor health were not preventing him from cycling three to four hours a day. Yet, with Nick Klassen he shared the state of his physical condition more frequently and in greater detail (5. 10. 1959; 21. 3. 1960; 4. 3. 1961; 16. 4. 1963). In the March 4 letter, he wrote about his lame leg, his arthritis, digestion ailments, and gallstones which he was treating with diet and medication instead of surgery with some success, and in the April 16 letter he admitted that he feared he had cancer. In conjunction with all this he wrote, "Jedenfalls ist meiner Stimmung und meiner Arbeitsfreudigkeit ein Dämpfer aufgesetzt. (Dieses alles aber nur für Dich)" (4. 3. 1963). From the parenthetical inclusion, one can gather that Dyck did not want his health condition to be a matter for public discussion.

There are other examples of people trying to arrange meetings with Dyck in Germany, which were thwarted by Dyck. Gerhard Wiens, a close friend of Dyck, proposed a meeting with Dyck as he was making his plans to spend a year in Europe beginning the summer of 1965. Their last previous meeting had been in 1958 (GW 13. 1. 65). On August 5th, 1965, Wiens had sent a card to Dyck in Darlaten from Amsterdam requesting a meeting with him. Dyck's response again is puzzling. He wrote Wiens promptly two days later:

Enn zwoasch so, daut See daut woll njih bejriepe woare: Loate Se mi bi dise Äre Reis mau gaunz lintjsch lidje! So jeern etj me met An uck mol wada trafe mucht, bi dise Jeläajenheit oba woat daut njih määjlich senne. Woarom njih–doavon räd wi vleijht een aunda Mol, en Kanada oda en’e Stäts. Jawohl, disen Hoawst noch go etj tridj no Kanada, enn zwoasch wada no Winnipeg. . . . Etj hop, See laje mi min Verhole njih faulsch ut, Äre Frindschaft mucht etj njih veleere. Etj muß daut uck aul met aundre Frind so moake. (7. 8. 1965)

The answer to this puzzle can likely be found in Dyck’s daughter’s article *Mein Vater, ein Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten* in which she explains that in 1965 her father became seriously ill for the first time in his life. Never before had he been hospitalized, apart from the time of his accident. The illness was a liver infection (*Collected Works* 4. 494). While no specific date is given and one cannot determine whether this was before or after the August 7 letter to Wiens, knowing Dyck’s reluctance to let others know his physical condition, one can quite safely assume that this was the reason for his refusal to meet Wiens.

Later, in the 1960’s, when Dyck spent most of his time in Germany, it became necessary for him to settle his affairs in Canada and to engage someone to manage leftover business matters. Jacob Regehr of Regehr’s Printing assisted Dyck in the liquidation and handled many of the financial transactions thereafter. Although the Regehr file is a relatively small file of letters, it reflects a very close relationship between Dyck and Regehr. Regehr lamented how much he missed Dyck in statements such as, “Ich kann aufrichtig bekennen, daß Ihr Wegzug von hier viel näher ging als z.B. der meines Bruders” (22. 5. 1962). In another letter where the same sentiments are issued, he expresses his longing to see Dyck again: “Aber vielleicht sehen wir uns noch einmal in diesem Leben. Sie schreiben mir zu viel vom Sterben, ich werde aber alles so machen wie Sie schreiben und Ihren Brief lege ich mir auf alle Fälle weg” (28. 2. 1962). He also expresses happiness when he receives mail from Dyck and responds warmly to him: “Es freut mich, daß Sie wieder von Reisen sprechen



anstatt von Sterben, so gefallen Sie mir besser, obzwar wir an Sterben denken sollen" (22. 5. 1962). Regehr also does not hesitate to instruct and admonish Dyck, telling him that he is making a big mistake in not coming back to Canada. It is difficult to determine exactly what Regehr meant by this, since the remark is made in the context of Dyck's Medicare issue, another item which Regehr handled for him (29. 3. 1969; 27. 4. 1969). While Regehr shares the personal details of his life with Dyck, such as the telegram notice of his wife's serious illness just as he was embarking a ship from Europe and his timely flight home, her subsequent death two days after his return (21. 9. 1965) and his remarriage (22. 1. 1969), Dyck says little of his family. Yet, the last letter in the file is virtually the only one that expresses a note of finality, as he thanks Regehr for all that he has done for him over all the years.

The secretiveness which Dyck exercised concerning his travel plans is somewhat puzzling. Frequently he did not even inform his friends in Germany that he was planning to go overseas. Apart from informing Regehr in his later years, Dyck almost exclusively informed D. H. Epp, and that primarily for business reasons. A letter written to Epp shortly before Dyck's departure in 1953 supports this:

Das Folgende möchte ich von Dir ganz vertraulich behandelt wissen, am besten, Du vernichtest diesen Brief, nachdem Du ihn gelesen hast. Übrigens wird er nichts Schlimmes enthalten, aber aus gewissen Gründen möchte ich die Dinge, um die es geht, zunächst wenigstens still gehalten haben.

Ich fahre nämlich schon in den nächsten Wochen wieder nach Deutschland. Diesmal für längere Zeit, wie lange, kann ich heute noch nicht sagen, das wird nicht zuletzt auch von der ganzen politischen Lage in der Welt abhängen. . . . Jedenfalls aber breche ich hier meine Hütten ab und will nun auch mal ein paar Jahre in der Nähe meiner einzigen beiden Großkinder verleben. Das wirst Du verstehen. (DB 8. 9. 1953)

Certainly, he must have felt that if people knew of his plans to go to Germany, it might threaten his publishing undertakings. In fact, the very next paragraph deals with the work in the *Echo-Verlag* and his decision to take it with him overseas. At the conclusion of the letter he reiterates his request — “Also noch einmal: verbrenne diesen Brief bitte” — which suggests much concern.

In other instances where he had left people uninformed about his whereabouts, as in the case of Anna Sudermann (14. 10. 1961), he probably had less of a reason to inform them. However, a subsequent letter from Sudermann implies in the phrase “[b]ei Ihrer Gewohnheit, geheimnisvoll zu verschwinden, um dann wieder irgendwann in Kanada oder Deutschland aufzutauchen” (31. 10. 1962) that this kind of behaviour was customary. Görz, who corresponded regularly with Dyck over a period of years, also experienced an unexplained interruption in letters from Dyck. When Görz repeatedly heard nothing, he was alarmed, (15. 4. 1954). The reason for the interruption is not learned from the letters. Earlier, in 1953, he was also surprised to learn of Dyck’s sudden appearance in Germany (2. 11. 1953).

If Dyck was reluctant to talk about his personal plans and his family situation, he was even more reluctant to talk about the trauma of his earlier life. It is only after Peter Klaassen of Rosenort in the Fernheim Colony in Paraguay asks about the fate of Dyck’s brother, of which Klaassen had some details, that Dyck discusses his brother’s fate quite extensively, devoting an entire letter to it:

Ihr Brief vom 9. Juni, 1943, hat mich erreicht und hat in mir Gefühle der Freude and zugleich der Wehmut ausgelöst. Der Freude, daß mal jemand nach meinem lieben Bruder fragt, und Wehmut, daß ich dem, was Sie über sein trauriges Schicksal wissen, nicht viel hinzufügen kann.

Nachdem mein Bruder Bernhard freigelassen worden war — wohl 6 Monate vor Ablauf der dreijährigen Frist, auf die sein Urteil lautete, für *gutes Betragen*—und zu den Seinen zurückgekehrt war, wohnte er in Schöneberg. Er ist dann wieder als Prediger tätig

gewesen, was die Veranlassung wurde, daß er nach Arkadak flüchten mußte. Aber auch dort stellte man ihm wegen derselben Tätigkeit nach, und er ging zurück nach der Ukraine, wohl wieder nach Schöneberg. Er wurde nun zum zweiten Mal arretiert (auch sein ältester Sohn wurde um dieselbe Zeit wieder verhaftet) und verschleppt. Wohin? — das habe ich nie erfahren. Ich habe dann weder von seiner Frau noch seinen Kindern irgendwelche Nachrichten bekommen und mußte annehmen, daß mein Bruder umgekommen sei. Dann, nach etwa einem Jahr, erhielt ich durch eine gemeinsame Bekannte in Alexandrowsk (meine Schwägerin, mit der ich die Verbindung bis dahin noch hatte aufrecht erhalten können, die Nachricht, daß Bernhard Dyck noch lebe und ab und zu ein kurzer Brief von ihm (aus Verbannung oder Kerker?) seine Angehörigen erreiche. Ein Toter war für mich erstanden! Leider kündete die Briefschreiberin in demselben Briefe an, daß der Briefwechsel mit mir nun abbrechen müsse, sie wage es nicht mehr zu schreiben oder Briefe zu erhalten. Und das ist meine letzte Nachricht von meinem letzten Bruder. (Unser ältester Bruder, Peter Dyck, wurde ermordet.) Heute wurde auch Bernhard tot sein. Zu Tode gemartert, weil er ein überzeugungstreuer, weil er ein ehrlicher und guter Mensch war. Wie gut, das weiß niemand besser als ich.

Unsere alte Mutter war mit den andern schließlich (von Moskau) wieder nach Hochfeld gekommen und starb dort. Sie hat bis zuletzt ihren Unterhalt (durch Spinnen) selber bestreiten [sic] können, und es ist ihr in ihrer Vereinsamung auch von Fremden viel Liebes erwiesen worden *um ihres Sohnes Bernhards wegen*. — —

. . . . Er [Ihr jüngerer Bruder] war es auch, der mir brieflich — die von Ihnen kommende für mich so niederschmetternde Nachricht von der Festnahme meines Bruders und seines Sohnes in Moskau übermittelte. (PAR 31. 1. 1944)

In view of Dyck's intensely private nature, one even questions the changing of his name from Abram Bernhard to Arnold, which he mentions in his first letter to Nick Klassen in order to confirm their acquaintance in St. Petersburg (8. 12. 1952), but for which he offers no explanation. Did he seek to conceal his true identity? Did his original name not have the distinctiveness of a writer? Did he have some preconceived notion about an author's name? Does this have any relation to the pen names which he used in his publications? During the Nazi period it was common practice for people to change their "Jewish" names to "Arian" names. One can

speculate that this is why he changed his name, but would he have found it necessary to do so having lived in Canada from 1924 and not having visited Germany until 1949, especially as he was living among Mennonites where Abram was a common name? Dyck does not clarify this change, but he does clarify the use of the three pseudonyms— Fritz Walden which he used for writing in High German, Hans Ennen for Low German, and Onkel Peter for the Geschichtenverein: “Es war nicht, daß ich nicht verantworten wollte, was ich schrieb oder tat, es schien mir aber nicht schicklich, daß der Editor so viel Raum für sich in Anspruch nahm” (*Aus meinem Leben, Collected Works* 1. 505). Concerning his being referred to as van Dyck in the Nienburger Tageszeitung, *Die Harke*, Dyck offers the following explanation:

Wenn ich da van Dyck genannt werde, so muß ich dazu wohl erklären, daß meine Familie, die schon seit 1938 in Deutschland war, sich während des Krieges dort einbürgern ließ und zwar unter dem Namen van Dyck von Ermittlungen, die in Westpreußen vorgenommen worden waren. Unter diesem Namen kamen drei meiner Kinder in die Nienburger Gegend und nur so lernte man sie kennen. Als später ich sie dort dann besuchte und einige Zeit wohnte, da übertrug man den Namen ohne weiteres auch auf den betreffenden Vater. Ich ließ es schon dabei. (PJK-V 26. 7. 1961)

It is remarkable how much can be gleaned from Dyck's personal life when one considers the correspondence as a whole. It is also interesting that he chose to deal with particular issues in his life with isolated individuals, so that it is only in the context of the whole that one can peer into the private life of a very private man to a considerable extent. The argument for reviewing the whole of the correspondence — to gain a valid assessment of the content of the letters and the value of such letters — even though each letter can stand alone in its own right, is self-evident.

The evidence of Dyck's living by the letter is indisputable. If one were able to compute the time he devoted to the writing and maintenance of his correspon-

dence, one would surely be astounded by the figures. The letter was a daily integral part of Dyck's life, and because of his living by the letter, he continues to live through his letters, of which this thesis offers the very proof.

## Chapter 2: An Ordinary Fellow?

Who can read the works of Arnold Dyck and not wonder about their creator as much as about the creations? His works have the distinctive quality of capturing the moment of the experience and emotion of the moment so precisely that the account seems to roll before one's eyes in film rather than in stark black letters. They also have the ability to engage the reader to the degree where, at the very least, he becomes an interested spectator with a sense of real experience in the action. Who can not identify with Hänschen as he begins to sense that something is wrong with his sister, Lena, and mother as his mother's increasing worry over Lena's condition is finally released in tears? Hänschen, not comprehending what it all means, is nevertheless affected as deeply as a child of his tender years could possibly be. A scene such as this is, in fact, felt even more acutely by the reader, because, while the reader understands exactly what is happening, he or she is yet "forced" to experience Lena's death through the innocent eyes and mind of the five-year-old. And in such moments of profound empathizing, intensified by experiencing the events through more than one character's eyes, there is a skillful and realistic inclusion of humor. That Lena, apparently, was too clever for her years and that is why she had to die is something that escapes Hänschen's grasp. He does make the deduction though, that he must be less clever, since he is still alive, at least so far, and hopefully till after Christmas, and then he gives up trying to reason this out. It is all too confusing (*Verloren in der Steppe* 22). Incidents that reveal the author's incisive insight into the peculiar minds of his characters follow one another paragraph by paragraph and page by page. Can anyone reading these works do so without a curiosity about the person who created them?

In examining the letters, one is struck by a number of distinct and unmistakably identifiable characteristics that arise out of the tracing-paper thin sheets, often

almost illegible from a faint, over-used carbon and neatly held together by a now-rusted nail. That the letter truly has a life of its own is confirmed as one reads the letters; that the writer of the letter can continue to live on through his medium and virtually be confronted face to face leaves one in a state of utter amazement.

The letters bear the records of Dyck's writings and achievements. One can document the writing of most of his dramas, his novel, his articles, as well as his work as publisher, as editor of the *Steinbach Post*, the *Mennonitische Warte*, the *Warte-Jahrbuch*, and his work as secretary of the *Echo-Verlag*. This is the writer, the producer, the businessman, the professional. But who is this man who steps forth from these last and most personal effects? He is the product of a process that he himself described as *Menschwerden*. He is *Mensch*.

In his day-to-day existence, Dyck was a private individual, as already indicated in previous references from the letter files. This is not only borne out in the views which he shared with great discretion, but also in his social interaction. Dyck did not appear to enjoy crowds or large social gatherings of any kind, and he tells B. B. Wiens, who has written him about their golden wedding, why:

Machen das die vorrückenden Jahre, oder macht das das Klima, das auf diesen Festlichkeiten hier herrscht? In mir bewirkt diese ganze Salbigkeit bei solchen Gelegenheiten genau das Gegenteil von dem, was sie bezweckt. Weiß der Kuckkuck, wenn ich so irgendwo draußen am Zaun mich mit unsern lieben Mennisten beschnüffele, ganz egal ob Laien, Prediger, Bischöfe, so sind es die prächtigsten Menschen, in die ich mich jedesmal von neuem vernarre. Höre ich sie aber bei der Feier, dann falle ich jedesmal en'e Leed. Und so kommt es dann, daß ich meine schönsten und "gesegnetsten" Stunden auf Konferenzen etc. immer irgendwo draußen an der Fenz oder wo auf der Car habe. (BBW 24. 7. 1946)

His business associate, D. H. Epp, too would rather be outside the “geweihten Wände” and visit with like-minded friends (BBW 24. 7. 1946). This is reiterated after Dyck has been to the Leamington Conference: “Und weißt Du, wir [Epp und Dyck] konferenzt dann so neben der Konferenz auf dem Hof unter den Bäumen. Und einmal holte man uns gar hinein” (BBW 23. 7. 1951).

It is interesting to observe that while Dyck protected his privacy, he did not demonstrate the qualities so often associated with recluses. He was certainly not non-communicative, out of touch with the real world, nor without a deep sense of purpose. So, while he accepted his loneliness, one also senses an intense melancholy in statements such as: “Ich feiere Weihnachten immer recht einsam und bin immer froh, wenn die Feiertage erst vorbei sind” (BBW 26. 12. 1951). Although Dyck chose to be alone, he does not see this as a positive thing necessarily, as intimated in a letter to K. Kauenhoven. The latter had become acquainted with Dyck’s son Siegfried who was studying in Göttingen and informs Dyck that Siegfried seems to have found a small circle of friends and is secretary of the Canada Club. Apart from this he appears to have a “ziemliche Neigung zum Einspännertum” (KK 12. 12. 1948). Several letters later Dyck expresses his joy at Siegfried’s situation and laments that “Die *Neigung* zum Einspännertum ist wohl erbliche *Belastung*” (KK 10. 3. 1949).

An appreciation of nature is a characteristic common among writers. The letters repeatedly reveal that Dyck longed to be close to nature. He enjoyed walking and cycling. Whether in Germany or in Canada, he included one or the other in his daily routine. After his motor-bike accident in Germany, while recuperating at a spa in Cuxhaven for five weeks, he went on walks for up to two hours daily (VP 28. 9. 1956). One reads idyllic descriptions of his existence in Germany, in his little secluded cottage in the woods in the moors:



Mein Häuschen . . . steht auch hier unter Kiefern und Birken.  
. . . Meine Nachbarn sind nicht Menschen, sondern die Rehe des  
Waldes, die gelegentlich vor meinem Schreibtischfenster spazieren-  
gehen. Aber auch außer Rehen, Fasanen, Hasen und anderem Getier  
gibt es hier viel Natur . . . . (NK 23. 1. 1962)

The practice of walking was one to which he adhered in Canada, too. In describing his daily routine in Steinbach to B. B. Wiens, he mentions his daily walk at 6:30 p.m. and talking to very few people (BBW 9. 3. 1951). Later, in Winnipeg, he found it frustrating that he could not find quiet and secluded places where he could go for leisurely walks (GF 17. 7. 1958).

His passion for nature was somewhat dependent on climatic conditions; he abhorred the Manitoba winters and was literally driven away by them. Several times he expresses his desire to go to and even move to British Columbia, completely dismayed by the absence of spring or summer in Manitoba:

Man verzweifelt schon ohnehin fast mit unserm Wetter. Der Kalender sagt, es ist bereits August, und wir haben wahrhaftig noch keinen Frühling gehabt, und nun soll auch der Sommer fast dahin sein. Und was das Schlimmste ist: so'n Frühling und Sommer setzen einem so zu, daß man sich schließlich schon den Winter herbeiwünscht, denn der ist doch wenigstens richtig und beständig. Alle anderen Jahreszeiten sind hier purer Schwindel. (BBW 1. 8. 1944)

Why, then, did he stay? He answers that question, too: "Nur die deutsch-druckenden Druckereien halten [mich] hier" (BBW 1. 8. 1944).

The complaints remain over the years, first his bemoaning the fact that spring does not come till the middle of June, and then there is the intolerable heat (BBW 18. 4. 1947). In another account a few years later, having returned from Germany two months prior, he recalls the nicest spring weather that he had had there,

while in Canada it was still winter. He talks of the snow still lying on the shady side of his house and the first warm temperatures being forecast, and about the flood (BBW 12. 5. 1950). Years later, writing from Germany, he is frustrated by the weather on that continent. The constant rain caused almost incessant shivering, which kept him from doing what he had purposed to do. He writes that he could read while shivering, but it made writing and letter-writing very difficult (NK 23. 1. 1962). A month earlier he had already been wishing he were back in Manitoba, where even if the weather is cold, at least his room would be warm (NK 6. 12. 1962).

His dislike for uncomfortable weather is matched only by his dislike for domestic chores. It may have been this, in part, that caused him to limit his direct contact with people. For instance, he tells B. B. Wiens that he would like to have travelled to the United States with him, but he does not know how they would have managed with the "Essenmacherei."

Sieh mal, dazu nahm ich mir grade ein Weibsbild mit, die laut Abmachung das ganze Verpflegungswerk in den Händen halten mußte, weil ich wenigstens einmal drei Wochen lang die verdammte Futtersorge lossein wollte. Ich hatte nämlich als einzigen Mitfahrer meine Plemennitza mit, die gleichzeitig Krankenschwester ist, und die dann auch bestens für meinen leiblichen Menschen gesorgt hat.  
(BBW 29. 8. 1946)

Then when he communicates his plans to go to B.C. in May, he comments again on this aspect of his life-style: "Essen tu ich irgendwo im Städtchen, wie ich das jetzt schon seit Jahren betreibe" (BBW 18. 4. 1947).

Although his dislike for attending to some of the necessities of life becomes quite clear, it does not suggest in any way that he did not attend to detail in his everyday life. In fact, just the contrary is true. His letter-writing, his detailed record-

keeping of the *Verlag*, and even his very routine (BBW 9. 3. 1951) are the evidence. He seems to have had a good memory for details, too. The record of bills and receipts between him and Wiens were stored in his head. Dyck assures Wiens that “das in Geldsachen aber nicht schlecht ist” (BBW 9. 3. 1951). Many other instances of attention to details can be noted. Of unusual interest is the documentation of the 14,376 kilometers which he accumulated on his bicycle over three years at age seventy-six (JR 20. 2. 1965).

While one may find it fascinating to try to determine how this man lived his daily life, one becomes much more engrossed by the more consequential qualities of his personhood. The letters are devoid of sentimentality, but they are laden with compassion, sensitivity, and kindness. One recalls his many humanitarian gestures: sending care packages to Karl Götz and his family in Germany after the war (KG 20. 5. 1947) (5. 12. 1947), which along with Dyck’s letters are deeply appreciated. One is moved more and more by these gestures as one begins to realize how desperate Götz’s situation was. One receives this information piecemeal. Götz had rented an attic in Stuttgart not far from the middle-school for girls where he was teaching, while his family remained in Dinkelsbühl. He tells of being able to go home for Christmas and being able to give gifts – dishes. The war had left them only three soup-bowls and four cups (KG 19. 10. 1949). He thanks Dyck for the lard and coffee and says that he sold the coffee in order to buy a few things for his boys.

Dyck also extended his generosity to Dr. Kurt Kauenhoven in Göttingen. From Kauenhoven’s letter, October 28, 1947, and from other sources earlier (KK 30. 12. 1947), Dyck learned of his nine-month imprisonment and the loss of his position, causing Dyck to initiate the sending of care packages, assisted by Anna Vogt, a Sunday-school class, and a *Frauenkränzchen* (KK 29. 3. 1948; 21. 6. 1948).

He also maintained a fairly constant flow of literary materials and again there are direct statements in the letters indicating that they were sent gratis (KK 9. 3. 1951).

When contact with Walter Quiring was re-established after World War II, Dyck, fully aware of the dire circumstances of post-war Europe, immediately wrote: "Und wenn Ihnen an etwas fehlt – es wird ja auch bei Ihnen verschiedenes knapp sein – so schreiben Sie mir das ungeniert. Es ist selbstverständlich, daß ich Ihnen helfe" (WQ 7. 8. 1946). Quiring kindly refused this offer (WQ 16. 9. 1946) and Dyck accepted the refusal, but told him the offer stood. It is possible that there was a misunderstanding on Quiring's part, as is indicated by Dyck's statement in a subsequent letter: "Und wenn ich von einer Schuld sprach, so dachte ich dabei weniger an eine geldliche. Aber auch irgendwelche Schuld müßte meine Haltung doch als selbstverständlich voraussetzen" (WQ 7. 11. 1946). That Dyck was selfish in his motivation is hardly to be considered, even though he probably knew that he would soon be requesting Quiring's involvement in various literary and historical publications. In his December 30 letter, Quiring consented to assistance. February 14, 1947, a care package was sent to Quiring and Dyck showed his intention to send relief through C.A.R.E. The extent of Quiring's poverty is revealed by statements such as the one that indicated that these packages were duty-free and that if they had not been, he would not have been able to afford to receive them (WQ 29. 12. 1948). One also finds that Quiring was not always successful in retaining all the contents of the packages (WQ 3. 2. 1949).

Dyck's generosity is observed frequently. He sent books and publications to his friends without expecting payment and frequently even requested not to be paid, particularly when he was aware of dire circumstances in that person's life. Alexander Rempel was one of these persons, and Dyck states that he was happy to be able to help him (AR 26. 5. 1951). Ernst Behrends was another such person. In this case

his readiness to lend assistance may have been influenced by Behrends' intention to write a novel about Mennonites and to help Dyck in his promotion of *Echo-Verlag* books. He instructs Regehr to send books and not to charge for them, "nicht von einem wie dieser Mennonitenfreund und angesichts dieses besonderen Zwecks" (JR 5. 9. 1962).

Empathy — placing himself into the person's position and acting from that vantage point — is witnessed in Dyck over and over. One thinks of his deep desire to publish Loewen's poetry book, because he knew what joy it would bring to Loewen if he could live to see it published (GL 2. 12. 1945).

One's admiration for Dyck and his accomplishments and his strong convictions might lead one to assume that he would be puffed up with pride. So much greater is one's wonder at his humility. Even greater is the wonder that he is humble in the very area where he had the greatest cause and vulnerability to be proud. Not only did he accept criticism on his works without defensiveness, as when Götz sent his criticism on *Verloren in der Steppe* (KG 2. 3. 1948), but he himself criticized the pride of the money-making Mennonites (WQ 5. 8. 1947). When B. B. Wiens critiqued an article that Dyck had sent to him, he accepted the criticism and openly described his feelings of timidity when subjecting his work to the scrutiny of others, but he did not become defensive, only embarrassed. He compared his feelings to those he used to have before taking an exam:

Junge, du mußt dich in Zukunft sehr, sehr viel besser vorbereiten, du weißt ja heute gar nichts. Heute sage ich mir in solchen Momenten der Schwäche und Verzagtheit: Junge, laß die Hände vom Büchermachen, was bemengst du dich überhaupt mit Sachen, in denen dir jeder Esel eins überreißen kann. . . Warum bleibst du nicht bei deinen Bienen, die dich wohl mal auch stechen, wenn du ungeschickt bist, deren Stich aber gut für dein Reißen ist, das dich gelegentlich hier und da zwickt. — Und dabei lasse ich mir dann alle weak points meines gebrechlichen Produkts durch den Kopf gehen und stochere in den

ohnehin brennenden Wunden herum, mit sadistischer Wollust stoche-  
re ich da herum. Eine solche Beule war mir Ihr Artikel. . . . Junge,  
Junge, bleib bei deinen Bienen. (BBW 8. 3. 1945)

Perhaps the various disappointments and “failures” caused him to remain humble. He does not hide the fact that he was embarrassed that after more than seven months Götz still had not been able to find a publisher for *Verloren in der Steppe*: “Das ist für mich ja zum Schämen und zum Rotwerden, wenn ich da jemand sich für mich so abmühen sehe. Lieber Herr Götz, lassen Sie das doch wirklich sein” (KG 3. 5. 1950). Indeed, he was ashamed that he has not asked him sooner to give up the search. When K. Kauenhoven offered to find a publisher for him, Dyck graciously and gratefully refused it, because he did not want to subject him to disappointments (KK 3. 2. 1953), but Dyck was probably trying to shield himself from them, too.

His humility is also reflected in that he did not like to have to praise himself to sell his books. He calls his dilemma a “verdammte Lage”, to write, to publish his own works, and then to do his own advertising for his own works. One detects a subtle note of irony as he adds the complicating factor: “Nun sind wir glücklicherweise doch so wohlerzogen, daß wir unsere Sachen nicht selber loben mögen” (BBW 7. 1. 1947). Even privately he did not want to laud his accomplishments. In one of his letters to Gerhard Wiens in which he describes his major undertakings of the past — the *Warte*, the *Warte-Jahrbuch*, the *Auslese*, and the *Echo-Verlag* and its thirteen works — Dyck reminds him that this is only for his information, “jedenfalls aber mich nirgends wörtlich zitieren” (GW 4. 2. 1959). Wiens’s article about Dyck claimed that Dyck had founded the *Echo-Verlag*. Dyck’s reaction is “Um Gottes Willen, lieber Freund, berichtigen Sie das doch noch. Die beiliegende Broschüre klärt Sie über den Geburtsakt auf, auch darüber, wie es dazu kam” (GW 4. 2. 1959). He only admits that the idea was his and that he got to do all the work, but he insists:

“Also bitte, bitte: nicht Dycks Echo-Verlag” and gives the credit to the former students of the *Zentralschule*.

The man one sees in a superficial study of his qualities would not lead one to conclude that he had a striking sense of humor. However, the presence of certain characteristics does not preclude the absence of others unless they are diametrically opposed. Certainly his works attest to a strong command of humor, punctuated by irony. This causes one to ask, to what degree is the generation of humor a matter of personality, and to what degree is it a matter of art and skill? Those who are familiar with Dyck's works can hardly dispute the man's creative genius in writing humorously, not only in the popular **Koop enn Bua** stories, but also in more subtle ways in other works. What caused him to write in this mode? Was it a natural bent towards humor, that is, personality? Was it merely a skill which he developed, consciously or unconsciously? Did he realize that this was the best and the most acceptable way in which he could deliver his important messages to his people with limited offensiveness? Did he believe that the very nature of *Plautdietsch* lent itself more towards the comic mode than say the tragic mode?<sup>1</sup> Did he believe that he could hide more of the man, the writer, himself, by the means of humor, than by other techniques? There may be a measure of validity in all of these possibilities; however, the letters do reveal a natural inclination towards humor, which suggests that the essence for developing humor in his works was an inherent part of his very being. One needs to remember that the letter is usually written quite spontaneously, although there is some evidence that the letters of his last decade, some of which were written explicitly for the purpose of recording his views on cultural and historical Mennonite issues, were more calculated (Knoop, *Mein Vater. Collected Works* 4. 493). The

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(1) Dyck rarely used *Plautdietsch* in tragic writings. The most notable exception is his well-known tragic short story *Twee Breew* which is seen as proof that Low German can be used successfully in writing serious literature.

examples of humor in the letters, which are fairly numerous, appear to be unstudied. Often the humor appears in the context of other issues, hence they may not be very meaningful when extracted from their context, but a few examples will bear out the fact that even though he seemed to enjoy an isolated life-style, he could also relish stimulating company, and even better, imagine himself in it even as he was writing the letter. When, for instance, Dyck wrote B. B. Wiens in British Columbia, in response to the latter's request for a visit, Dyck writes:

Dazu wollte ich mir aber eine neue Car kaufen, und nu streikt das Takel überall und mit dem neuen Auto sieht es man recht trüb aus. So geht es mir immer mit meinen großen Plänen, immer kommt da eine Kleinigkeit dazwischen, ein Weltkrieg, ein Millionenmannstreik u.a.  
(BBW 4. 12. 1945)

On another occasion Dyck recounts his two-thousand kilometer trip to southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, half of which he made on his bicycle:

Genau einen Monat war ich unterwegs und die ganze Zeit herrschte eine Temperatur zwischen 30 und 37 Grad. Da habe ich in den Bergen was geschwitzt beim Treten und beim Schieben. Und erfrischende Brisen, wie hier an der Nordsee, gab es da nicht. Jede 10 km mußte ich tanken, Bier natürlich. Ich habe alles andere zuerst versucht, angefangen von der frommen Milch, aber nur mit Bier ließ es sich einigermaßen schaffen. (GF 6. 8. 1957)

There are other examples: While Dyck was certainly committed to publishing Loewen's **Feldblumen**, in a letter to Epp, on February 14, 1944, loaded down with work, he wrote "die **Feldblumen** können gern bis zum April weiter im Verborgenen blühen."

On one occasion Dyck had sent one of his works to Götz for perusal and stated: "Wenn Sie mal nichts Besseres zu tun haben, lesen Sie das Ding vielleicht,



und dann werden Sie ja schon sehen, ob es damit nicht schon genug Leser gehabt hat. (Sie wären übrigens dann der erste und letzte gewesen.)” (KG 31. 10. 1951) When C. Krahn required a picture of Dyck for *Mennonitische Welt*, Dyck wrote: “[ich] schicke ein anderes, das weniger schlecht ist, so weit das bei mir denn möglich ist” (26. 2. 1952). Indeed, in his letters, Dyck is often the target of his own humor.

As suggested in Chapter 1, the people with whom Dyck corresponded were not selected at random, and they tell one something of Dyck. This is not to say that Dyck was in agreement with all the views expressed by his friends and acquaintances, but the fact that they expressed them freely to him indicates that they did not feel he would reject them for their views. Occasionally, Dyck expresses the kindred spirit sentiment:

[E]igentlich glaube ich doch, daß wir in vielen Sachen, besonders in den wichtigeren, sehr ähnliche Ansichten haben und uns daher sehr bald näher kommen würden. Ich bin in mennonitischen Angelegenheiten ein bißchen revolutionär, Du scheinst mir auch nicht ganz frei davon zu sein. (BBW 19. 5. 1945)

Courageous himself, he was impressed by courageous people, those who dared to express their opinions and in the case of B. B. Wiens, to admit he was an Altkolonier:

Das ist mir in meiner Praxis auch noch nicht passiert, daß da mal einer, den alle Welt für’n Molotschnaer hält, sich ohne Not und aus freien Stücken zu den Altkoloniern bekennt. Das muß man sagen, Mut und Leichtsinn besitzen Sie. Aber mutige Menschen haben mir schon immer imponiert, und mit ein bißchen Leichtsinn lebt sich’s leichter, vor allem aber schöner. Ich komme gut mit den Molotschnaern aus, schon von der Forstei her und aus meiner Studienzeit (waren sie doch immer in der Mehrheit und worin sie uns Altkoloniern über sind, soll gelten; wenn ich aber eine Nation nicht leiden mag, so sind es solche Pseudo-Altkolonier, die es, wo es paßt und wo es nicht paßt, hervorstreichen mögen, daß sie mit irgend einem Zeh molotschnaer Abstammung sind. (BBW 1. 8. 1944)

In another letter he encouraged B. B. Wiens to write and to do it “wie Dir der Schnabel gewachsen ist, so wie Du etwa Deine Briefe an mich schreibst. Die wirken auf mich immer ungeheuer erfrischend” (BBW 1. 2. 1946). He also encouraged him to submit an article to the *Bote* about his golden wedding: “Tue das doch einmal im *Boten*. Und wenn Ohm Diedrich Dir dann an den Kragen will, komm ich Dir, *jej-she-jej*, zu Hilfe.” Dyck did not lack courage either. It was not his intention that his private opinions be publicized, and he guarded them cautiously; but the reader of the cumulative files gains a virtual omniscience which the individual letter-writers did not have, and is able to get a more comprehensive view. Dyck was forthright in expressing positive opinions of people. Having visited Gerhard Friesen in Wilhelmshaven he wrote to Victor Peters: “Der Mann hat mir bestens gefallen” (VP 25. 8. 1955). While he recognizes Friesen’s weaknesses, he does not change his opinion and reiterates it even four years later:

Unter uns – dem lieben Mann fehlt ein Manager. Wie es ist, scheint er es nicht fertig zu bringen, sich Verhältnisse zu schaffen, in denen er das tun könnte, wozu die Vorsehung ihn einmal bestimmt und ausgerüstet hat – zu schreiben, denn ohne Zweifel ist er der Begabteste von allen und – es liegt nichts von ihm vor. (VP 8. 7. 1959)

In the case of a more controversial well-known figure, the deciphering of opinions becomes a fairly complex task. There are several such figures, the most notable – Walter Quiring. In the early letters between Dyck and Quiring, the broad general issues with which Dyck concerned himself were discussed openly. It seemed Dyck wanted to know where Quiring’s sentiments lay as far as the Mennonites were concerned.<sup>2</sup> Quiring openly stated his position in several letters, making statements such as,

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(2) Dyck certainly would have been familiar with Quiring’s earlier views through his articles in *Der Bote* from 1934 to 1937, which exposed Quiring’s political Germanism. Among his published views were (a) that “Mennonites spoke

In meinen persönlichen Plänen für die Zukunft spielt das Mennonitentum gar keine Rolle. Auch wenn es mir gelänge, nach C[anada] oder S.A. [Südamerika] auszuwandern, würde ich wohl kaum unter Mennoniten leben. Das würde meinem Wohlwollen dieser Gemeinschaft gegenüber allerdings keinen Abbruch tun. (WQ 1. 9. 1947)

After Epp's death in 1955, Quiring became the new editor of the *Bote* (WQ 18. 12. 1955), a paper which Dyck had long felt was simply a religious mouthpiece for the General Conference. Victor Peters wrote Dyck, expressing his fears that Quiring would be a second D. H. Epp (perhaps because Peters had been slighted by Quiring, who had not published his travel journal as previously promised). Quiring, once in Rosthern, wondered whether Dyck (at that time in Germany) would continue to support the *Bote* with its change in leadership. Dyck assured him of it, but stated his misgivings about the new *Bote* and about his contribution: "Im übrigen habe ich dabei immer das peinliche Gefühl gehabt, daß meine Schreibereien — nach Gegenstand, Form, vor allem aber Ton — unter dem anderen Stoff, ein wenig out of place waren. . . . An sich würde ich gerne mitmachen. . . ." (WQ 18. 1. 1956). This feeling out of place originated in a fundamental conviction that Dyck had about his definition of "Mennonite", which he maintained was almost exclusively a cultural and an historical entity, rather than a religious one, as the writers and directors of the paper assumed.

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German (*deutsch, niederdeutsch, plattdeutsch*) and German was the language of the Mennonite heart" (b) claiming that ethnically Mennonites were Germans, "[h]e rejected the term *mennonitsches Volk* and insisted that one could speak only of *eine mennonitsche Konfession, eine mennonitsche Gemeinschaft*" (c) he justified the Nationalist Socialist Germany by citing the achievements of the *Reich* and the *Führer*, namely, "the clean-up of the films and other mass media, the ordering of the political life and of putting the Jews in their place, the unifying of the many Germanies, the providing of employment and/or bread for the unemployed, and of stopping the Communist menace. Credit for these achievements, of course, belonged to Adolf Hitler, for whom the popular *Heil Hitler* was both a deserved honor, a meaningful greeting, and a proper prayer." (Epp, *An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism* 230, 232, 235–236)

The continuing references to Quiring and the **Bote** in the various letter files speak largely for themselves. In the Gerhard Friesen files, Dyck admits that “zwischen dem **Boten** und mir ist das Verhältnis recht kühl” (GF 6. 5. 1960). He talks about his disappointments; he had hoped that with Quiring at the helm, the paper could become what it should have been all along, and that it should, as any good paper tolerate opposing viewpoints and bring issues to the forefront, rather than promote a certain factional or sectarian view.

His opposition to Quiring is a two-pronged opposition: professional and personal. He recognized Quiring’s editorial expertise and that he was not “fromm genug” for the Conference Board (NK 18. 2. 1962) (which, in this case, was a compliment) and that he had improved the paper; but he criticized Quiring’s journalistic compromising and his egocentricity and materialistic inclinations. To Friesen in South Africa he wrote:

Ja, dabei könnte ich Ihnen allerhand auch über den **Boten** und seinen zurzeitigen “Onkel” [Quiring] erzählen. Dieser Onkel wird tatsächlich ausgebotet und ausgebootet. Alles Anpassen und Sichfügenwollen hat zu nichts geführt, und so geht Qu. also, und zwar schon zum 15. September. (GF 22. 4. 1963)

Dyck suspected that the old dissenting guard who had had to remain silent in recent times would not likely be heard in the paper again.

To Nick Klassen he wrote that Quiring is “sehr materialistisch u. vergisst sich selber nirgends . . .” (NK18. 2. 1962). Correspondence between Klassen and Dyck suggests a mutual skepticism about Quiring. Klassen stated his dislike for him openly, especially the way he conducted himself with others and in the scandals he created, launching attacks against individuals such as Ältester Thiessen (NK 30. 6. 1963). While Dyck was also negatively inclined, he tended to be somewhat more ob-

jective. While he was surprised at Quiring's behaviour, he still gave him his due credit, acknowledging that Quiring's contribution to the *Bote* had been "die Verbesserung der Sprache" (NK 27. 7. 1963). Yet, he also knew that they would find out after Quiring's *Bilderbuch* would be completed how much he belonged to the Mennonites and to what degree his being a Mennonite was *echt*. Dyck contended, "So lange hat er, was er tat, immer nur für Geld getan" (NK 29. 7. 1963). Despite this openness, he nevertheless remained cautious reminding Klassen that "Ja, alles, was Du mir vertraulich mitteilst, bleibt natürlich unter uns. Das gilt hoffentlich auch umgekehrt, denn es ist nicht ausgeschlossen, daß wir es noch einmal werden mit Quiring zu tun bekommen" (29. 7. 1963).

Dyck's skepticism is also demonstrated in his letters to Abram Friesen, a close friend with whom Dyck was very open. Dyck informed Friesen that Quiring was going on a six-week "missionary tour" of Europe to gather pictures for his *Bilderbuch*. His statement sounds cynical<sup>3</sup> as he plays on the biblical truth "Geben ist seliger als nehmen"<sup>4</sup>: "[D]er Begriff Mission muß hier etwas umgedeutet werden. Es geht in diesem Falle nicht um Geben, sondern ums Nehmen. Er sammelt nämlich Fotos für ein neues Bilderbuch" (AF 21. 6. 1962).

In some cases Dyck was forthright and unabashed with the very person in question. Yet he was cautious when launching his own criticism, especially in avoiding overgeneralizations: "[I]ch möchte nicht ungerecht sein, besonders dem einzelnen gegenüber" (WQ 5. 8. 1947). His clear thinking let him draw distinctions

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(3) Although one can not determine the reason for this cynicism conclusively, one may conjecture that it had something to do with the fact that already in 1960 Dyck had presented the idea of publishing a picture book of the 150-year history of the Mennonites in Russia, an idea which he had requested N. Klassen to keep confidential (20. 8. 1960). Did he feel that Quiring's book was a stolen idea?

(4) *Acts* 20.35

which left his arguments irrefutable. His clarity of thought is demonstrated in a variety of situations, some of minimal significance and some of greater significance.

His clear thinking allowed Dyck to handle potentially contentious situations in a rational manner. One is reminded of Jacob Toews forwarding a biography and his proposal to publish a book on his father, Cornelius Toews. In his January 24, 1951, letter to Dyck, Toews informed him that his objective was to dispel the prejudices against the Mennonite landowners in the steppes. Defending his position, he intimates that Dyck did not esteem the value of the landowners, stating, “Es tut einem weh, wenn unsere Geschichtsschreiber so wenig darauf reagieren, was wir paar noch übriggebliebene Alten ihnen noch überliefern können – und somit geht unserem Volk ein wesentlicher Teil unsrer Geschichte verloren” (JCT 24. 1. 1951). In this letter he also seemed perturbed that Dyck had not critiqued the biography. The letter that follows from Dyck is a logical and critical defence of his own position. Dyck begins by stating Toews’s premise “daß man Sie mißtrauisch gemacht hat, wenn Sie mich verdächtigen wollen, dem Gutsbesitzertums feindlich gegenüber zu stehen” (JCT 1. 2. 1951) and denying the accusation categorically. The arguments that he presents are: he knew the landowners of the *Altkolonie* well, having grown up with children of landowners, having had two or three such children in their home for many years, who attended school with him, having been on holidays with them, having attended middle-school with the sons of landowners and studied with them later, and finally having taught them at the *Zentralschule*, and he claims to have known this class of people well – their habits and their work, their strengths and their weaknesses. He wrote: “Niemand kann sie mir ganz weiß machen, niemand kann sie mir ganz schwarz machen. Und sie sind, ganz egal wie sie waren – ob weiß oder schwarz – aus unserer Rußlandgeschichte gar nicht wegzulassen (1. 2. 1951).

A second argument follows. He expresses his skepticism about Toews's contention that Mennonite historians have been prejudiced against them; Dyck rather suggests that perhaps they have received too much attention. As long as it is done factually, without sentimentality, and for the purpose of completing the historical picture, then those interested in history, including himself, can welcome his contribution, as he claims he has.

A third argument, in this instance a statement of clarification, follows. Dyck says that his former response was not a criticism of the work as such, but that he has other works going to print that have precedence, and that Toews's work is too short to be published as a book and could only be published as part of a collection or of a larger work.

His fourth objection is that Toews is relying on memory, his and that of others, for the names, dates, and statistics. Dyck maintains that he should not have to explain to Toews the value of the accuracy of historic details, especially since the work is to be a defence of a controversial position. Dyck's conclusion is terse: "Doch genug. Sie sind nun eben mißtrauisch gemacht worden, vielleicht sogar gereizt, Ihr Verdacht gegen mich ist aber vollauf unbegründet" (JCT 1. 2. 1951).

A year passes before Toews responds, describing his efforts and indicating the end of his pursuit of publishing his work. He was disappointed that the *Bote* had rejected the manuscript, too. Five years later Toews wrote Dyck to inform him that Epp had changed his opinion and printed the story, which had created a stir, even among non-Mennonites who Toews claimed were more objective (JCT 2. 4. 1958). Dyck responded, still insisting that the community in question had been classless in the best sense of the word (JCT 16. 4. 1958). A further letter from Toews dated April 24, 1958, indicates that Toews was hurt by the rejection of the manuscript and

that Dyck's previous letter had been "nur eine höfliche Ausrede. Also machen wir Schluß damit", and "Es befriedigt mich nicht." Dyck did not respond, probably wisely so, seeing that it would not accomplish anything. The tools of logic and critical analysis are of no use against the uncritical and sentimental mindset.

The next letter in the file was written almost two years later. It is an apology—from Toews. Realizing that he is growing old (and possibly suspecting that his days are unpredictable, if not short), he has decided to clear his account with those whom he may have wronged, saying that he does not want to part in enmity with anyone (JCT 8. 1. 1960). For the reader, it is a vindication of Dyck's argument. His reply is simply "Also Gras über das, was war" (JCT 15. 1 1960).

Letters with other people intimate that there were other details which Dyck perceived as inaccuracies or misrepresentations. P. J. Klaassen, in a letter later that same year, mentions the Toews manuscript. Dyck takes issue with details such as the fact that there were separate tables for the servants in the landowner households, which Toews used as evidence to support his class distinction theory. Dyck objects to it and gives a very simple reason for the separate tables: these people lived in separate worlds and this was simply a courtesy (PJK-V 26. 7. 1960). This is only one example of the many objections Dyck had to the manuscript. Dyck seems honest and forthright in his conclusion to this matter: "Ja, der liebe Mann [Toews] schmolzt, und auf mich dürfte er auch schimpfen. Aber Du hast ja das Stück nun wohl schon gelesen und wirst verstehen, daß er für den Druck nicht fertig genug ist, abgesehen davon, daß an ihm auch dieses und jenes zu beanstanden wäre" (PJK-V 26. 7. 1960).

There are other examples that are less involved, but they give further insight into Dyck's acuity in judging character and dealing with people according to his perception. December 4, 1945, J. J. Hildebrand wrote D. H. Epp to inform him that the



numbers in the *Terek* book were inaccurate (DB). December 8, 1945, Dyck responded to Epp, saying that he does not have to take the complaint too seriously; this is simply Hildebrand's hobby. In November, 1947, Dyck talked about this in a letter to Quiring, saying that Hildebrand is unreliable as a historian, that he is embittered and lacks objectivity – a “Kampfhahn” – and that both conferences have banned his book. At other times his assessments of other people are mere fleeting remarks. Of G. S. Derksen, a long-time friend, he said, “er ist ausgesprochener Pessimist, und vor solchen ist mir immer angst ” (DHE 11. 9. 1943). As one reads these statements one has to remember that most of such comments are made in the context of locating suitable writers for his various projects, and the remarks may reflect more on their suitability as writers, than on them as persons. At any rate, Dyck's talent in perceiving the essential qualities in people was invaluable for him in his profession. If his judging ability was not a natural talent, then it was certainly a skill which he learned out of necessity.

In other instances his dealings with people are a matter of astuteness, financial or other, and shrewdness. Meticulous bookkeeping of the *Echo-Verlag*, apparent in the D. H. Epp letters and the Karl Fast<sup>5</sup> file, provides ample proof. There is a regular flow of information with Fast regarding Dyck's undertakings and Fast's tasks. The astuteness is also seen specifically in the directions he gave to Fast. In the distribution of the *Memrik*-book, Dyck recommended that Fast contact V. Peters who would be able to advise him on how best to do the mailing with the least amount of duty, and who had influence with many people in Winnipeg (KF 28. 2. 1955). This quality of astuteness as evidenced in the sending of his care packages mentioned earlier is also seen in the marketing of his own works. As he was preparing for the selling of *Koop enn Bua II*, he told Epp that once Part II was published, it would not be

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(5) K. Fast assumed some of Dyck's business responsibilities during his stay in Germany from 1953 to 1955.

sold separately from Part I. In this way he would not be left sitting with Part II as people would not want to purchase Part II without Part I, whereas the converse was not true. When considering another publication, Dyck carefully considered its viability and oftentimes investigated the cost of publishing and printing with other companies, sometimes making inquiries for *Echo* books in Germany (KG 25. 7. 1959).

There are instances where one also sees this astuteness and cautiousness in long-term undertakings, such as in his handling of Leonard Froese's doctoral work. Dyck dealt with this over a long period of time. The request for the completed work was first made by Dyck in 1948 (LF 9. 8. 1948) before K. Kauenhoven even encouraged Dyck to consider publishing it (KK 19. 8. 1948) and to support Froese (KK 11. 10. 1948); but Dyck more or less declined in his March 23, 1949 letter. After exploring further possibilities Dyck still maintained it was a risk (LF 2. 8. 1949), because those who would potentially be interested, the new immigrants in South America, were too poor to buy books. That these were the actual reasons can also be verified by exchanges between Dyck and Kauenhoven, in which Dyck indicated that the *Echo-Verlag* would take it if no other way were found (KK 10. 3. 1949). With Froese Dyck remained firm on his stand (LF 16. 6. 1950). Froese then proposed publishing it in two parts, but Dyck insisted that Froese first determine how many books he could sell through the church conferences and MCC, placing the responsibility entirely on Froese (LF 19. 9. 1951). German publishers were contacted and Dyck insisted that he could publish it if Froese could sell one hundred copies in advance outside of Canada (LF 4. 12. 1951). Dyck finally consented to publish it, but not until 1953 and not until he would have the complete work in his hands (LF 11. 3. 1952). The next letter to Froese was written in the summer of 1954 from Germany. Dyck had engaged Beltz for the printing, and in Dyck's last letter in this file, he is still not certain about the cost of the books and the details regarding retaining his one hundred copies in Germany. The process shows Dyck's

astuteness, but it also shows his persistence, having dealt with this project for a period of six years, despite some subtle suggestions of annoyance. Precisely in a matter such as this the correspondence with other persons becomes valuable in deciphering Dyck's true opinions. In this case they reveal how Dyck actually felt about this matter, because it is those letters that shed light on the negotiating process between Dyck and Froese.

It is possible that Dyck was leery of Froese's work. If he had been leery, then the statement made in Alexander Rempel's letter, (provided it was not another excuse for Rempel to delay his own work for which Dyck was waiting), might support Dyck's apprehension. Rempel who was working on a book on the *Altkolonie* and using Froese's doctoral work on the educational system as a source, maintained that he would have already finished it if the thesis were better: "Sie taugt einfach nichts. Und so mußte ich alles neu aufrollen" (AR 17. 4. 1959).

Froese is mentioned again in the Gerhard Wiens file. Wiens had had the occasion to meet the forty-year-old Froese who had become a professor at the University of Marburg as *Erziehungswissenschaftler* in November. He says that Froese is "enn sea jescheida Mensch", that Dyck should get to know him, and that Froese "mucht jeern met An bekaunt woare" (GW 13. 1. 1965). While Dyck seems to appreciate Froese, his initial statement sounds a little offputting:

Professa Froes? Dee saul mau goanijh so onschuldig doone, oda es tweschen An von mi nijh de Räd jewast. Wi tjanne ons nämlijh gaunz goot, hab wi doch lange Verhaundlungje jefeat wäajen sine Dissertation, dee etj dretje wull, oda doch weens bim Rutbringje halpe sull. Üt aulem word nuscht, daut weer een to grotet Biet. Awajens een feina Maun, dis Froes, enn mi freit, daut hee onse Lied en Kanada een bät oppjemoddat haft.<sup>6</sup>(GW 22. 2. 1965)

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(6) This probably refers to Froese's visit to Winnipeg and Vancouver in the fall of 1964 during which he held public lectures and wrote articles. In these he

One person whose name appears in the letters quite regularly and with whom Dyck apparently did correspond (14.8. 1944) but whose letters are not found in the files is B. Schellenberg. In all of Dyck's critical assessments of persons with whom he worked, this one tends to be the harshest, perhaps justifiably so. His name continues to appear because of the importance of the archival material which he had in his possession and refused to share with his fellow historians and writers, which had direct ramifications for Dyck's work. Dyck recognizes that Schellenberg can not be circumvented, "schon weil er Archivwurm ist" (DHE 11.9. 1943). He continues to tell Epp that "In der Sachlichkeit mangelt es ihm oft. Ist aber sein Interessengebiet [Verlag-Projekt], und wird daher gut zu brauchen sein" (DHE 11. 9. 1943). Between this letter and that of July 23, 1944, certain unrecorded interactions must have taken place which prompted Dyck to write Epp in confidence, "Es ist jammerschade, daß es mit B. Sch.<sup>7</sup> so ist, wie es ist". From the details which follow it becomes apparent that Schellenberg is not a member of the *Verlag* and that he ought to have been, because he loved to write and because he had the archives which Dyck says they desperately needed. The remainder of the letter reveals Dyck's apprehensions about him and that some unpleasant circumstances have gotten in the way:

[I]ch fürchte aber, daß auch wir nicht mit ihm fertig werden, wie man auch sonst mit ihm nicht fertig wird. Die Entscheidung liegt aber bei Dir. Auf mich brauchst Du dabei weiter Rücksicht zu nehmen, wenn er mir auch eins ausgewischt hat, ich kann das stenden [sic]. Warum ich aber von ihm spreche: Ich habe ihn seit dem Abend nicht wieder gesprochen. Er war hier in Steinbach und hat mich nicht besucht. Ich glaube, er fühlt sich zurückgesetzt und fürchte, er kann auf den Gedanken kommen, uns schaden zu wollen. Wir werden uns vor ihm in acht nehmen müssen (DHE 23. 7. 1944).<sup>8</sup>

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outlined a seven-point cultural and ethnic self-preservation program for the Mennonites as racial Germans (Epp, *An Analysis* 322).

- (7) His name is frequently abbreviated in this manner in the files.
- (8) Epp had also had a negative experience with Schellenberg. On one occasion Epp had requested an exclusive historical overview article for the *Bote*, and Schellenberg had published it in the *Rundschau* as well (23. 3. 1943).

By August 14 Schellenberg has resumed corresponding with Dyck and Dyck indicated to Epp that he would respond, saying “[w]ir werden uns schon wieder vertragen” (14. 8. 1944), for he realized the potential value of the man for the *Verlag*.

It seems that both Dyck and Epp questioned Schellenberg’s ethics. The context of the statements which point to this conclusion is not always clear, but the statements themselves leave little doubt. A few examples illustrate this point. Dyck’s reply to B. B. Wiens, which probably concerned an article in *Auslese* is “Schellenbergs Rezension war länger, aber nicht so aufrichtig gemeint, und zudem verdreht er gerne hier und da was” (BBW 7. 2. 1951). A comment made by Dyck in conjunction with another publication reads: “Dann – look out for B. Schellenberg, der wird es bestimmt auch nicht unterlassen, an unserm Buche herumzumäkeln” (DHE 8. 12. 1945). At one point there seemed to be a hope for resolving this problem. Dyck had met with Arnold Regier from the Bible College<sup>9</sup> who seemed to have won Schellenberg’s trust and access to his *Apfelkasten* (as Dyck referred to it). Regier had heard that Schellenberg was planning to sell the archives ostensibly for a few thousand dollars, but it was not known to whom. Dyck then suggested: “Vielleicht müßte man Berentje tatsächlich einmal ’n hundert Dollar bieten, daß man die Sachen rettete. Daß sie ihm nicht gehören, ist eine andre Sache” (DHE 17. 8. 1950). Meanwhile the comments about him had become increasingly accusatory (DHE 23. 4. 1946) and through the years when Toews requires statistical research material for his book (JCT 12. 18. 1949) and Dyck is gathering material for the *Alt-Kolonie*, the situation with Schellenberg and his Conference archive does not seem to have changed at all (PJK-V 3. 9. 1958). While Dyck must have found it very frustrating to interact with personalities such as Schellenberg, fully realizing the value of

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(9) Dyck, residing in Manitoba, refers to this as “unserm Bibel-College” which presumably meant CMBC, since Regier was president of the College from 1947 to 1951 (Regehr and Franz, ed. *Twenty-Five Years: A Time to Grow*, CMBC 1947–1972 no page number).

their potential contribution, he continued to pursue professional relationships with them in the interest of his greater mission. This attests to his astuteness in dealing with people, but it also reveals a spirit of persistence and much patience. In it all he still managed to keep a sense of humor about it, too. Having to deal with a large number of people, each with his idiosyncrasies, he reflects: "Es ist ein Jammer, wie sehr es bei uns überall menschtelt: Intrigen, Machtkämpfe, Verdächtigungen, Anfeindungen. Es müßte da einmal ein Bußprediger kommen, aber einer mit Donner und Blitz und mit einer Peitsche" (DHE 10. 8. 1946).

Those who saw only the dreamer with shattered yesterdays and battered hopes in Arnold Dyck, fail to see the realism in his idealism. Earlier on in his career he seemed to go through a period of indecision. He had grown weary of his publishing house (BBW 17. 2. 1947), sold his bee-keeping business, planned to sell his home, and planned to sell his chicken business, which he did (BBW 18. 4. 1947). It was still his desire, which was no secret, to write a larger and more difficult work that was already completed in his mind. In his typical humor Dyck writes Wiens: "Und dann . . . will ich endlich auch malen, daß mein Vater das viele Geld doch nicht umsonst weggeschmissen hat" (BBW 17. 2. 1947). He readily recognized the latter as impractical, in contrast to those things with which he had occupied himself before. In the quest to reach his idealistic objectives he had to confront many obstructive and disillusioning forces of the real world.

Was Dyck an ordinary man? If all that the letters have already revealed about him does not provide an answer, one can infer it from the words of his close friend, B. B. Wiens, who formulated this concise precis of the man: "ein unheimlicher Psychologe, ein guter Menschenkenner, ein guter Beobachter, und besitzt einen politischen Fernblick" (BBW 7. 12. 1950).

### Chapter 3: Muses and Pearls

Inspiration and purpose or a sense of mission have been the key stimuli that have motivated writers to write throughout the ages. Is it any different for the writer in question? Hardly. Dyck, despite the many obstacles which stood in his way and his relative unpopularity,<sup>1</sup> which itself, when considering his literary legacy, seems inexplicable in retrospect, was driven by a deep sense of purpose, as can be determined from the letter files.

Only in a few instances does Dyck speak directly about inspiration as literary scholars would speak of it, but when he does, he does so very explicitly. The foremost example appears in a letter to Gerhard Wiens at the University of Oklahoma. By the time this letter is written, Dyck and Wiens had started corresponding in Low German, virtually the only person with whom Dyck did this,<sup>2</sup> and it is appropriate that the letter that provides the reader with Dyck's inspiration for writing is written in the language that Dyck sought to preserve by writing in it. The excerpt which describes Dyck's muse is written in a joking manner, but since this tends to be a common tone in the correspondence between these two men, the content can still be considered with a large measure of seriousness. The excerpt reads as follows:

Weete See uck . . . See aus Sproakemeista weete om daut Musen-Jeschnerr (Musen es Hoagdietsch, Jeschnerr — Plautdietsch), Maun stoatj, aules Wiewa. De selle je dejansje senne, de sone Mensche, bi de em Kopp nij aules faust enn em Jemiet veschiednet los es, aulahaund tofuschle enn an daut dann lud saje, schriewe, sinje enn piepe lote. Etj schriew je nu uck eensjemol waut, weet de leewen Tiet, enn uck mi sett doa dann so'n Tjraet emm Jnetj enn fuschelt. Weete See uck, wam daut Wiefstetj litjent? — An. Wesz-woa! — Son Musen—

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(1) This will be substantiated in Chapter 6.

(2) Exceptions are very few. One example is a Low German letter written to Dyck by R. Epp of Terrace B.C. on January 15, 1961 and Dyck's responding letter to Epp (AL 8. 2. 1961).

Mumtjes naeme je veschiedne Jestault aun. Mine litjend lang emma Ält. J. H. Jaunzen. Aus de donn storf, dreef se sitj dann hier'n doa rom, one woa rejhtig Foot to foate. Bott See dann kaume, donn wiszt se, woahan.

Saul etj An daut'n bät, so daut uck'n Professa daut bätä bejriipt? (See seene, An jäänäwa räd etj fresch wajh von'e Plütz (Plutz op mol.<sup>3</sup>), one em jeringste Angst to habe.) Daut es nämlich so: Wann etj t. B. K. & B.<sup>4</sup> schriew enn disem Bua dann aulahaund Losladari'e, saj wi "Domms", enfaule, de hee aufdrei'e mucht, oda saje, dann es daut mine Sach, optopausze, daut doa tjeene Kralle (Perlen) ver'e Schwien (= Säue) jeschmeete wore, daut daut "Domms" also uck to Wirtjung tjemmt.

Wieda kaum etj (aum Jeburtsdach von onsem jinjsten Prinz) nijh. Enn en de Tweschentiet wort mi aules waut etj jeschraewe haud leed, wiels, wann etj uck nuscht met Schputniks aun minem Nome si, so si etj emmarhan 71 Joa olt, enn wo sitt daut von sonem!

Aulso – von'e Kralle wieda: Auf doa uck emma waea wurd senne, de emma aunketsche wurd. Oba etj sach dann emma eenem. – Latzte Wäatj laus etj de proofs von **K. & B. en Dietschlaund**. Enn de Tiet äwa saut mine Muse ver mi enn jniesad enn jibbad enn eenzjemol prust se uck los. Enn etj dann uck, wann etj ar so pruste sach. So, nu musste See aul bejräpe habe, waut 'ne mennische Muse es enn woato See – enn etj meen nu An – bowenen got senn met Aere Faehigtheit, sitj en sone Museumm to vewaundle. (19. 2. 1960)

The passage, even in or precisely through its humor, communicates Dyck's profoundest thoughts on muses of inspiration. The kind of people whom the muses choose, "bi de em Kopp nij aules faust enn em Jemiet veschiednet los es", is probably more the perception of the people who rejected Dyck's humorous writings than his own perception. The passage also makes it clear, (by saying that he wonders if there would always be somebody who would catch on), that, except for his muse, Dyck did not expect most people to grasp the hidden meaning in the humor. This can certainly be substantiated in a close examination of his humorous works.<sup>5</sup> It is

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(3) Molotsch

(4) tom Biespell, Koop enn Bua

(5) An intensive examination of this point is beyond the scope of this work, since the letters are the primary source for its exegesis.



questionable whether Dyck expected the ordinary reader to perceive the cryptic and biting satire embodied in his buffoonery. Even some critics, while realizing his admonishing tone but seemingly underestimating the writer's sharp reproofs, have called Dyck's "insights into our common foibles . . . incisive and yet kind . . . His laughter is not a blow which stings and smarts" (Suderman 170). Elisabeth Peters calls him "the gentle *Mahner* of his people" (Peters, *Arnold Dyck – Our Last Visit* 55). Mary Regehr Dueck concludes her article, *Arnold Dyck: Non-Conformist*, with "His [Dyck's] satire was gentle and he never resorted to cruel sarcasm or outright ridicule" (24). In *Twee Breew*, the suicide of the refugee woman who cannot cope with the tragic news of her daughter's and granddaughter's death, however "sensitive, empathic and sympathetic" (Jack Thiessen, *Arnold Dyck – The Mennonite Artist* 77) in its description, remains a taboo resolution which was hardly accepted by Dyck's contemporary audience. The general readership would hardly have separated the artistic creation from the moral implications of such an outcome. In a private discussion about the ending, Dyck is reported to have said about his readership, "Daut woare de goanijh enn" (Elisabeth Peters, Private communication). This is reminiscent of "[a]uf doa uck emma waea wurd senne, de emma aunketsche wurd" (GW 19. 2. 1960). Al Reimer makes a similar observation about the tendency for the readership to overlook Dyck's calculated messages in " 'Derche Bloom Råde ': Arnold Dyck and the Comic Irony of the *Forstei*." In discussing Dyck's technique of *derche Bloom råde*, Reimer is inherently making the assumption that it was very much Dyck's intention to shroud the criticisms in humour, which he did through a skillful manipulation of comic techniques. The method as articulated by Reimer causes the reader to be disarmed and seduced into an uncritical state:

With its dry, perfectly controlled tone, his [Dyck's] comic irony in the vernacular seems so effortlessly right that most readers accept it with uncritical chuckles as a perfectly natural, artless form of expression, a deliciously unsophisticated way of writing indigenous to our earthy, unpretentious *Plautdietsch*. They seem unaware, those readers, that Dyck's technique consists of anything more than an entertainer's

knack for cracking jokes and telling funny stories in a homespun dialect that has no literary pretensions whatsoever. (61)

While the critics recognize the intention and the art with which that intention is illustrated, not all of the critics are in agreement about the intensity of Dyck's criticisms which span from docile admonitions to searing condemnations.

Reimer also supports the notion that Dyck's early works, such as *Belauschte Gespräche*, had a "strongly didactic flavor" (*The Creation of Arnold Dyck's "Koop enn Bua" Characters* 258) and that Dyck "began the Koop and Bua series as much for instructive purposes as for entertainment purposes" (258). Reimer elaborates on Dyck's didacticism as follows:

One gets the impression from these sketches that Dyck thought of himself as a kind of sly and unobtrusive teacher to his people — especially to his more culturally deprived Canadian Mennonite readers — as well as a civilizing writer who tried to broaden the intellectual and cultural horizons of his readers by making them to grow more tolerant of others' views and ways. For the most part, he performs this function with admirable skill and surprising subtlety. . . .

. . . . Unfortunately, Dyck's own prejudices in such areas as politics and racial prestige sometimes betrayed his honorable didactic intentions. (*The Creation* 259)

Citing a few specific examples from the works, however abbreviated, demonstrates Dyck's contention that the general readership would not always perceive the subtexts. In examining them it behooves the critic to identify clearly what the writer is and what he is not criticizing. Hänschen, in *Verloren in der Steppe*, realizes that High German is "das Merkmal aller Vornehmheit und Bedeutenheit" (*Collected Works* 1. 131). Upon his return on the first day of school, as he recounts to his mother the details of the day, his gaze falls upon the already-set coffee-table, which brings him to the topic of High German:

Nun macht er ein süßes Gesicht: "Bekomm ich heute den Kaffee mit'n bißchen mehr Schmant, ja?" Er stutzt. "Ist Schmaunt auf hochdeutsch Schmant? Das haben wir noch nicht gelernt. Aber das muß so sein. Wo du au sagst, da sag ich a, und gleich ist es hochdeutsch. 'Baul' sag ich Ball, siehst! Das ist doch einfach, nicht? Und du mußt es jetzt auch so tun. Und wenn du mir wieder 'mal die Offenbarung vorliest – das ist doch das, mit den vielen Tieren? – dann mußt du nicht Johaunes sagen, sondern Johannes, sonst versteh ich das jetzt bald nicht mehr. – Mutter, wollen wir gleich einmal hochdeutsch sprechen?"

Mutter erschrickt über den kleinen Reformator. (*Collected Works* 1. 136)

The author is not ridiculing the use of Low German or High German. He recognized this as an historic reality. What he does ridicule is the attitude of people who were introduced to a "new" pronunciation of vowel sounds and how they attributed the changing of biblical ideas to the changing sound of words. They do not reflect on their ill-understood, preconceived notions, but only react in fear, as indicated in the mother's ensuing thoughts:

Der [Hänschen] wußte es noch nicht, daß ihr Lesen so ganz anders war als das, wie es der Lehrer heute in der Schule lehrte, ja auch als das, wie es in neuerer Zeit die Prediger auf der Kanzel damit hatten. Sie hat darüber nie zu jemand gesprochen, aber in stillen Stunden hat sie sich darüber schwere Gedanken gemacht. Denn ist es nicht so, daß man durch solche willkürliche Änderungen der Aussprache dem Worte Gottes Gewalt antut! Und daß dem menschlichen Hochmut die schlichte Sprache, in der die Bibel den Menschen doch einmal gegeben wurde, nicht mehr fein genug ist, und man aus solchem hof-färtigen Wesen heraus angefangen hat, statt des wahren und würdigen "au" das leichtsinnige, spötterische "a" zu setzen, wie es die deutschen Wanderburschen für ihr loses Geschwätz brauchen? Ihr Mann ist in diesen Sachen auch viel zu leichtsinnig. Für den steht der Lehrer, von dem in der Hauptsache ja all das Neue kommt, über allen andern Menschen. Ja, im stillen steht er bei ihm wohl gar über den Predi-gern. Sie fühlt es, daß in dieser Sache alle gegen sie sind. Und es war ihr daher immer ein kleiner Trost, daß sie wenigstens ihrem Kleinsten noch die Bibel unverfälscht lesen konnte, wie es richtig ist. Und nun soll sie mit einmal auch das nicht mehr. – Und wie dieser Jüngste ins Zeug geht! Gleich so fordernd und so rücksichtslos! Und da erschrickt sie. (*Collected Works* 1. 136–137)

It is the unthinking associations made between language and religion that Dyck is exposing. The mother's thoughts are portrayed sympathetically and one does not get the impression that Dyck is attacking her personally, but instead he is attacking attitudes towards the origin and nature of the Scriptures, associations between language pronunciation and pride, the assumption that a certain pronunciation is scoffing or derisory because certain people of questionable repute use such pronunciation while another is pure and reverend because the Bible was first written in that language (which, of course, it was not), and that education is the cause of such unholy intrusions into the language. When all this is pitted against Hänschen's delightful discovery of how to change Low German into High German, (which this writer can verify as a common notion among certain Mennonites of the past), even the humour cannot shroud the criticism.

The truths and insights which Dyck has given to his people in his literary works are significant, and so are the works themselves. The accuracy with which he describes the mind of the child in *Verloren in der Steppe* accompanied with the appropriate nuances of the language is masterful. His insights into people and issues are profound. One can readily understand Dyck's not wanting to share them with those who would completely fail to understand his intentions or to appreciate their value. From his statement in the cited letter, he believed that those who would not "catch on" were far in the majority.

Supposing that the people did appreciate his insights and works in Dyck's time, they did not manifest it in their purchase of his works. Again and again in the letters Dyck laments the reluctance of the Mennonites to invest money in books. His annoyance at seeing single copies being purchased and then circulated through the whole village is evident in his statement, "[M]an liest am liebsten geliehene Bücher" NK 9. 12. 1959). When *De Opnoam* was not selling, he struck at the core as

one hears him say in frustration, “Wenn ich noch mal was herausgebe, wird es wohl müssen ein Kochbuch sein. Denn sieh mal, der Magen der steht bei uns in Ehren” (BBW 26. 1. 1952). This certainly suggests that the preoccupation with the mental faculties was secondary to that of the physical. In the light of these concerns, Dyck’s treatment of certain issues in his literary works acquires an additional richness. One is quickly reminded of the “sectarian” Mennonite foursome travelling to the *Rußlända* conference in **Koop enn Bua foare noa Toronto** and the discussion, which at one point centers on the method of baptism, a divisive factor in the Mennonite Church. Consistent with his other criticism, the writer slips in this issue humorously, as he lauds the wonderfully reconciling power of a Mennonite favorite, the watermelon:

Mett Arbuse ess daut gaunss waut Wundaboaret. Wann daut too Arbuse kjemt, dann ess daut gaunss ’endoont, wannea wää fonn Russlaund no Kanada jekome ess — 45 Joa, 25 Joa, fief Doag; daut ess uck gaunss ’endoont, too woone Kjoatj wää aum Sinndach jeit, Nuad-Kjoatj, Wast-Kjoatj, Sud-Kjoatj, Oost-Kjoatj — eendoont ess uck, woo wää jedeepst ess — Japs, Fluss, Schmaundkauntje — dee Arbus, dee jlijt aules ut enn fereenijcht aules. (Collected Works 2. 222)

The intellectual shallowness presupposed by the reluctance of his potential readers to invest in books and newspapers is here reflected in the shallow solution — the ecumenical watermelon — to a long-standing, unresolved religious difference among the groups of Mennonites. Surely, this is one of the pearls of which Dyck speaks in the focal letter, and undoubtedly his muse would have “caught on” fully and appreciated the pearl. Dyck makes a point in the letter that he derived pleasure from these creations too: “Enn de Tiet äwa saut mine Muse ver mi enn jniesad enn jibbad enn eenzjemol prust se uck los. Enn etj dann uck, wann etj ar so pruste sach” (GW 19. 2. 1960).<sup>6</sup> Given that this is an accurate interpretation of what Dyck was trying to

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(6) Although this letter and the work cited in the letter were written much later

achieve, what does one then make of the “tjeene Kralle (Perlen) ver’e Schwien (= Säue) [schmiete]”? The inferences are not flattering. However, his concern appeared to be that the humorous works should not be read for their humor alone, but that they should result in self-reflection and effect some greater good or “Wirtjung” in his people.

With the lack of appreciation and understanding of his genius being the prevailing sentiment that he had to combat, what was it that caused him to continue to create pearls at all? The muses who inspired him and understood him were unquestionably his source of inspiration. Wiens, in responding to the aforementioned letter, maintained that he also thought of Dyck when he wrote and was proud to be called Dyck’s muse (28. 2. 1960). Those who did not understand Dyck, being enslaved to their very narrow interpretation of the world, would have considered the very use of the term “muse” as heretical, perhaps interpreting it as an unholy spirit originating from the devil.

A second factor was Dyck’s deep sense of purpose. One recalls his statement in the critical letter mentioned at the outset, in which he says, “[D]ann es daut mine Sach, optopausze . . . daut daut “Domms” also uck to Wirtjung tjemmt” (19. 2. 1960). Through his art he wanted the Mennonites to look at themselves and gain an awareness of who they were, to assess their views in the context of a larger world view, and to hold a mirror to their beliefs, philosophical ideas, and traditions, which in many instances had been fused with their doctrine. His art was also supposed to expose them for what he perceived them to be. His operative assumption

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than the passage cited above, it would be uninformed to suggest that the quotation from the letter is invalid or misapplied, since Dyck’s muse was operative long before even the earlier work cited was written.

was that developing a self-awareness is not possible without having an understanding of self.

His primary interest was the history and the recent history of the Rußländer, those Mennonites who fled after World War I to various countries of the world (CK 8. 9. 1943), and the founding of the *Echo-Verlag*, named after the “ehemaligen Chortitzer Zentralschüler”, was established specially for the publication of Mennonite historical writings (WQ 7. 8. 1946). The magnitude of his purpose is expressed in statements such as the following which appeared in a letter to B. B. Wiens: “Ich graule mich schon so immer vor der Atombombenkraft, mit der man ja der Welt jetzt zu Dack [sic] geht . . . . Ich sage: Hände weg von der Welt, ich habe noch allerhand erst zu tun” (11. 2. 1946). Of course, a nuclear holocaust might have made his need for writing obsolete, and one can sense his jesting, but one can also sense his urgency to complete a mission.

Not only did his sense of purpose and his desire to improve the cultural niveau of the *Rußlandmennoniten* spurn him on to writing, but his desire to see cultural and political restoration and improvements in Europe caused him to encourage writers overseas. Even though he receives depressing impressions of the state of art in Germany in Götz's letters, yet at the same time he reads of Götz's continued writing and hopefulness of an improving situation in Germany, and Dyck writes that “Es tut unser einem hier gut zu wissen, daß es da drüben immer noch solche gibt, die auf ein besseres Deutschland nicht nur sitzen und warten, sondern an seinem Bau auch Hand anlegen” (20. 9. 1951).

Dyck acknowledges in his letters the role that those around him played in causing him to write.<sup>7</sup> In a letter to Gerhard Loewen, a writer many years his senior, whom Dyck recognized as “ganz und immer Dichter” (2. 12. 1945), he acknowledges Loewen’s influence:

Für mich persönlich hatten Sie noch eine besondere Bedeutung: Ihre **Ferienreise** gehörte mit zu den Sachen, die mir den Anstoß gaben, daß meine Gedanken wieder mehr zurück auf unser mennonitisches Volk gerichtet wurden. Ich lebte damals (in meinen Schuljahren) mit Gedanken und Gefühlen in einer ganz russischen Welt. (2. 12. 1945)

To what degree was Dyck simply motivated by nostalgia? At times, as one sees Dyck’s undulating moods and attitudes, his optimism and despair, one is inclined to ask to what degree the tendency to romanticize and sentimentalize one’s childhood and youth, or one’s past in general, influences him in his writing? And, if it did, was he aware of it or was he unconsciously allowing it to toss him to and fro? In his September 20, 1951, letter to Götz, as he recalled his solo wanderings of his days in Stuttgart, the city in which Götz lives, Dyck wrote: “Und es ist wohl so der Gang der Dinge im Leben, daß man im Alter in der Rückerinnerung alles einmal Gesehene und Erlebte – und gerade das Schöne davon – viel intensiver empfindet als bei der Aufnahme der Eindrücke in der Jugend.” Does perceiving it more intensively necessarily mean that the experience is exaggerated, or does it simply mean that it was equally intense at the time of experience but the capacity to perceive was merely diminished in that instance? While a categorical answer can not likely be as-

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(7) The letters are not exhaustive in this respect. Articles by Dyck such as *Jacob H. Janzen – Writer in Mennonite Life*, July 1951, clearly demonstrate that there were others who had a profound effect on him and his writing. With Janzen, it was not only the works themselves which impressed him, but the realization that through his work **Denn meine Augen haben Deinen Heiland gesehen** Mennonite literature “was now in readiness to make its entree” (33).



certained, one can say that regardless of which is correct, it is both the experience and the later perception of it which move the writer to record it.

Closely related to experience is his appreciation for nature, and this also prompted him to write. It was not that an appreciation caused him to write about the beauties of nature in the way that it compelled the Romantic poets to write, even though there are many vividly described, picturesque scenes in his works; instead it simply provided the inspiration for his work generally. In response to Nick Klassen's inquiry about his health, he mentioned his daily walks, and talks about their influence on him: "Spaziergänge — das war meine Kur für alle meine Gebrechen, körperliche und seelische, und war Ansporn für geistiges Schaffen" (5. 10. 1959). However, being back in Canada, he found his walks less inspiring, as he continued in the letter, "Darin bin ich jetzt stark eingeschränkt, was sich negativ auf meine Stimmung und Arbeitslust auswirkt" (5. 10. 1959).

Debatably of equal consequence as his inherent nature and innate abilities and affinities was Dyck's interest in literature. In perusing the files cumulatively, it becomes abundantly obvious that Dyck was an avid reader, and that his interest was piqued by a curiosity and an interest in current cultural and political developments. In his communication with Karl Götz of Stuttgart, it becomes very clear that he had a broad scope of interest and he continually kept informed about the literary developments in Germany — about which pre-war writers were no longer on the scene, and what new books were being published, and what new tendencies in art were emerging. He read a broad spectrum of materials, both North American and German, especially criticism of works in order to obtain a valid impression of the *Geisteshaltung* of those who were spearheading the literary world (6. 4. 1949).

Dyck was constantly requesting and sending books and other literature along with his letters. Obviously, he was in tune with those friends who were writers themselves and were interested in what others wrote. One finds this particularly true of correspondents such as Karl Götz, Gerhard Friesen, and Nick Klassen.<sup>8</sup> Certain files seem to contain many references to the books that Dyck was reading. One such file is the Nick Klassen file. Names which appear in this file are Zenta Maurina, Gorki, und Busch. Dyck's fondness for Wilhelm Busch, who undoubtedly influenced Dyck in the use of humor, is expressed in Dyck's recounting his visit to the Busch museum, not too far from where Dyck was living:

Er [Busch] ist auch mein Mann. Ich habe ja einmal sein Häuschen (jetzt Museum) in Wiedensahl aufgesucht und es mir da nicht verkneifen können, mich unbemerkt ein bißchen auf seinen Schreibtischstuhl zu setzen. Es ist schon so, einen Fritz Reiter [his spelling] kann man totsichweigen, W. Busch aber lebt auch heute weiter. (NK 23. 1. 1962)

Especially during those times that Dyck lived in Germany, he devoted much time to reading newspapers, magazines, and literature which focused on the then current situation in Europe. This seemed to be of particular interest to Nick Klassen. Dyck admits that he is living in two distinct worlds in Germany. On the one hand, he continued to keep subscriptions for seven Mennonite papers; on the other hand, he read new books on the German market which dealt with the issues of World War II, remaining very much aware of the tensions and the critical nature of the world situation, which was hardly felt in Canada (NK 21. 3. 1964; NK 27. 11. 1964).

Not only was Dyck influenced by the literature of his time, but several times in the files one encounters the names of Russian writers of the nineteenth century whom Dyck studied during his student days and reread in the latter years of his life.

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(8) See letters: KG 7. 9. 1949; GF 24. 11. 1955; GF 4. 5. 1958; NK 9. 4. 1961; NK 12. 11. 1961; NK 25. 8. 1961; NK 23. 1. 1962.

The extent of their influence cannot be determined all too precisely from the letters alone, but in examining these writers further one can speculate on the influence.<sup>9</sup> Dyck's rereading of their works in his later years seems to have been more for the purpose of enjoyment than for inspiration. While he read the literature of the day avidly, or "viel zu viel" as Dyck said, he admitted that "zur Entspannung und im Versuch, das Böse des Heute einmal auch zu vergessen, lese ich die Klassiker der Weltliteratur, wie sie in unseren Schuljahren dargeboten und uns einmal groß wurden" (NK 27. 11. 1964).

Among the writers mentioned most frequently are Gogol, Pushkin, and Soschtschanko. It is Gogol who quickly becomes the one to single out in terms of possible influences on Dyck. One must exercise much discretion and judicious discipline not to draw unfounded parallels between Dyck and Gogol, for even Gogol himself has been viewed in a variety of ways. The prevailing impression is that in his works he presented a typical picture of Russia. Some credited his work simply as

farces aimed at providing harmless entertainment. A greater number believed that Gogol was trying to convey some serious message of moral uplift, but insisted that it bore on individual vices and not on society as a whole. Most commentators, however did seem to regard Gogol as a social satirist who was bent on pointing up the discrepancies between the real and ideal world. His humor, in Pushkin's famous phrase, amounted to "laughter through tears," and it was to provoke laughter and reform (Maguire 6).

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(9) To examine the full extent of the influence of these Russian writers is beyond the scope of this thesis, for it could well constitute another work of similar size. It would also require the use of Dyck's literary works as a primary source rather than a secondary source.

One might argue that there is some commonality of approach between Dyck and Gogol, but the letters do not provide sufficient detail to support comparisons which might have been mere coincidence.<sup>10</sup>

Puschkin is referred to less frequently. It is in conjunction with receiving Gerhard Wiens's Russian reader that Dyck comes to speak of Puschkin and talks about the impression that the Russian writers have on him as he reads them: "[D]ann bang etj mi meteens enn weet nijh no waut, enn mi es dann no roare enn kaun doch nijh goot saje, om waut" (16. 5. 1962). Did these writers engender productive nostalgia, or was this mere sentimentality? There is evidence that their influence was not always a positive one; it also, on occasion, drove Dyck to despair. One finds out why in a letter to Gerhard Friesen, dated 24. 11. 1955:

Ich hatte zwei kurze Sachen von ihm [Soschtschanko} in deutscher Übersetzung gelesen, und die hatten mich stark beeindruckt. Nun aber hat er mich enttäuscht. Es sei denn, es wäre Absicht bei ihm, durch Auswahl des Stoffes, durch die Sprache und die Art der Darstellung die ganze Misere und Kümmerlichkeit des Sowjetlebens bloßzustellen. Das ist nun aber kaum anzunehmen, ich habe viel mehr den Eindruck, er kann nicht besser, ist ein ungebildeter Kerl und auf seine Schriftstellerei enorm eingebildet. Wenn so ein sowjetischer Tschekow aussieht – Du lieber Gott, was hat man aus dem künstlerisch so begnadeten russischen Volk doch gemacht. Aber für uns, diejenigen unter uns, die von Rußland noch immer nicht loskommen können, ist es schon besser so. Das paßt zu unseren zerstörten, kolschosierten und verdreckten Dörfern am Dnjepr und an der Molotschna, und so wird unsere ganze Sehnsucht nach dem, was einmal ein Reichtum, unser Reichtum war, objektlos und muß langsam sterben.

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(10) One might be inclined to see traces of Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky of *The Inspector General*, a work cited by Dyck in his letters, in Koop and Bua. The former two are not the contrasting figures that Koop and Bua are, nor are they the central characters in the drama, but they perform the humorous dramatic function as Dyck's duo does.

He concludes that they were born at the wrong time, they simply do not fit in anywhere, and they are left with nothing. He also questions that even if they were to write about it, whether anyone would want to read it.

Not all of Dyck's work was a result of the influence of his muse or an uncontrollable flow of creative genius. Occasional or "commissioned" articles were a part of his work, too. Being involved in a rather closely knit circle of writers and educators, it was customary to receive various requests for writing. Dyck spent much of his time soliciting writers for his own publications. Others made similar requests of him, to which Dyck frequently responded positively, as when Krahn requested Dyck to write a tribute to Gerhard Loewen for *Mennonite Life* (19. 8. 1946), but this portion of his creative work constituted a very minor part of his total creative production.

The influences on Dyck's life and writing were many. There is little purpose in debating which were the most and the least important influences in his life, as far as the letter files can determine, because each of the factors have contributed significantly to the writer's storehouse. It is conceivable that even a factor deemed in isolation to be of little value might, in fact, be the grain of sand that allowed the pearl to begin its embryonic development or the glimmer of light that appeared in the descending of the muse.

## Chapter 4: The Perils of Publishing

No scholar or critic who has examined the writings and undertakings of Arnold Dyck can remain unimpressed by the accomplishments of this man's post-emigration experience. Apart from his literary achievement, his most outstanding feat was the establishment of the *Echo-Verlag*, which has already been mentioned in earlier chapters. Although there are numerous files that contain references to this particular undertaking, the majority of the labours related to this are documented in the D. H. Epp file and the Bote file which is comprised mostly of letters between Dyck and Epp. These letters can almost exclusively be classified as business letters, which is not true of the other files.

Before one examines this particular venture in the context of these two files, one ought to ask whether the fact that they are business letters distinguishes them in any significant way, in terms of their value, in comparison to or contrast with the other letters. Lutz Mackensen makes an observation which addresses the question:

Wenn wir durch die Straßen unserer Städte gehen, wenn wir vor dem Rundfunkempfänger oder Ferngerät sitzen, wenn wir einen modernen Roman lesen: immer spüren wir den Atem unserer Zeit. Lesen wir aber einen der noch heute üblichen Geschäftsbriefe, so haben wir oft den Eindruck, als lebte man in unseren Büros trotz Diktiergerät und Schreibmaschine wie vor 300 Jahren. (177)

This may be more a comment on style than on other aspects of the letter, and yet, it is precisely the language of the author which reflects the changing sentiments and attitudes of society in the course of history. In this respect one can consider the effect of the business letter written by an active author, as Dyck was.

The letters in the aforementioned files are those written between the years 1930 and 1955. The controversy of these files as it arises in the mind of the reader (and not in the minds of the writers) is the recognition given to the founder of the *Echo-Verlag*. Whose idea was it to establish this publishing house, who was the actual founder, and who received the recognition for it? Three critical factors which must be considered in attacking these questions are the nature of the business letter, which in its politeness sometimes shields the raw truth, the relationship between Dyck and Epp,<sup>1</sup> and the dichotomy between the public perception and the concealed original evidence of the founding.

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- (1) Due to the absence of letters between 1930 and 1943, it is difficult to determine the nature of the relationship between Dyck and Epp. The fact that both became editors of Mennonite newspapers very shortly after their immigration to Canada, the **Post** and the **Bote** respectively, might have kept them apart, especially since the emphases in their papers differed, the former being conservative and "less church oriented" (F. Epp, *An Analysis* 314) than the latter and having the 1870's immigrants as the target audience rather than those of the 1920's (22). Dyck mentions the altercation with Epp in *Aus meinem Leben*. The **Post** was supposed to be a newspaper for the recent Mennonite immigrants from Russia. A group in Rosthern had had a similar idea for a weekly paper which was originally called the **Immigrantenbote**. He made an agreement with Epp to keep the **Post** as it had been in the past (*Collected Works* 1. 501). After Dyck sold his paper in 1936, he continued to lament the fact that the **Bote** was a mouthpiece for the General Conference. Even as late as 1963, when the **Bote** faced a crisis, he had aspirations for the **Post** becoming the "Zentralorgan der preußisch-rußländischen Mennonitenschaft in aller Welt . . . daß natürlich nur deutschsprachig sein darf (SP 5. 4. 1963). He expressed this hope in a letter to Goering at the **Post**:

Ein Organ, das diese Mennonitenschaft nicht durch (farbverwischende) Konferenzbrillen zu sehen sich bestrebt, sondern in dieser Sondergruppe das erkennt, zu werten weiß und zur Geltung zu bringen sich bemüht, womit sie sich einen Namen gemacht, wohin auch immer sie auf ihren Wanderungen gekommen ist. Es solle möglich sein, Mitarbeiter zu finden, die Schablonenrahmen und -form der Berichterstattung und Gesprächsführung, wie sie in unserer Presse üblich, zu sprengen und von Sachen sachlich und ohne Phrasendrescherei zu sprechen fähig und bereit wären. Das dürfte schon aus den Auseinandersetzungen im **Boten** ersichtlich werden. (SP 5. 4. 1963)

In reading Abram Berg's biography of D. H. Epp one receives the impression that Epp was the impetus and the founder of the publishing house. Unquestionably, Epp had a profound and nostalgic love for the "Chortitzer Zentralschule" and "[d]iese Gefühle bewirkten es daß ihm der Gedanke kam der Schule ein Denkmal zu setzen. Keines aus Marmor oder Granit, nein, ein geistiges Denkmal" (68). The event that prompted and strengthened these feelings was the hundredth jubilee of the school, which met its demise on account of the revolution. The biographical editor continues, "Sein [Epp's] Wunsch war es, ein Treffen der früheren Schüler zu veranstalten und [e]r begann eine Liste anzufertigen" (69). Epp himself in the preface to this list says, "Da lag nun der Gedanke nahe, zu erfahren, wieviel ihrer im Lande [Kanada] sind — und was sie hier treiben" (69). The editor adds that Epp had worked for almost two years on this. Arnold Dyck is not mentioned at all.

The plans for the reunion and the reunion itself are described in Berg's book. That the reunion be connected to the forty-second Conference of Mennonites in Canada had been discussed by Epp with some of the students who all agreed with the proposal. The event was held in Winnipeg on July 3, 1944. In his address at this occasion Epp spoke about "mein Vorschlag", saying, "Lebhafter denn je stieg in euch und in mir der Wunsch auf, einander wiederzusehen. Dieser Wunsch gab den Anlaß zu meinem Vorschlag. . . " (71). One reads that a centennial celebration had already been planned in 1910, and that Epp's brother had intended to write a historical work that was to include the history of the school. Epp also stated, "Aus Dankbarkeit . . . wollen wir ihr [die Schule] ein Denkmal stellen . . . das in unseren Herzen errichtet wird und in der Geschichte unseres Volkes weiterleben soll" (74). At the celebration Epp was recognized as the one "[der] am meisten am Zustandekommen dieser Feier gearbeitet" hat (74). The memorial project had already been publicized in the *Bote* previously and at the conference Arnold Dyck was given the



opportunity to announce "sein Projekt". In regards to this issue Dyck is only named once more and that in the context of the work of the *Echo-Verlag*:

Bei dieser Arbeit hatte D. Epp eine große und gediegene Hilfe in Arnold Dyck, der Sekretär des Echo-Verlags wurde. A. Dyck war schriftstellerisch begabt und hatte somit die Fähigkeit, dem Inhalt einen guten literarischen Stil zu geben, so daß die Bücher gern und mit Interesse gelesen wurden. (76)

Epp's biography further explains that through the cooperative work of Epp and Dyck a series of historical Mennonite books were published, the first of which were produced in the *Bote*-Press, which allowed Epp to contribute to the first **Bausteine zum Denkmal** with his own hands (76).

In reading the book one gets the strong impression that Epp received the recognition that rightfully belonged to Dyck. The quotation states that Epp had an assistant in Dyck and not the reverse. To verify this, it is first of all necessary to analyse the Dyck letters with precision and objectivity, but more than that to attempt to discover the content of the reciprocal Epp letters, which to a large degree, are not available. Of the 156 letters in the archival Verlag file<sup>2</sup> there are 140 letters written by Dyck to Epp and only 5 written by Epp to Dyck. In the Dyck's *Bote* file there are 49 letters from Dyck to Epp and 46 letters from Epp to Dyck, and in the Dyck's *Echo-Verlag* file 40 letters from Dyck to Epp (of which 23 overlap with the archival file and 39 letters from Epp to Dyck (of which one overlaps with the *Verlag* file). There is some evidence of missing letters; others simply have not been answered. The reasons for unanswered letters cannot all be established, but among them would be Epp's illness, and the urgency of business issues which could not wait for response letters. Since Dyck was the initiator of the publishing work there was a natu-

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(2) These are referred to as the D. H. Epp file (DHE) in this work, and are located at the CMBC Heritage Centre Archives.

ral tendency to generate letters. He does not excuse Epp's failure to respond, but instead describes the situation as it really was. In one letter to B. B. Wiens, he says that Epp does not write often and "Dabei geht es zwischen uns ja um geschäftliche Briefe. Aber auch die muß ich aus ihm fast mit Gewalt *herauswürgen*" (BBW 26. 1. 1951).

What then was Dyck's role in the establishment and development of the *Echo-Verlag*? The first sign of its development appears in the letter dated March 21, 1943. Since the *Verlag* file contains only two previous reciprocal letters, dated September 26 and October 17, 1930, one can not know whether there are missing letters in the thirteen year interlude. That some kind of communication existed is intimated, because Dyck mentions Epp's request to the *Zentralschule* students, of whom Dyck was one, from the previous December. Whether the request was a personal one or whether it was received through the *Bote* cannot be determined. It is interesting to read the following in Dyck's letter:

Nun kam mir aber beim Lesen der Letzten Nummer des *Boten* eine Idee. Und die möchte ich Ihnen unterbreiten. . . .

Was ich tun würde, wäre dieses: Ich würde einen Aufruf durch unsere drei Zeitungen ergehen lassen, ihre Namen, Adresse und einige anderen Daten . . . an mich zu schicken. Allerhand Weiteres, darunter sicherlich auch Gutes, würde sich dann bestimmt schon finden. (DHE 21. 3. 1943)

Dyck asks Epp to reply to this suggestion and to share any opposition to it. Epp's response, March 23, 1943, sounds pessimistic:

Herzlich gern überlasse ich Ihnen die Arbeit, das Material über die früheren Schüler der Ch. Z. zu sammeln. Nur bin ich durch Erfahrung klug geworden und habe meine Zweifel ob Sie mit Ihrem Plane Erfolg haben werden.

Die Leutchen sind nicht aufzurütteln. (DHE 23. 3. 1943)

He promotes the suggestion of a former student to send a sample of the circular to one former student in each district. Then he continues: "Nun aber noch eins: Da es meine Idee ist, so möchte ich das Resultat auch ausschliesslich im **Boten** veröffentlichen" (23. 3. 1943). This request stems from his competition in the **Rundschau**, but that does not justify the acknowledgement of the proposal as being his.

In Dyck's next letter, July 2, 1943, he reports on the gathering of the students' names, which already contains 300 entries, and lays out his plan:

Wenn ich mich mit Ihnen verständigen kann, und Sie mir dann Ihren **Boten** dazu zur Verfügung stellen, will ich unserer Schülergemeinde den Vorschlag machen und ihn mit allem Nachdruck vertreten, einen Buchverlag zu gründen.

It seems that Dyck anticipated Epp's mistrust, hence he immediately explains that he has no selfish objectives. After presenting the constitution, he concentrates on the most significant question insofar as this chapter is concerned, namely, who should be designated as president of the *Verlag*. He maintains there are only two possibilities, "Sie [Epp] und (wenn es auch ein bißchen stinkt) mich" (DHE 2. 7. 1943). His reasons for this conclusion are also delineated:

Ich scheide aus, wie ich schon zu Anfang sagte. Einmal, weil ich die Sache angeregt habe, und zum anderen, weil man den **Warte-Herausgeber** noch in Erinnerung hat, dem man weitgehend Opposition entgegenbrachte, und die man auch auf dieses Werk übertragen würde, hätte ich es in den Händen. Es bleiben also nur Sie, Dietrich Heinrichowitsch. Wollen Sie es tun? Ich bin bereit, die Sache so lange zu führen, bis Sie als Präsident dasitzen mit einem Kassenwart an einer Seite, der hoffentlich auch ein paar Batzen im Beutel hat, mit 5 Direktoren zur anderen Seite, die Ihnen nicht viel verpfuschen können, und mit dem verbrieften Recht, sich frei einen Gehilfen zu wählen, dem Sie praktisch die ganze Arbeit aufbürden können. (Ich hoffe nämlich, daß sich das alles durchdrücken läßt.) (DHE 2. 7. 1943)

This excerpt contains, in large measure, the reason for Dyck's major responsibilities in the *Verlag*. The proposal assumes that he, as assistant, would be doing the work without receiving the recognition. Epp's answer surprises and disappoints even today's reader, but Dyck apparently had not anticipated an optimistic reaction, for in the next letter he writes: "Sie stürzen sich wahrhaftig nicht Hals über Kopf in das projektierte Unternehmen, aber das konnte und habe ich auch nicht erwartet" (DHE 22. 7. 1943).

Through various arguments he attempts to convince Epp that the presidency is purely an honorary position. At the same time he does not exclude Epp's participation:

Ich setze voraus, daß Sie selber die Bücher und Schriften des Verlags drucken werden, und dabei werden Sie nolens volens Ihre Gedanken stark auch mit dem Inhalte des Materials beschäftigen müssen. Und gerade die Gedankenarbeit ist es, die ich Ihnen unterschieben möchte. (DHE 22.7. 1943)

A thorough examination of the letters shows that Dyck did most of the work. One can cite several examples: trying to coerce Epp into writing the principal and premiere work of the *Verlag*—the history of the school (22. 7. 1943); the naming of the directors (2. 8. 1943; 11. 9. 1943); extension (2. 8. 1943) and finalization (11. 9. 1943) of the student list; the planning for the printing of the *Steppen*-book and the publishing of Loewen's *Feldblumen* (14. 2. 1944, and others); the amplification of the planned brochure about the student reunion, which, according to Dyck, should include the schedule, the minutes of the founding document, the speeches, the group picture, and a picture of Epp, and, of course, the student list (10. 7. 1944; 23. 7. 1944, and others); the idea of the name, *Echo-Verlag* and its insignia—the hundred year-old oak—and the suggestions for further division of the work (25. 8. 1944); the continuous search for knowledgeable historians, archival experts, chronol-

ogists, authors, and other required assistants (29. 12. 1944; 14. 2. 1945); the meticulous accounting and book-keeping (28. 8. 1944; 30. 10. 1944, et al); the reworking and search for new works, for example, the **Trakt-Buch**, **Sagradowka**, **Die Flucht über den Amur**, **Arkadak**, and **Kuban** (10. 8. 1944; 6. 1. 1945); the improvement of the **Terek** manuscripts (28. 8. 1944); ideas for additional books and the constant pursuit of other materials and undertakings; the development of the *Echo-Buchgemeinschaft* (not dated); his extensive editorial work, studiously adhering to rigid principles of journalism, which were manifested in the treatment of certain books such as the Bernhard Harder's **Alt-Samara** book, especially the chapter dealing with the church-splits (17. 8. 1950; 25. 9. 1950; 10. 11. 1950).

The analysis of this letter file leads one to the indisputable conclusion that Dyck was indeed the founder of the *Echo-Verlag* even though he was not recognized as such. The archival file of letters bespeaks this fact, in that while it contains only five letters from Epp to Dyck, there are one hundred and forty letters from Dyck to Epp. Interestingly, the file is catalogued under the title *D. H. Epp Papers: Correspondence re Echo Verlag (primarily with Arnold Dyck)*, probably due to the use of an established category in the Conference archives.

Naturally, one is inclined to ask how the founding could have been attributed to Epp, especially when there is so much original evidence which attests to Dyck's diligent work. There are several possible explanations. The first, already alluded to by Dyck himself, and documented earlier, is Dyck's reputation acquired in his publishing of the **Warte**. He was also well aware of his reputation in the Steinbach community, which he expresses in his letter of August 2, 1945: "Ich glaube das einigemal sogar von mir, wenn die Leute hier herum sich auch nicht genug wundern können, wovon der Dretja-Ditj denn eigentlich lebt: er säet nicht, er erntet nicht, und Gott im Himmel nährt ihn doch!" As if his publishing business were not work!

A second explanation lies, in part, in the relationship between Dyck and Epp. Although these letters deal mostly with business matters, it is nevertheless important to document the relationship that existed between them, because it influences the correspondence. One observes, for example, that Dyck was a former student of Epp when both still resided in Russia. This helps to explain why the establishing of a communication network among the former *Chortitzer* students was such a burning issue for both of them, and also in what way their former teacher–student relationship influenced the letters, the establishment of the *Echo-Verlag*, and the accompanying work. Until July 10, 1944, Dyck always addressed Epp with the formal “Sie”. In the middle of the business communication he suddenly writes, “Nun mögen Sie – Pardon, ich wollte mich ja nicht länger wehren und das Du annehmen – also, nun magst Du dasselbe schon gedacht und etwas zu schreiben angefangen haben, oder gar schon fertig haben” (10. 7. 1944).

It is not until six years later that he makes some remarks about their previous relationship:

Liest Du wenigstens noch immer meine dicht kommenden Briefe trotz Deines ewigen Nicht–Zeit–habens? . . . Es geziemt sich nicht, für einen Schüler, über seinen Lehrer zu lachen, aber ich tue es doch, wenn ich so Deine Seufzer lese und mir es überlege, wie hübsch Du es verstanden hast, Dir Dein Alter einzurichten, “enn wear doch von morjen noch so kloak”. Als ich bei Dir in der vierten Klasse war, las ich schon immer fleißig die “Njiwa” – was war das doch für ein schönes Blatt mit all seinen Beilagen, die mir später übrigens die Machnowzy im Ofen verheizten; – bei meinem Bruder mit. . . . Da gab es, wohl in den “Ljiteraturnyje Priloshenjija” allerhand mathematische und geometrische Rätsel zu lösen, die ich mir dann auch einmal ansah. Dabei war ich dann immer der felsenfesten Überzeugung, daß wenn es auf der Welt einen Menschen gibt, der das immer so im Bigône alles lösen kann, nur Du es seist. Heute weiß ich besser, es geht aber gar nicht darum, ob Du das konntest oder nicht konntest, es geht darum, daß Du als Lehrer mir, Deinem Schüler – und ich war nicht dümmer als die andern – diesen großen Glauben beigebracht hattest. Und damit und überhaupt – als Lehrer warst Du ganz groß. Größer als Geschäftsmann und Lebenskünstler. Darum lasse mich

nur ein bißchen lachen, denn ich bin froh, daß es so ist und nicht umgekehrt. Die Geschäftsleute stehen bei mir nämlich nicht sehr hoch im Rang. (16. 12. 1950)

Dyck's openness is transparent here, something he would not have risked in the days of the establishment of the publishing house. Had he been more open and courageous earlier, it is conceivable that the situation would have developed quite differently.

There are also other signs of his increasing openness. The later letters contain many more personal opinions: his discouragement on account of the *Verlag* (3. 1. 1945); the disunity and factionalism among the Mennonites (29. 1. 1945); the overrating of the importance of religion in the history of the Mennonites, particularly in relation to the cultural and economic progress (29. 1. 1945); politics (18. 10. 1949), and other topics. Ever more frequently he expresses his disappointment in the Mennonites, as uttered in the letter dated August 10, 1946: "Es ist ein Jammer, wie sehr es bei uns überall menschelt: Intrigen, Machtkämpfe, Parteikämpfe, Verdächtigungen, Anfeindungen. Es mußte da einmal ein Bußprediger kommen, aber einer mit Donner und Blitz und mit einer Peitsche".

This openness is a definite outgrowth of Epp's trust and confidence in Dyck. The business arrangement is revealed again and again, as in Dyck's letter of November 10, 1945:

Schon glaubte ich, daß Du vielleicht verärgert wärest wegen meiner Bitte um die Fehlerberichtigung.

. . . Du hast ja mich, ohne daß es verabredet war, soweit schalten und walten lassen und hast auch auf all meine Bitten und Anregungen positiv reagiert. Das hat mich die Arbeit, die ich soweit getan, gern tun lassen. Und solange Du hinter mir stehst, und solange ich den Eindruck behalte, daß Du den Glauben an und das Wollen zu

unserer Sache nicht verlierst, will ich mir meinen eigenen Glauben an ihre Durchführbarkeit nicht nehmen lassen.

Despite this trust one occasionally perceives that the relationship is somewhat precarious. The perception rests in Epp's irregular writing and in Dyck's apologies. An example is found in Dyck's January 27, 1951, letter:

Nun wird's mir direkt ein bißchen unheimlich, daß ich überhaupt nichts mehr von Dir höre . . . . Oder denk ich dann auch wieder, daß ich in meiner Schwatzhaftigkeit irgendwas gesagt habe, wodurch Du Dich hättest getroffen fühlen. Das dürfte schon sein, das ist dann aber durch Ungeschick, in keiner Weise mit übler Absicht geschehen.

The situation does not seem to improve, for in Dyck's next letters, written four months later, the assumed altercation becomes apparent:

Soeben erhielt ich Deinen Brief vom 21. Mai. Schon lange wollte ich Dir schreiben . . . . Es ist wohl doch mehr der Schatten, der sich über unsere Beziehungen gelegt hat, was mich hinderte, Dir über meine kleinen und großen Echo-Sorgen und auch sonstiges zu schreiben, wie ich es zu tun pflegte. Daran kann ich aber kaum etwas ändern, da ich nicht weiß, woher Du "wohl auch ein Recht hast, was gegen mich zu haben". Du wirst aber überzeugt sein, daß Du es hast. Zugleich aber kannst Du Dich darüber wegsetzen, und das ist viel wert, und ich halte es viel wert. (24. 5. 1951)

In the meantime the number of letters diminishes. Dyck often laments this with statements such as "Jetzt habe ich aber wirklich schon eine kleine Ewigkeit kein Lebenszeichen von Dir erhalten. . . ." (3. 12. 1952).

Long before this situation had become so sensitive, Dyck had already shared the truth of the situation with a few of his trusted friends. To C. Krahn who as an editor himself had a strong interest in the *Verlag* he wrote:



Geschäftsführer bin nur ich allein. Epp ist Präsident, hat praktisch alles aber mir übergeben. Ich berate mich mit ihm in wichtigen Sachen und mache dann Vorschläge. Wenn Sie über den Verlag etwas schreiben, so wollen Sie bitte aber doch Epp alle ihm als dem Präsidenten gebührende Ehre zukommen lassen. Ich fühle mich durch ihn doch sehr gestützt. (CK 18. 4. 1950)

In the last letters one already perceives the inevitable fate of the *Verlag*. Not only had the relations between them changed, but also the personal conditions for each one had changed. Epp had been sickly for quite some time and was approaching eighty, and Dyck had moved to Germany in the expectation of running his business from there. Since Epp's letters to Dyck are missing to a very large extent, it is difficult to ascertain when and how Epp gave up his post. Dyck's other correspondence sheds more light on this, as Dyck was searching for a replacement (possibly Krahn) for Epp in the event of his death (CK 25. 8. 1954). Some of the details are disclosed in a letter to C. Krahn. Dyck discussed the issue of naming a successor to Epp as laid down in the constitution, especially in view of Epp's advanced age. He explains that he discussed this with Epp when he came to visit him in Steinbach the previous fall after Dyck's letter which raised the issue. Dyck had recommended C. Krahn which Epp did not accept nor reject. Dyck also explains that Epp subsequently wrote to him in the summer from his sickbed to accept the recommendation and to relieve himself of his presidential responsibilities at once. Fearing that the whole situation could readily be misinterpreted, Dyck elaborates:

So hatte ich es natürlich nicht gemeint, und es war überhaupt nicht nach meinem Sinn, ihn schon zu seinen Lebzeiten aus diesem Unternehmen ausscheiden zu lassen. Das umsomehr, als seine Pflichten ihn unmöglich irgendwie gedrückt haben konnten. Praktisch wurde die ganze Arbeit von mir getan, er stellte mir bereitwillig den **Boten** für die Reklame etc. zur Verfügung, und ich hatte immer aber eine Stelle, von der ich mir nötigenfalls die Sanktion für Sachen holen konnte, die zu entscheiden ich nicht auf mich nehmen wollte, bzw. nicht durfte. Wir sind ausgezeichnet mit einander gefahren (so wenigstens sieht es von meinem Ende aus aus) da ich so gut wie absolute Bewegungsfreiheit hatte, ohne die formelle Vollmacht dazu zu besitzen, die übrigens

laut unserem Statut erteilt werden kann. Mit einem Wort — ich möchte Epp als Boss ohne weiteren Grund nicht verlieren . . . .  
(CK 25. 8. 1954)

This is very much in keeping with the letter that Dyck had sent Epp two months earlier. That letter gave some information about this, including Dyck's reaction, which is formulated as follows:

Was Du zur "Abdankung" als Verlagspräsident sagst, hat mich doch überrascht, an sowas habe ich nie gedacht, und ich kann es mir auch nicht gut vorstellen, daß, während Du da in Rosthern sitzt und nun nur Echo-Schreiarbeit tust, ich mit einem anderen über Echo-Angelegenheiten verhandeln soll. Nein, da müssen wir eine Kompromisslösung finden, durch die Du zwar entlastet, nicht aber ausgeschaltet wirst, nicht vom Mitreden. (13. 12. 1954)

Dyck's word to Epp can hardly be doubted, as he had already indicated to C. Krahn in an earlier letter that he did not want the presidency of the *Verlag* (CK 23. 11. 1954).

In less than six months Dyck realized that his intention to conduct his business from Germany was a miscalculation. Since he was not willing to change his other plans, he found he had no recourse but to resign. In his second last letter to Epp he presents his views and his accomplishments as follows:

Als ich vor 11 Jahren die Gründung eines Verlags vorschlug, ging es mir um unsere Zentralschule, bezw. um ein ihrer würdiges Denkmal. Daß ich die Führung der Verlagsgeschäfte würde zu übernehmen haben, falls Du es nicht selber tun wolltest, der Gedanke ist mir im Ernst nicht gekommen, denn weder fühle ich mich als Geschichtler, noch bin ich es. Außerdem gab es da nichts zu verdienen und auch nicht große Ehre einzulegen. Genug, es lag kein Grund vor, mich nach der Arbeit zu drängen. Wenn ich sie dann aber doch, ohne mich zu weigern, übernahm, so einzig allein, weil es mir darum zu tun war, daß das Unternehmen wirklich ins Leben käme und lebte. Es hat nun 10 Jahre gelebt. Es ist nie betteln gegangen, für es sind keine

Spenden gesammelt und keine Kollekten "gehoben" worden. Es besitzt heute trotzdem ein kleines Vermögen an Bücherreserven und ein bescheidenes Betriebskapital, groß genug, seine Tätigkeit im bisherigen Umfang fortsetzen zu können. Und damit ist meinem Ehrgeiz, es bestätigt zu sehen, daß mein Vorschlag von damals richtig und gut war, Genüge geleistet. Heute gebe ich das Werk also gerne aus den Händen. Das wäre meine Seite. (13. 12. 1954)

In his responding letter, February 27, 1955, Epp does not yet concede that Dyck had been the actual leader in the business, nor does he accept Dyck's resignation as a final retirement or withdrawal from the *Verlag*. In fact, he requests an answer to his request for further ideas for books and sources. There is not a word of gratitude, only a smooth excuse for his negligence in writing: "Wenn ich nun lange mit Antworten gewartet habe, so vergilt Böses mit Gutem".

Dyck's suggestions concerning the assets of their business and what was to be done in the event of its folding or their deaths was not acted upon by Epp either. When Epp died on March 31, 1955, he had not left a will or any instructions for the possible dissolution of the *Verlag* (CK 28. 4. 1955). The matter was resting fully in Dyck's hands.

Despite all that Dyck had encountered in his interactions and work with Epp, he continued to defend him when accusations were launched against him by his friends. A. Friesen, then of Vancouver, unreservedly expressed his opinion about Epp: "Der Prachtkerl hat den **Boten** schließlich zu einem richtig demokratischen Blatt werden lassen, zur Stimme der Mehrheit, der des frommen mennonitischen Pöbels" (5. 12. 1953). Dyck defended Epp as a teacher, saying "Er war ein guter Lehrer, und für mich war er schlechtweg **der** Lehrer, wenn ich andere Lehrer auch mehr liebte und mehr verehrte und bewunderte. Auch ist Epp ein prächtiger Unterhaltungspartner, wenn auch heute immer noch. Ob er der rechte Schriftführer für ein mennonitisches Blatt war und ist, das ist ein ganz anderes Ding. . . ."

(12. 1. 1954). Dyck was cautious in drawing this distinction and in his correspondence always upheld Epp's reputation as a teacher, even if he acknowledged Epp's weaknesses in other areas.

The overview of the business correspondence relating to the day-to-day work of Arnold Dyck allows the reader to glean many insights into the life and work of its two authors. Do the business letters serve a specific purpose in respect to Dyck's work in the establishment of the *Verlag*? Obviously, the letters reveal the massive amount of Dyck's work and his role in the founding of the *Verlag*. On the one hand, one can maintain that the correspondence in this instance is too one-sided to stand as the absolute and final evidence for the matter in question. On the other hand, one can assert that the business letter is relatively objective and, therefore, the most credible source of evidence, and that the volume of Dyck letters alone are the reliable witness of his work. In Dyck's last-mentioned letter his views and motivations come to the fore once more. He knew from the very first that he needed a figurehead in order to establish the *Verlag* and he was willing to do the work without receiving any recognition, simply because his concern was intrinsically the *Verlag*, for his insight permitted him to realize what could be achieved through it – the recording of the history of the Mennonite people and the development of the Mennonite archives, and through it, the education of its people.

The perils of publishing as seen from Dyck's vantage point are, in the final analysis, quite different from those seen by the reader. From the reader's point of view the perils are the failure to have the rightful recognition ascribed, and the continuous fear of failure and risk in running a business of questionable viability. For Dyck the perils were the risks of broken relationships and the risk of a failed mission, a mission which few were even able to comprehend.

## Chapter 5: Primordial Tensions

Since the emergence of the Mennonites as a people, three inextricably connected concepts have been at the heart of their essence and their definition: *Volk*, *Heimat*, and *Sprache*. These terms, in the context of Mennonitism, are highly emotional and almost defy definition. In the context of their history, the term *Volk* does not mean a people who have a certain territory in common, and possibly also a government; if one considers only the elements of culture, language, or economic life, then one can approach an interpretation of the term. How one explains the term also has implications for the delineation of the term *Heimat* due to the interdependence of the terms. Since one is not associating the Mennonites specifically with a certain territory, considering that their history is rooted in vast areas of Europe, Prussia, the Soviet Union, and in more recent times in the Americas and many other parts of the world, one can hardly speak of a homeland. It might actually be more appropriate to speak of a home strictly in the connotative sense. The definition is a nebulous one. To speak of a home which does not occupy a space seems to be a veritable contradiction. However, if *home* is not fixed to a location, then home is only the memories and the feelings which the memories arouse.

The language concept is no less complex. *Plautdietsch*, one of the Low German dialects of Northern Europe, was the everyday language of the Russian Mennonites. Its very earliest origins can be traced back to before the Anglo Saxon invasion of the British Isles (R. Epp, *Plautdietsch* 61) in the fifth century, and as a written language it disappeared along with the decline of the Hanseatic world in the seventeenth century in which Low German had become an internationally important language. Reuben Epp maintains that the shift towards High German during the Reformation was a result of a people's increased receptivity to a language and culture of a more successful people as their own culture and language disintegrates and

therefore "Low German gradually ceased being the overall written language and yielded to the High German of the successful south" (R. Epp 63-64). The intellectual and theological influences from the "south" also resulted in Low German no longer being used among the educated, and those who did were held in disdain. According to Epp in his citation of Dieter Möhn's *Geschichte der niederdeutschen Mundarten*, Low German "was considered to be a hindrance to social culture" (R. Epp 64). For the Mennonites, Dutch had originally been their language of written communication and of the church. After their migration to West Prussia in the middle of the sixteenth century which was inhabited by a Low German population, the Mennonites assimilated the dialect of these people. In the second half of the eighteenth century High German replaced Dutch, but their Low German dialect remained their everyday language. This distinctive language, one of numerous Low German dialects, with its eventual inclusion of many loan words from Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish and English (Thiessen, *Plattdeutsch in Kanada* 213) was considered by Dyck as a vital characteristic which gave his people its distinctive identity, rather than the "religious" beliefs. Loewen and Reimer also maintain that "[f]or Dyck, it would appear, *Plautdietsch* rather than the church was the *sine qua non* of authentic Mennonite experience" (*Origins and Literacy Development* 285). Dyck also believed that by writing in this language he could contribute to its preservation. The disadvantage of writing in Low German was that it "was considered too vulgar to serve as a vehicle for literature, only High German, the church language, was employed for serious writing" (Reimer, *The Russian-Mennonite Experience in Fiction* 221) among the Russian Mennonites. It was this lingering perception with which the emerging writers in the early twentieth century had to contend. Reimer states the consequence of this attitude:

Thus, the placid, derivative, and conservative nature of Russian-Mennonite culture worked against the emergence of a genuine literature based on boldness of vision, a capacity for self-criticism, and the kind of radical social consciousness which goads writers into the creation of

fresh and stimulating works of art. (*The Russian-Mennonite Experience* 222-223)

It was not until the second decade of the twentieth century with the appearance of J. H. Janzen's works that *Plautdietsch* was used as a literary language in Russia (Loewen and Reimer, 280).

Harry Loewen makes further observations about the reasons and effects of Dyck's use of Low German. He contends that Dyck's most significant works were written in *Plautdietsch* because "[n]ot only was Low German closest to Dyck's heart, but he also knew that in order to entertain, amuse and educate his Mennonite readers, he had to write his stories and playlets in Low German" (*Literary Images of Canadian Mennonites* 3). Loewen also differentiates between the Low German and High German works in their nature. The former are written "in the language of the heart rather than the mind" (5) and describe a peaceful world as it existed in the experience of the Mennonites; the latter "contain a great deal of reflection, introspection, and often a longing for either an imaginary world or a world and a way of life which have passed" (5-6). Loewen also indicates that the Low German works do not attempt to communicate values to the non-Mennonite world (*The Linguistic Medium is the Message* 10).

When Dyck exposes his views and sentiments on the nature of *Volk*, *Heimat*, and *Sprache* in his letters, he rarely talks about any of these in isolation, especially the first two concepts. As has already become apparent, virtually every file of letters has as its focus a concern or cause which is almost exclusive to that file or the author of that file. Consequently, certain topics have received more attention in one file than in another. This also gives one deeper insight into the authors and the issues, because there is room for the development and testing of particular concepts. One finds that the concepts that are the center of this chapter are discussed at length in

Dyck's letters to P. J. Klaassen, Vancouver. Dyck had corresponded with Klaassen before his immigration to Canada from Paraguay, but it is their correspondence that took place during the last twelve years of Dyck's life that attempts to come to terms with these concepts and with the destiny of the Mennonites. On the one hand, there is a decided advantage in examining these later letters, because one ought to be able to extract a more developed, comprehensive, and mature view. On the other hand, there is in Dyck a detectable increasing pessimism with the apparently diminishing interest, awareness, and concern among the Mennonites for these intrinsic elements of their existence as Mennonites. A passage representative of this pessimism extracted from a letter to Gerhard Wiens, who proclaimed himself ready to join Dyck in his mission after a thirty-year absence from the Mennonite scene, bears this out:

... unsere Alten sind im Aussterben. Sie werden bestimmt überrascht sein, wie sehr sich unser Volk auch hier in Kanada schon verändert hat. Den alten, biederer plattdeutschen Mennistenmenschen, wie er als Sonderspezies nur einmal und nur im Zarenrußland entstehen konnte, wird man bald nur noch aus Büchern kennen lernen können. Falls solche überhaupt da sein werden. (GW 19. 3. 1958)

In a general way, Dyck, in a letter written December 19, 1960, describes the rise, scattering and dissolution, and downfall of his people. According to him, the forced migrations from country to country provided valuable learning experiences, but he distinguishes between the learning for the individual and the masses. The individual has been enriched in wisdom through it; the masses have contended more with the practical things. Contrary to the popular way of looking at this, Dyck says that in the final analysis it is not the combined experience that converts the wanderer into a settlement pioneer. He argues for "racial" characteristics, even in pre-Mennonite times, and that on account of Mennonitism an ethical seriousness and a reputable moral standard became inherent characteristics. These qualities became a guarantee that wherever they went they knew how to hold their own and assert them-



selves which always led to prosperity. But this was only their economic progress and it was not enough. The material is not enough to gain happiness, which was demonstrated to the Mennonites in the two World Wars. Man needs something more — "eine Heimat, eine aus Erde, Luft und Himmel. Zum mindesten braucht er ein Heimatvolk, dem er sich zugehörig empfindet, mit dem er sich eins weiß." (PJK-V 19. 12. 1960) Dyck maintains that few are even aware of the need for a *Heimat* and *Heimatvolk*. As he sees it, in Russia the unique circumstances resulted in the development of a Mennonite society that had all the marks of an independent nation, but that was all swept away through the wars. The letter draws a comparison between them and Ukrainians for whom the Ukraine always remained a dream and existed only as an idea and continues to exist as such. The Mennonites have no such concept. He decries the dispersion of the Mennonite people, specifically his comrades from the various schools and the *Forsteien*, into Russia, Germany, Canada, USA, Mexico, Paraguay, Brasil, Argentina, and Uruguay. His conclusion to this analysis and his dismay at the number of countries where Mennonites have experienced their rise and fall would have been truly shocking to his readership if he had disclosed his views publicly; in fact, the Mennonite papers would not have published it:

Kulturdünger? Ein schlechter Trost, und es ist auch noch nicht dagewesen, daß sich ein ganzes Volk bewußt und ohne Zwang zu Kulturdünger hergegeben hätte. — Das sind so die Gedanken, aus denen heraus ich zu fragen anfangte: War es richtig, daß wir einmal nach Rußland gingen. [sic] (PJK-V 19. 12. 1960)

Dyck's questioning eventually turns into a disconsolate, heavy-hearted, reluctant acceptance of their destiny of homelessness. Not only does Dyck believe that this destiny was more intensely perceived by the group of Mennonites to which he belonged, but that there was also no way to redeem the past:

Zu ihnen gehören auch diejenigen deutscher Zunge, die aus der Steppe stammen. Vornehmlich die Immigrantanten [sic] der ersten Generation. Von denen es heißt, daß ihr Schicksal der Tod sei. Gemeint ist der Tod aus leiblicher Not. Das trifft heute hierzulande kaum noch zu. Und wenn sie dennoch langsam absterben, diese Ersten, so ist das die Folge einer geistigen Not. Für die volksdeutschen Rußlandflüchtigen nicht zuletzt eben die, daß es für sie kein gedankliches Rückwandern zu den Stätten ihrer Kindheit, ihrer Jugend gibt. Die sind einfach nicht mehr da. (EB 1. 7. 1961)

Dyck also maintains that the decline of the Mennonites in Canada was not being caused by the greater external threats such as war. In a letter to Quiring who was personally touched by the tragedy of war in the loss of his only son and Quiring's own escape he cites a much more fundamental cause:

Nein, von außen her ist uns nichts geschehen, und wenn wir uns aber doch im Abbau befinden. . . so kommt das von innen und ist eben das, wozu es unvermeidlich kommen muß, wenn eine Gemeinschaft allmählich den Boden verläßt, aus dem sie gewachsen und der ihr eigentlicher Kraftspender ist. (WQ 7. 8. 1946)

He did not see emigration to Central and South America as the answer. There is a sense of utter hopelessness in his exclamation "Aus einer Heimatlosigkeit in eine andere!" (EB 1. 7. 1961)

One complicating factor in trying to clarify and neatly outline Dyck's persuasions on the vital elements of *Mennonitenum* is his position on the church as a vital component. It takes careful reading and careful study to understand what Dyck actually believes. What he is actually saying is highly dependent upon how he says it, and how he says it is dependent upon to whom he says it. With some writers much of what was said was said in a joking but respectable fashion; with some writers he was forthright and literal; with some he was mocking and satiric; with yet others he was heretical and sacrilegious. This factor must be kept in mind as one cites passages

from the sources, for if one does not detect the tone and consider it in the interpretation, one can not reconcile the apparent contradictions that surface. What is said satirically or sacrilegiously may contradict what is said literally if one ignores the tone of one. This factor is particularly important in statements pertaining to the most sensitive issues in his letters, namely, matters of religion and the church.

In some letters Dyck is highly critical of the role that the church has played in the disintegration of the Mennonites as a people. Sometimes his criticism is so intense that one is left with the impression that Dyck was completely anti-religious and therefore seeks to deny the positive influence of the church. If this had been his true sentiment, then it is also conceivable that Dyck would simply have been indifferent to the church, rather than bothering to criticize it. One can conjecture that he sought to induce some change through the very criticism of it.<sup>1</sup>

Dyck was very perceptive to any developments happening in the Mennonite community and the community at large, and frequently he comments on them. For instance, after the war was over, he writes W. Quiring that the Mennonites are making a concerted effort to retain their uniqueness and their language. However, he also perceives that this is all for a greater purpose, though, which is for the "Erhaltung der Kirche" (WQ 7. 11. 1946).

Dyck's position on the role of the church in the past in fostering the idea of a Mennonite *Volk* is expressed in brief in another letter to P. J. Klaassen. "Ist es nicht grade die Kirche, durch die wir einen *Volksgenossen* nach dem andern verlieren"? he asks (PJK-V 21. 2. 1961). Then he answers his own question:

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(1) Dyck's stance on specific religious issues and those related to his religious views are examined in Chapter 6.

Die einen biestern ab in englische Gemeinden, meistens durch Heirat, die andern, besonders die, die in die Stadt gehen, machen in der Kirche nicht mehr mit. Sie distanzieren sich ganz bewußt von ihr. Vornehmlich unsere studierte Jugend tut das. Wir tun aber auch nichts, in ihnen ein Volksbewußtsein wachzurufen, das weit mehr als Sonntagschullektionen sie erkennen lassen würde, warum sie bei uns bleiben müssen und sich nicht an das fremde Völkergemisch verlieren dürfen. Denn das sind nicht unsere Blutsbrüder, das ist ein Mischlingsvolk, dem der Begriff Volksbewußtsein völlig fremd ist. (PJK-V 21. 2. 1961)

Dyck suggests that racial categories are important, but he is not racist insofar that he seeks to undermine specific races.<sup>2</sup> His concern is for the preservation of a distinct Mennonite people as *Blutsbrüder*. The issue for Dyck is that his people not become “Einheitsmenschen” or “Schablonenmenschen”, which he believes is the worst thing that can happen to man:

Die sich daraus ergebende Öde in der ganzen Welt – nicht auszudenken! Wie die Sachen liegen, machen wir da heute aber mit, statt dort zu sein, wo man noch für völkische Eigen-Art und völkische Eigentümlichkeit steht und gegen die völkische Vermassung. . . . Und darum . . . müßte jeder für die Menschheit wertvolle Mensch bei seinem Muttervolke bleiben dürfen und wollen. (PJK-V 21. 2. 1961)

Dyck’s citing as example the Jews as the prototype for what he aspires the Mennonite to possess and define him intrinsically makes his concept very clear: “Ein Jude bleibt Jude, ganz gleich, wo und unter wem er lebt. Ich wünschte, wir hätten etwas von diesem zähen Stoff in uns” (PJK-V 21. 2. 1961).

The language problem was a very complex one, especially for the group of Mennonites who were Dyck’s major concern. This group of Mennonites who remained after the 1874 migration experienced the *russification* process, hence they en-

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(2) This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 6 in the section *Political Views*.

countered additional language influences through the interaction with the Ukrainian people and the compulsory use of Russian in the school system. Dyck recognized Ukrainian as the language of the steppes and the adaptability of the Mennonites to the language situation: “Denn Ukrainisch ist die Sprache der Steppe. Und selbst uns, den deutschen Steppenbauern, ging das Chocholsche (Ukrainische) weit glatter von der Zunge als das landesfremde Russisch, obwohl letzteres in allen Schulen Unterrichtssprache war” (EB 1. 7. 1961). Dyck’s strong identification with the Russian element in his background is somewhat puzzling. Was it so strong because he was able to empathize with the Russians and see things from their vantage point, or was this simply the prevailing feeling among his contemporaries? An autobiographical<sup>3</sup> passage in *Verloren in der Steppe* sheds some light on this in Hans Toews’s discussion with his Russian teacher, Warwara Pawlowna, on his return from the *Chortitza Zentralschule* where he had taken his exam in Russian. She, in encouraging him in his further studies, reflects on how differently she has been treated from the German teacher in his Mennonite community. There is a tone of resentment in what she says. In the Russian schools where she had taught, she received the respect that was her due as a schoolteacher and an educated person. Why was such a distinction made between her and Heinrich Jakowlewitsch in Hochfeld?

War das nicht einzig und allein, weil er Deutscher ist und ich Russin — Weil ich Russin bin, hat man mich abgelehnt und hat man mich als etwas Geringeres behandelt. — So seid ihr deutschen Kolonisten. Auf die Russen seht ihr mit Geringschätzung herab. — Dabei seid *ihr* die Fremdlinge hier, seid bei uns zu Gast, denn dieses Land gehört doch uns, den Russen — Und sieh dich einmal um, sieh dir die deutschen Dörfer an und betrachte dann die russischen, wenige Schritte von eurer Tür. Welch ein Kontrast. Es scheint so, unsere Gutsbesitzer mußten untergehen, nur um euch Deutschen Platz zu machen. In eure Hände ging ihr Land über, und unser Muschik? Er ging leer aus, blieb arm, wie er es schon immer war. — Eure Söhne und Töchter gehen nicht in Dienst. Nicht einmal zu anderen Deutschen, geschweige denn zu Russen. (409)

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(3) This is verified in Chapter 6

This is not a popular admission, and perhaps Dyck was one of the few who was courageous enough to admit the truth and sympathized with the Russians. At least he dared to write about it in his fictional work.

In Canada there were new influences again. Possibly due, in part, to the mounting Cold War, which expressed itself in strong anti-Russian sentiment, the recent immigrants, according to Dyck, were forsaking their Russian roots: "Es ist übrigens recht merkwürdig: die Leutchen kommen nicht gerne aus Rußland, sie wollen aus Deutschland kommen" (KG 9. 8. 1949). For the immigrants of 1874 this was not so much a factor, since their affinity with Russia was not as close. But how can one reconcile the criticism that Dyck expresses above with the lines that he wrote Victor Peters from Cuxhaven: "Was würde dann schon meine Stimme gelten, wenn ich dennoch beteuern sollte, daß Deutschland sehr, sehr schön ist, und — man braucht es nicht zu wissen, man fühlt es wieder und wieder, daß hier einmal unser Ursprung war" (VP 7. 1. 1957). Is he admitting that the origin of his people is here, but they are not to say so? Or is it the aesthetic response to the beauties of nature that are subconsciously reminiscent of his memories of the beauties of the steppes? However one attempts to explain this dichotomy, one cannot deny the warring tensions that continue to rage within his soul.

But the influences in Canada and America were much larger than the language issue. A whole new materialistic mentality accompanied their prosperity in their new environment. They obtained more work and had more money, which meant they could buy more. The tragedy, according to Dyck, was that they were as much in the pursuit of the almighty dollar as the rest, and had not retained any pride in the fact that they were once an independent agrarian people.

In the struggle to retain the original language of the Mennonites, Dyck felt very much alone, hence his elation when he received an unexpected essay in *Plautdietsch*. His response is a lament that the people are forsaking their heritage language:

Da hat man sich in die Idee gebohrt, unsere Leute müßten in den Familien hochdeutsch sprechen, nicht mehr Platt. Einem sinken da die Hände am Leibe herunter, denn — *sie wissen nicht, was sie tun*. Und es ist mir dann wie Manna vom Himmel, wenn ich einen Artikel, wie den Ihren, lese und weiß, daß ihn tausende lesen und jedermann sehen kann, daß nicht ich ihn geschrieben habe. (GW 19. 3. 1958)

A few short years later Dyck's concern is not the High German — Low German issue; it is that of turning to English. Even in Russia they were able to retain their language. He bemoans the loss:

... [I]n Rußland, wie es damals war, hätten wir nicht brauchen Russen zu werden und wären es wohl auch noch lange nicht, vielleicht überhaupt nicht geworden. Wie ja auch die baltischen Deutschen es nicht wurden. In Nordamerika nun aber, da geht das Englischwerden vielen nicht schnell genug. (PJK-V No date. After May 6, 1965)

The battle seemed to be lost and the outcome inevitable.

What was Dyck's personal contribution to keep alive the language upon which the very essence of Mennonitism depended? In general, he promoted the language with certain counterparts. In particular, he wrote numerous works in *Plautdietsch*, especially dramas which could be presented to large audiences and did not require a reading ability for the spectator and hence could win a widespread appeal. Their humor was also intended to increase the appeal. To a certain degree the contribution was a beneficial one, since some works were performed during his lifetime

and some of his works were read in radio broadcasts on Radio CFAM, through which they gained much additional exposure.

Dyck went beyond simply using the language in his own works; he actually wrote a drama on the topic, one that remained unpublished during his lifetime, namely, **Daut Jeburtsdach**. What prompted him to write a drama that dealt with the tensions that wrestled with the very survival of Mennonitism? Undoubtedly, he had a certain measure of hope in salvaging what remained to be salvaged. In the light of what is exposed in the letters, one can draw conclusions about what other factors prompted him. Apart from seeing the possible utilitarian value, there was also a writer's intrinsic compulsion to write about matters that lie close to his heart, or as Dyck puts it in the vernacular, "ut'e Plutz" (GW 19. 2. 1960). Another factor which may have prompted him to write this work is the increasing frequency of the mixed marriage phenomenon, especially having experienced it in his own family. The phenomenon was obviously a topic of discussion between him and his friends as substantiated in a letter to P. J. Klaassen in which he is reflecting on their past in St.

Petersburg and on Klaassen's family:

Deine Nichten (also wenigstens zwei) mit ihren englischen Männern  
Apropos, ich erinnere mich noch, wie diese Deine Schwester heiratete  
und Euer Vater den angehenden Schwiegersohn Pharisäer (Fahre-  
sehr) nannte, so erzählte Hans es mir. Freier und Bräutigame mußten  
eben forsch vorgefahren kommen, und die Thießens konnten sich  
schon gute "Fahrpferde" leisten. Jawohl, wie viele unter uns erleben  
es heute am eigenen Leibe, was es für unser Volk bedeutet immerzu  
auf der Wanderung zu sein. Auch ich habe eine englische Schwieger-  
tochter (ein prächtiger Mensch, aber nicht darin liegt die Tragik bei  
den Mischehen) und spreche mit meiner Großtochter englisch. Aber  
ich höre nun lieber auf, sonst fange ich wieder an, denn dieses ist ein  
Thema, das mich immerzu beschäftigt. (PJK-V 8. 9. 1964)

In a letter to N. Klassen on August 10, 1959, Dyck states his intention of the drama, originally known by the title **Um der Väter Erbe**, as



um die große Sprachenverwirrung, in der wir stecken, und die ganze-Tragik unserer Heimatlosigkeit zu veranschaulichen. . . . Im Drama wird diesem Standpunkt [die "nicht zu umgehenden Assimilierung englischsprechenden Amerika"] durchaus Rechnung getragen (es prallen da nämlich zwei entgegengesetzte Standpunkte hart aufeinander).

The language issue was such a critical one in his eyes because as he saw it, "die deutsche Sprache (Hoch- und Plattdeutsch) war es, die unseren geistigen Menschen schuf, wie eine besondere Religionsauffassung unsern geistlichen Menschen schuf. Aus dem Zusammenwirken dieser beiden Faktoren wurden wir, was wir sind" (NK 10. 8. 1959). The inclusion of Russian he saw as an enriching factor rather than a threat. To see the language issue as he did means that the components of *Volk*, *Heimat*, and *Sprache* can no longer be considered in isolation, but as inextricable, interdependent components which define his people.

The letters certainly verify that the views purported in the drama are those of the author. There is virtually no distance between author and some of the characters, even though this author was well familiar with the rules of good writing. It can be argued that this is, in fact, the very weakness of the drama, that it is polemic, dogmatic, and didactic — three qualities that have not been presented subliminally in this piece of fiction. The fiction lies primarily in the fact that it seems unlikely that the grandfather's five sons should have chosen women precisely representative of the populations to which the Mennonites gravitated in the surrender of their heritage: Russian, English, Mexican (or South American), German/Prussian, and ironically the exception, a fellow Low-German Mennonite. Outside of that, the rest seems hardly fictional. The lack of distance between the author and speaker is heightened by some of the less significant details, such as the date of emigration of this family from Russia which coincides with that of the author. It would be unwise to suggest that the author assumes the role of a single character, for one hears the strains of Dyck's internal dialogue in the grandfather's adamant statements calling Beerend's action a betrayal. It

is interesting to note that it is not what kind of a woman he has married that is the issue. As Dyck puts it, “Daut jeit omm aundre, omm grundsättslijche Dinj. Hia ess Ferrot fereewt worde. Hia haft eena aul de jeistje enn de seelische Jeeda, dee enn onsem Glowe, enn onsem Foltjstum enn enn onse Muttasproak enthoole senn, ferr’n Bottabroot feschachat” (*Daut Jeburtsdach* 261). He also sees it as a weakness of character. In the grandfather’s next comment, there is not only anger at the cheap sale of his birthright, but there is sarcasm, which is ridiculing the shallow thinking of the religious Mennonites in their definition of who they are — that mere baptism alone makes one a Mennonite. He says, “Doa heat mea too, aus’n bät Unjawiese fonn eenem mennischen Prädja, ooda’n poa Kartjismusauntwuat enn ’bät Wota. Kjeen Mensch wausst äwanacht enn eenen nie’en Gloowe ’nenn. Enn eascht rajcht passeat daut nijh, wann eena derjch Befri’e doatoo jedrenjt woat” (261).

One can also hear the author in Hauns’s words. Hauns, having noted the cool reception of Nadja, the Russian wife of the long-time missing Jeat, speaks in her defence relating how she was the encouragement that caused Jeat to withstand the despondency in the forestry work and to battle typhus when he was already on his deathbed. Hauns also reminds the reader of the hostilities between the Russians and Germans, naturally including the Mennonites, and despite this and the strong disapproval of her people, she stood by him “enn ess uck niemols mea enn äarem Foda sien Hus jewast. Fee am wea see ’ne Laundesferrätarin” (265). The *Volk* argument leads to the language argument, and again the thoughts of the letters are found in the drama, voiced mainly by the grandfather. It is his belief that “Daut Eajentiemlije fonn eene Sproak — fonn jieda Sproak — ess, daut de Jeist fonn eenem Foltj, dee sitj de Sproak eenmol schaufe enn forme deed, aundasiets uck mau blooss derjch dise Sproak wiedajejäft enn aun niee Jeneratsjoone äwameddelt woare kaun” (271, 272). This concept is expounded upon by him in lengthy didactic speeches. It seems that the urgency Dyck felt to get his message to the people superseded his

need to create a superior literary work. A key point which Dyck makes quite successfully by example is that the Mennonite who relinquishes his *Plautdietsch* for English will be deluded by the influence of

disem framden Jeist, dee die langsomm aunft ommtoomoddle, one daut du daut rejchtijch ennwoascht. Du woascht kjeen Enjlenda, daut bill die nijch enn, oba du heascht opp Mennonit enn siene uasprinjliche Jestault too senne enn fangst doamet aun, daut Mennonitentum too unjagrowe, one daut du daut weetst enn wellst. (272)

The antagonistic viewpoint is clearly defined through David, who has married an English-speaking woman, who adheres to the view that they should help along to speed up the assimilation process and thereby decrease the pangs of the process. The grandfather, like Dyck, does not relent and continues, having lost his self-control, to forge ahead in his stand. His views continue to parallel those of the letters. The *Volk* concept is tersely formulated: "Dien Heimatfoltj ess daut mennische Foltj, een Foltj fe daut'et kjeene Lendajrenze jeft (277). Even the sentiment uttered by Selma after the grandfather has left the stage is a reflection of the impression one received of Dyck in his latter letters. One can well imagine that she is describing Dyck instead of the fictional father-in-law when she says:

[F]ür das, was in der Welt, und insonderheit in der mennonitischen-Welt vorgeht, hat Vater ein sehr offenes Auge. Da hast du ihm kaum etwas Neues gesagt. Und er ist über den Gang, den es mit der rußlandmennonitischen Volksgruppe, an der er mit solcher Leidenschaftlichkeit hängt, geht, tief unglücklich. (280)

Dyck corresponded with P. J. Klaassen about this dramatic work. In one letter Klaassen wrote that the clever, educated David in the play has found the formula for moving from one nation into another (PJK-V 13. 7. 1960). Dyck's expressive response is not far removed from the lines that one has just heard from Selma: "Die,

die den David zu spielen haben würden, sind selber Davids. . . Schade, jammer-schade, daß hier ein Volk untergeht ohne den Untergang als solchen zu empfinden und ohne sich seiner bewußt zu sein" (PJK 26. 7. 1960).

The attempts that Dyck made to retain the language for his people were valiant in the light of the magnitude of the opposing forces. Yet, he thought that he could have done even more, that he and Gerhard Wiens could have given their people a *Plattdeutsche Schriftsprache*: grammar, writing rules, exceptions, pronunciation, and a dictionary. Several times he mentions this as he expresses his regrets at how much of the language is dying out with the death of older people, but he also realizes that "[n]ichts Großes läßt sich tun, an das der Glaube fehlt" (GW 22. 10. 1958).

The accuracy with which Dyck had calculated the language question — the indifference towards its loss, the preoccupation with the material world that caused anything "spiritual" to pale in its shadow, and the reluctance even to listen to the prophet in the wilderness — is evident in his reaction to the response of the public to this work. Documentation of this response sounds the same from letter to letter.<sup>4</sup>

Bemühe Dich weiter nicht um eine Aufführung. Mir ist wirklich nicht mehr darum zu tun. Du schreibst: "da fühlen sich manche getroffen" (Familien mit Außenheiraten). Das grade meinte ich, wenn ich von "anstößig" sprach. Hier in Winnipeg geht es genau so, man hüllt sich in Schweigen, und ich frage nicht. (NK 15. 10. 1960)

To Elisabeth Peters he wrote: "Mit dem Stück bin ich ja vor unserer Gesellschaft 'reingefallen. Hatte es auch nicht anders erwartet" (VP no date, 1962). Even as late as 1967, he was still talking about it, with a definite note of sadness, not so much at its failure as a drama, but in the real reason for its failure:

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(4) N. Klassen who had contemplated a presentation of the drama cancelled his plans, with Dyck's encouragement to do so.

Nein, nach **Daut Jeburtsdach** habe ich auf dem Gebiet weiter nichts verbrauchen. Nicht aber, weil dieses mein letztes Stück keine Aufführung erlebt hat — das hatte ich so gut wie erwartet — sondern, weil alles, oder doch so vieles sich auch in unserer mennonitschen Welt ändert. (CK 20. 1. 1967)<sup>5</sup>

In Dyck's eyes the fundamental elements of Mennonitism, which the Mennonites have striven to understand for generations, have stood in a continual tension with one another. The very life of the *Mennonitentum* depended on the coexistence of *Volk*, *Heimat*, and *Sprache*. The fact that Dyck could perceive, describe, explain, and defend this complex organism, while so many had not even recognized that it had existed at all or that it was undergoing disintegration, speaks well for him as a sculptor who well perceived the tensions in that "colossal wreck." And so one can perhaps understand even better the words of the writer, perhaps better than the letter-writer himself, who said to Dyck, "Das mennonitische rußlanddeutsche Kolonistenvolk hat in Ihnen den Gestalter seines Lebens gefunden" (KG 16. 6. 1949).

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(5) This letter is not found in the Dyck letters, but in the Krahn letters in the Bethel College archives.

## Chapter 6: Apostle or Apostate?

The preceding chapters have already exposed much of Dyck and his convictions. Contrary to much of the popular opinion, Dyck, although gentle in character, was not meek and mild in his assessment of the Mennonite people and their views. One can hardly call him a fence-sitter. If his views were strong and undaunting on matters of *Volk*, *Heimat*, and *Sprache*, they were even more so on matters of art and culture, religion, and politics. It is virtually impossible to discuss Dyck's various views in isolation of each other because they stem from a comprehensive world view that hardly lends itself to categorization, fragmentation, and compartmentalization. For the purpose of clarifying his views, a certain degree of topical separation is necessary, even though the references reveal bold topical overlapping. Since Dyck's art touches all the issues, it is necessary to determine his views on the topics — his views on what comprises art, his assessment of the art of others and his own, the response of his community to his art and his response to the community, and art and literary criticism. Because these views are extracted primarily from his private correspondence, it is first of all necessary to determine the purpose and value of the letter in its relation to the letter as an art form and its value in providing not only the vital information but also a context for interpreting the views. This lengthy and comprehensive chapter deals specifically with the topics of art and culture, religion, and politics, and has been divided into the respective subsections.

As one reads the letters one is prone to ask to what degree the author's own views were in agreement or disagreement with the prevailing Mennonite stances. One senses that while Dyck was open with his views where he enjoyed a significant following, for example, his views on *Sprache*, he was much more private about his stand on pacifism. The former were published in newspaper articles; the latter were shared selectively with friends who were sympathetic to his viewpoint. Unfortu-

nately, the latter were relatively few in number when it came to the more contentious or controversial issues, and one finds him not enjoying a popularity that he probably deserved.

Dyck's relative unpopularity in his time, which will be substantiated in the following discourse, is an enigma for those who have come to understand the writer in his completeness, and it begs many questions. Why were Dyck's works not promoted more within the Mennonite community? Why was his work as a publisher not supported more enthusiastically? Why were his works not part of the curriculum in the schools in Mennonite areas, especially in the private schools?<sup>1</sup> Why was relatively little substantive critical research done on his writings? Numerous perfunctory answers exist: his works, while they reflected Mennonite character or behavior, did not outwardly promote some aspects of the Mennonite philosophy; his works were written largely in Low German, and since Low German was not considered to be a written language, it was unsuitable for instruction, not to overlook the fact that many of the more educated individuals considered Low German "altmodisch" — "das einfache, derbe, nüchterne plattdeutsch" (*Collected Works* 1. 130) in contrast to the High German, which was regarded as having "the mark of elegance" (Dueck, 24). His failure to gain general acceptance undoubtedly was linked to his apparent non-pacifist leanings and his personal "problems" within his family, (probably largely misunderstood in view of what the letters say) which for many legalistic Mennonites would have been ample grounds for shunning.<sup>2</sup>

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(1) Dyck was dismayed that the private schools did not even subscribe to other Mennonite publications (DB 11. 11. 1954; 2. 12. 1954).

(2) At the time of writing, this writer is aware of current instances of shunning among some Mennonites.

That Dyck was a *Rußlandmennonit* did not help him to win acceptance among the other Mennonites in Canada who had not experienced the same fate as their Russian counterparts in the early part of the twentieth century. He was quite aware of this fact, when he acknowledged his readership in *Ein Schlußwort* in the last issue of the *Warte*:

Es waren fast ohne Ausnahme rußlandmennonitische Häuser, in denen sie [die *Warte*-hefte] Aufnahme fanden. Das konnte auch kaum anders sein: denn es sind unter allen Mennoniten in der Welt nur die Rußlandmennoniten, die nicht nur eine gemeinsame Glaubensdoktrin [sic] verbindet, sondern die auch dasselbe Blut, dieselbe Sprache und ein gemeinsames Schicksal zusammenkittet, vielmehr zusammenkittet. Mit diesen nichtkonfessionellen Elementen — Blut, Sprache, Schicksal — unseres Rußlandmennonitentums hat die *Warte* sich befaßt. (*Die Mennonitische Warte* 414)

The non-*Rußlandmennoniten* were highly critical of the Russian Mennonites, of their compromise of Mennonite principles in Russia, of their preoccupation with culture, and of their emphasis on education; many of the Canadian Mennonites also had a negative attitude towards literature and art itself, regarding fictional literature as lies and art as idolatry. For Dyck, however, the forces of literature, culture, and faith were not seen as opposing forces, but as composite forces. To suggest then, that the apparent opposing views could be reconciled through the education of the people in the history of their experience, as he did, rather than through the church, would have been perceived as heresy.

The sensitive man that he was, Dyck realized the opposition to himself and this is why, when he established the *Echo-Verlag* as a service to his people, he did not take the presidency.<sup>3</sup> To J. H. Janzen he admits "Und ich glaube es diesmal so

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(3) There were other reasons which are discussed in Chapter 4.



schlau angegangen zu haben, daß ich beinahe nicht zu sehen bin" (JHJ 16. 1. 1946). A statement in a letter to K. Götz two years later confirms that Dyck was highly aware of his own unpopularity. The statement appears in the context of a deposition that Götz, who had been accused of being a Nazi sympathizer during the Hitler era and apprehended Christmas Eve, had requested from Dyck as evidence of his innocence.<sup>4</sup> Dyck sends the depositions but explains that they are from Ältester Enns of the Schönwieser Gemeinde,<sup>5</sup> (where Dyck was a member) for certain reasons "auf die wir wohl noch mal zu sprechen kommen, es war nämlich auch sonstwo außer bei Ihnen nicht alles so schön und friedlich." He clarifies a misconception concerning the church denomination and continues to say, "und bei mir spielt das kaum eine Rolle, da ich eine Partei für mich allein bin – die allgemeinste, dafür auch ohne Anhänger, aber anderswo ist es vielleicht anders" (KG 2. 3. 1948).

To arrive at more satisfying answers to the questions raised at the outset, it is necessary to recall Dyck's purpose for writing, which was to allow his people to experience renewal through greater knowledge, to bring Mennonites to experience peoplehood, to teach Mennonites and let them learn from their own history, to reveal creative people among Mennonites and foster a pride in them, and possibly most important, to strengthen a "völkisches Selbstbewußtsein", which in Dyck's words reads:

Schließlich will sie [die Warte] zeigen, das auch in unserem Volke schöpferische Kräfte vorhanden sind, auf die wir mit Stolz schauen können, und die unser *völkisches Selbstbewußtsein* stärker und den Willen festigen sollen, zu bleiben was wir sind: Mennoniten, die sich ihres eigenen Wertes voll bewußt sind. (Arnold Dyck, *Ein Geleitwort vom Herausgeber*, 1)

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- (4) The Götz file contains 41 pages of enclosures with a lot of details on this case.
  - (5) In Götz's letter of June 7, 1948, Götz thanks Dyck for his contribution: "Das Schreiben von J. H. Enns (das Ihre) hat ausgezeichnet gewirkt."

Another reason for the attitude which people had towards Dyck, as he perceived it, according to a letter written in Germany to A. Friesen in 1954, was that there was a prejudice against immigrants per se. He seemingly found it quite a relief to have found a corner where he could be at peace in Germany, "wo ich nicht Germanjetzt [sic] geschimpft werde und wo ich nicht als naturalisierter Bürger nicht zweitrangig eingestuft werde" (AF 12. 2. 1954).

One also needs to consider the prevailing attitude of Mennonites towards literature and writing as a profession, and towards the arts in general.<sup>6</sup> While this has been alluded to previously, more will be said about this later to verify the attitude and establish Dyck's counter-attitude.

Devoted to the preservation of the *Mennonitentum* that he knew so well, Dyck nevertheless experienced frustration in this mission, because in some areas that were of great significance to him a large segment of Mennonites did not share his views and convictions. These areas, inextricably connected, as evidenced in the letters are the arts, religion, and to a lesser degree, politics.

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(6) That the negativism was not simply directed towards Dyck, the man, can be supported with documentation from H. Loewen's articles *Intellectual Developments among the Mennonites of Russia* and *A Mennonite Artist as a Young Man: The Letters of Johann P. Klassen to a Friend (1905-1913)*. The former explains the resistance by the Mennonites in Russia to Jacob H. Janzen's innovative ways and his openness to culture and literature in the schools and the community (20), and both articles describe the traumatic experience of the artist Johann Klassen returning home from his art studies in Germany to encounter a hostile family, community, and critics (21-22; 25-26).

## *Views on Art and Culture*

In analyzing the issue of art, there are many different aspects that must be considered if one is to see the full import of what Dyck has to say, ranging from the purpose of the letters in relation to the letter as an art form and the question of what art is or ought to be and what it is not or ought not to be, to the attitude of the community toward the artist and his works and the artist's attitude towards his community and the artist's attitude towards critics and criticism, other writers and their works, and toward his own works and accomplishments. Undoubtedly, some of these factors play a greater role than others, depending on the individual circumstances of the artist.

If one examines the files individually, one notices though that certain files, such as P. J. Klaassen and Nick Klassen files, tend to deal more with personal convictions or sensitive perceptions than others, which sets them apart from those which were primarily business correspondence, such as the D. H. Epp and J. Regehr, or even J. C. Toews files. In general, the business correspondence is a record of the history of the *Echo-Verlag*; in detail, it is a history of editorial revision and the life of a publisher. This is particularly true of those in the D. H. Epp files, but the other letters also provide many details concerning his work. Certain letters, though not in their entirety a work of art, exemplify the literary skill that is found in his works. Excerpts heretofore have already demonstrated the author's ability to recreate experiences with authenticity and deep sensitivity as well as his ability to manipulate language to achieve his purpose.

The letter also has value in the context of literary criticism. The letter can illuminate the controversies of the times during which the letters were written. Critics must tread cautiously in this respect to avoid reading into the letter. The com-

bined letters under discussion not only provide the researcher with the information about the author, his life and his views, which are the issue here, but also with significant socio-political background information, which may or may not be of consequence to gaining a closer acquaintance with the author. For instance, because of the time period which the letters cover and upon which they reflect, they span a very important era of history, one which includes the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Second World War. Consequently, one encounters some interesting details which were significant in the author's day-to-day existence, and sometimes influenced his actions, but which in a larger context might seem insignificant to a reader years later. Examples of such details would include the rationing and cost of food during the war, the stringent regulations which limited travel to post-war Germany (WQ 27. 11. 1947), banning of books (KG 3. 5. 1950) and censoring movies (KG 28. 5. 1949), the restricted communication with people of your own kind (PAR 20. 11. 1939), the loss of many valuable manuscripts (AR 14. 11. 1946), the loss of a valuable German literature collection, including 20,000 letters (KG 12. 1. 1948) the cancellation of the *Jahrbuch* (PAR 28. 9. 1939), the lack of half-tone paper for printing purposes (DHE 10. 11. 1950), and a paper shortage so extreme that the correspondent could not afford to keep a carbon copy of his letters (WQ 23. 4. 1948). Even though these kinds of detail are not always of vital importance, they authenticate the letters and sometimes shed light on the reasons for certain actions.

In addition, the letter allows one to experience the attitude and personality of the writers and thereby attain a better or more accurate impression of his views. Interruptions in the correspondence can bring to light the changes which one sees in the works. One can determine the author's awareness of society and of the events in the contemporary political scene and assess the social movements. In general, one can evaluate the time in which the author lived more precisely. The writer either reflects the times or he is ahead of his time. A true picture of the time influences

one's interpretation of his works. To this end, the letter can be beneficial, even more so when the letter can be appraised both in form and content.

If the original intent of the letters was not to produce literary works, then how can one use the Dyck letters in the context of art? There are several ways. One can extract those portions that have artistic value and assess their merit. One can examine them in terms of content insofar as they critique art, both his and that of others, past or contemporary. One can examine them for the author's own view of art and writing.

It is conceivable that Dyck's readers had a misconception about his view of art, perhaps that art to him was sheer entertainment, because of the humorous nature of a lot of his works. For Dyck art was much more than that. He had a very well-defined notion of what constitutes art. What the masses considered to be art as it manifested itself in its various forms, Dyck largely dismissed, as noted in a letter to P. J. Klaassen: "Denn schließlich ist Kunst doch nicht Clownerie, die erheitern soll, sie ist vielmehr Offenbarung des wahrhaft Schönen, das wie kaum etwas anderes zum Guten — Gutsein führen kann mit allem was das in sich schließt." (PJK-V 3. 12. 1964) To achieve this higher goal, art for him had to be more than description. Even the historic works which he published, though factual in nature, had to go beyond the superficial. In his critique of J. C. Toews's manuscript about his father, a *Gutsbesitzer* in Russia, Dyck explains what makes a work valuable — not a factual record of the special accomplishments of a pioneer, but the vivid description of the process of a man in poor circumstances, who in his own power, through circumspection, energy and tenacity, achieves wealth and prestige. The circumstances in which this struggle takes place all the while are kept before the eyes of the audience.

He was not suggesting, though, that the factual basis was not important; he considered it to be critical that the truth be preserved and that the material presented was suitable for the kind of book being written. Several examples can be cited from the correspondence. When P. J. Klaassen wrote to Dyck about the proposed translation of Klassen's *Verlorene Söhne*, he concurred with the suggestion with the warning, "Wenn die denn aber nur kein Schuster macht!" (PJK-V 3. 2. 1951) which intimates apprehension of undue editorial changes which might change the intent of the book. With B. Harder's *Alt-Samara*, Dyck was concerned that it was turning into a sermon (DHE 17. 8. 1950) and that the story of the splits in the church did not pertain to the history presented in the book and was not appropriate for this particular publication (CK 24. 2. 1951); consequently he returned the book with the proposal to delete one hundred pages (DHE 27. 1. 1951). The book was never published by the *Echo-Verlag*.

Another criterion that he emphasized was that the work ought to be topical and of importance. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Dyck was so preoccupied with the very lengthy tragedy<sup>7</sup> originally entitled *Om de Muttasproak*, then *Um der Väter Erbe* (CK 10. 12. 1959), and finally *Daut Jeburtsdach*. The vital elements are present: "es geht da um Dinge, die heute noch aktuell sind und in denen die Geister sich scheiden" (CK 28. 10. 1958).

While adhering to the stringent rules of good journalism, Dyck also faced the reality of the plight of the writer, which was often at odds with the former. Because writing and publishing was not a sideline activity for him but his livelihood, he took some precautions to insure that those works that he wrote strictly for the market

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(7) Initially it was between five and six hours long.

would not receive the kind of criticism that would jeopardize his very existence, as seen in a letter to Walter Quiring:

Wenn Sie darüber [die neue Reiseschilderung] etwas schreiben wollen, mögen Sie es gerne tun aber reißen Sie mir das Buch nicht herunter. Die Koop & Bua-Bücher sind die einzigen unter meinen Sachen, die einen Markwert haben, sie werden gekauft von Einheimischen und Rußländern (heimlich sogar von Brüdern), in Kanada und in U.S. und tragen mir also etwas ein. Darum auch nur habe ich dieses dritte Heft heraus gebracht. Ich selber habe wenig Freude daran gehabt. (WQ 3. 2. 1949)

One has to remember, however, that Dyck was not compromising in his writing. Indeed, he was very perturbed about the kind of writing that he saw in the papers, especially the *Bote*. Its dependency on the General Conference made it very difficult for its editors to exercise journalistic freedom. Dyck also intimates that the tendency towards silence and passivity is characteristic of the people, as seen in a comment to B. B. Wiens in the context of his "tiefes Schweigen". Dyck says, "man [darf] bei uns überhaupt über die vitalsten Sachen nicht sprechen" (BBW 4. 12. 1945), and encouraged him (in the context of his the book on the *Köppentaler* Mennonites) to stir up the people: "Überhaupt schadet es nichts, wenn Du in unseren Blättern in der Sache ein bißchen Geräusch machst" (BBW 7. 2. 1947). To N. Klassen he also writes, "Und alles ist eigentlich nur für Dich. Man kann eben nicht immer still sein, wenn es um Dinge und Menschen geht, die einem zum Schicksal werden" (NK 21. 5. 1962). Incessantly he encouraged those who dared to write from their own convictions to stay among their fellow Mennonites and fulfill their duty, particularly those already named and others such as Victor Peters. (VP, not dated, 1955). In the light of such convictions it is not surprising that Dyck was so aggravated by the kind of writing that he saw around him. Statements of the following kind are not rare: "Wer dichtet heute noch! oder wer schreibt heute noch was anderes als Missions-, Kränzchen-, und Todesberichte — nur Geschäftliches also"

(VP 28. 9. 1956) and “Immer sind es die leidigen Festbeschreibungen, von denen wir alle noch einmal richtig krank werden müssen” (BBW 5. 5. 1949). He knew that this kind of writing did not originate in some inspired perception seeking a creative outflow (VP 28. 9. 1956) or in the vernacular, “von’e Plütz schrewe, om’et lostowoare” (GW 22. 7. 1960).

Dyck’s preoccupation was, naturally, with the art produced by his own people, but even in the global community he saw a certain narrow-mindedness and skepticism towards the literary and visual arts, which may have been largely motivated by the fears arising from the current social or political conditions in the world. For instance, he notes the disappearance of *Oliver Twist* from the market in Germany because of its anti-semitic tendency, as reported in the *Moderne Kunst* magazine and says, “der Film lief hier eine ganze Woche, und ich sah ihn. Es ist doch bezeichend, daß man da eine antisemitische Tendenz finden will” (KG 28. 5. 1949).

Dyck’s views are not restricted to the literary arts, but also include the visual and musical arts. Having studied art and illustrated his own works, it is predictable that he would have an opinion. He desired to do more in the visual arts, as indicated in his original plans to illustrate *De Opnoam* (PJK–Y 2. 2. 1951) and his secret ideas to compile and publish a picture book of one hundred and fifty years of Mennonite life in Russia, because he realized the tremendous advantage of the visual arts, namely that “das Bild. . . keine Sprachgrenzen kennt” (K 20. 8. 1960). He had high regard for Rembrandt, who was influenced by his Mennonite teachers (CK 28. 12. 1960), but disdain for the modern artists. Perhaps more than the art itself, it was the means by which modern art gained its popularity that disgusted him, for he says, “was sich heute die abstrakte Kunst nennt, ist weitgehend ein Produkt der *hellseherischen* und federgewandten Kunstkritiker (PJK–V 19. 12. 1960). He abhorred the power of the critics who would read things into the abstraction that would



cause the artist to shudder in awe, and shortly the artist becomes a pawn in the critic's hand as he grows wealthier and ever more popular. Dyck maintains that the world, in this way, has lost many a piece of art that never even came into existence, because the artist was being compelled to produce those things that gave him money and reputation. He also believed that the value of a work of art was not to be measured in dollars. He saw the dilemma as one which could not easily be solved. To Karl Götz he wrote, "Das Schlimme dabei [impressionism or surrealism] ist, sowas stirbt nicht sobald aus." Like Jazz, Swing, Boogie Woogie, "wird [es] von schlimm immer nur noch schlimmer" (KG 6. 4. 1949), and "[h]offentlich tobt sich die *unterdrückt* gewesene moderne Kunst jetzt tüchtig aus. . ." (KG 28. 5. 1949).

Unfortunately, writers like Dyck, whose writing was so intricately connected to a relatively small and specific readership, are at the mercy of the idiosyncrasies of that readership. For Dyck this was an almost unsurmountable obstacle, which drove him to despair intermittently. Growing pessimism due to the dismal sales of his books culminate in statements such as "warum ich doch noch immer schreibe, weiß ich selber nicht recht . . ." (BBW 5. 5. 1949).

It was not difficult for Dyck and his compatriots to identify the fundamental problem for them as writers. G. Toews of St. Catharines, also gravely pessimistic, formulates the problem as it pertained to Hans Harder. Harder could write only as long as he wrote for the German public. Toews wrote, "Sobald er für Mennoniten schreibt, unterliegt er einer Kontrolle, die früher oder später jeden eigenen Gedanken in ihm tötet oder ihn zwingt Sonntagsschullektionen zu schreiben oder auch Gemeindegeschichten und dazu müßte er ja mindestens Prediger oder Ältester sein" (WQ 11. 4. 1952). For the most part, all the Mennonite writers were subject to this kind of control. Several incidents recorded in the letters bear this out. While the actions recorded are directed at different parties, they have at their root the same

attitude that produces the action. One incident involves Dyck, indirectly, the other involves P. J. Klassen of Yarrow, British Columbia.

The attitude towards the writers' works are displayed clearly in the reactions of the potential readership. The reactions that Dyck encountered to his works, he realized, had little to do with their intrinsic value. He makes this point in a letter to W. Quiring, as he relates a reaction to *Dee Fria*, which although it sold few copies, was produced successfully,

und selbst Prediger sehen es sich zweimal nacheinander an. So hatten also auch die Lehrer von Tabor College (Brüder) es eingeübt und auch schon die Eintrittskarten verkauft. Im letzten Moment stellte sich da aber ein *Onkel* hier in Canada auf die Hinterbeine und setzte es durch, daß die Aufführung abgeblasen wurde. Die Leute sollten sich das Geld zurück holen, so wurde es zweispaltig in der Zeitung bekannt gemacht. (WQ 31. 5. 1948)

The second incident uncovers the attitude in a much more explicit way, and leaves no doubt as to the thinking of the opponents to Dyck and his fellow writers. In a letter to B. B. Wiens he indicates that he had heard from B. C. that in 1949 at a provincial ministers' conference, chaired by Wiens's son, Ältester J. B. Wiens, someone had raised the question, ' "Ist es Sünde, die Bücher unserer Schriftsteller zu lesen, wie *Die Bildung*, *Die Geschichte der Philosophie*, die *Koop enn Bua* Bücher, *Dee Fria* und die *Peet*-Bücher?" ' and that the matter had been discussed "wobei dann auch ein Ältester erklärt habe, daß in seinem Hause Bücher mennonitischer Schreiber nicht geduldet würden" (BBW 12. 5. 1950). Dyck says that he would like to know about it in confidence for no specific reason, just for his own orientation.

Wiens answers the request, saying that his son does not remember this, but that he then asked P. Klassen, Yarrow, who told him about it. Wiens writes that he knows the minister, Ältester H. Epp, Abbotsford and Quidam (P. J. Klassen, nom de

plume) and that Epp is not to be treated seriously. Wiens says further that through his “Engherzigkeit” Epp had created a scandal in the congregation for which he had been called into question the previous week and was told that he had gone too far in his reform efforts. Division was perceived, which could be healed only by Epp’s removal (BBW 25. 5. 1950).

Dyck’s response is startling, although not at all out of character: “Es greift mich übrigens auch wenig an, wenn da irgend ein Ältester verbiestert. Bei der allgemeinen Zerfahrenheit in unserem Mennistentum, kommt es auf einen mehr oder weniger nicht mehr an” (BBW 24. 6. 1950).

It is interesting to note that Dyck actually had heard more details than this from P. J. Klassen himself in a letter more than two weeks earlier. This letter also included a counter-position in the remarks of Ältester W. Martens of Sardis who had said that when there was pain or sadness in his household, he gathers his family round him, and reads from these condemned books and with the laughter the burden disappears; and if this were sin, then he was a big sinner, but he was expecting to get to heaven despite this. Martens had then proposed to have the discussion on this issue cease. Klassen’s response is ‘ “Vater, vergib ihnen . . . ” ’ (PJK–Y 25. 4. 1950). Klassen also says that H. Epp had drawn up fourteen points which his congregation had voted on the previous week in an attempt to purify his church and raise it to apostolic heights. One point was “daß wer raucht, in eine Bierhalle geht, Kino oder Theater, Oper besucht, tanzt oder *Putzeleeda* [folk songs in a humorous or satiric vein] singt und spielt, und dergleichen mehr, der darf in der Gemeinde gar *kein* Amt oder Posten bekleiden — nicht mal *Janitor* oder Platzanweiser darf er sein” (PJK–Y 25. 4. 1950). He says because there is a similar wave in Yarrow, he has not joined a church yet. Two years later Klassen resigned from the B. C. Conference, because he could not condone the actions of the church (PJK–Y 7. 11. 1952).

Letters between A. Friesen and Dyck almost two years later reveal a few other intricacies, which although they point to some personal differences among some of the parties involved, do not deny the underlying attitude. Friesen, in his usual humorous manner, describes the fight between Klassen and the church led by Ältester Wiens in animal imagery, perhaps fittingly so:

Seine Feinde scheinen zu ahnen, daß er allein und ohnmächtig ist.  
Dem gelähmten Löwen noch schnell, ehe er stirbt, einen Fußtritt zu  
geben, das Vergnügen kann sich auch der feigste Esel nicht versagen.  
Man mag einwenden, das Beispiel treffe nicht zu, wir haben keinen  
richtigen Löwen unter uns Mennoniten. Das mag stimmen. An Eseln  
aber und an Feigheit mangelt es uns wahrlich nicht. (AF 10. 1. 1954)

Friesen says that Klassen had been embittered in his last years, and he had no option but to keep silent and leave. Dyck seems a little surprised that Ältester Wiens, the son of the by-now-deceased B. B. Wiens, would have acted in this manner and he is disappointed to hear all this, but reminds himself that “[d]er Alte war von anderem Holz” (AF 12. 1. 1954). He did not know about the altercation between Wiens and P. J. Klassen, although he knew “daß Klassen zuletzt ziemlich zerfallen war mit der menn. Kirche, d.h. der Predigerschaft” (AF 12. 1. 1954).

Dyck deeply regrets the impact that religion has on the literary field, as indicated when he some time later tells Klassen it would have been better for his writing not to have been a minister. He says,

[B]ei andern [non-Mennonites] geht das, bei uns geht das nicht. Und es geht immer weniger . . . . Uns fällt es aber mehr auf, wenn Leute aus Deutschland oder auch Südamerika kommen, die von dort aus immer so aggressiv und so freimütig waren, daß man seine Freude an ihnen hatte, und sind sie erst ein paar Monate hier und bei der Kirche in Brot und Lohn, sind sie nicht mehr wiederzuerkennen. (PJK-Y 20. 11. 1952)

It is indisputable that Dyck's experience with his people influenced his writing. His comment to C. Krahn in 1944 when he was still optimistic about the *Jahrbuch* is followed by a less positive observation, "daß bei uns eigentlich nur um Weihnachten herum Bücher gekauft werden" (CK 10. 5. 1944). One is at once reminded of Dyck's short story, *Der Weihnachtsmann*. In this imaginative story, not accidentally laden with biblical allusions, Santa appears to the speaker, a writer, in the form of a successful pedlar of medicinal remedies and soon-to-be magic oils, who agrees to sell the writer's books for him in his peddling routes, in order to do his people a service. This is what Dyck expresses repeatedly in his letters as his motive for writing and publishing (eg. JHJ 16. 1. 1946). Upon the pedlar's return several weeks later, one hears of his very limited success. The dialogue which follows reveals a vicious dilemma. On the one hand, people are not interested, because the material is too ancient to be of interest to them, dating back to the war years, while the writer is feeling guilty about the books being four years old. On the other hand, if previous experience with a similar venture is significant, they could be of interest again in forty years, in which case they are still much too new. The dates used in the story are, indeed, the dates of Dyck's yearbook publication. The pedlar also explains that the people maintain that the Low German works are meant to be read out loud publicly, hence only the reader needs to buy a copy. In the story people do not comment about *Verloren in der Steppe* at all, which was also the case in reality, according to the Dyck letters.

The situation that Dyck found in reality is depicted in detail in this fanciful account. The pedlar does not seem to grasp that the job of writing is a job at all. Having asked what his occupation is and the writer points to his books and responds ' "Die grade, die Bücher" ', the pedlar says, ' "Nein, ich meine Arbeit, einen Beruf, eine Anstellung vielleicht, mit einem Wort, was arbeiten Sie?" ' To himself the writer thinks "Ich persönlich war ja der ketzerischen Meinung, das Büchermachen

... als eine Arbeit anzusehen wäre” but he is left speechless momentarily, and the pedlar interjects, “Eigentlich ... kann ich grade Ihnen gegenüber gerne gestehen, daß auch ich nicht gerne arbeite. ....” (Collected Works 4. 379). The “auch” indicates that the pedlar has not understood the work of a writer at all.

The hare which the writer receives in barter for a book is released. The book has spared the hare’s life and that of its offspring, a small feat, in light of what he had ridiculously hoped to accomplish — to save his people. His last words, words of admonition, are “meide die Menschen, und halte die Gebote, insonderheit das elfte” (4. 382), which is one that has been devised by the people themselves, and the writer (and Dyck) might well have imagined it to be: “Thou shalt not read the works of Arnold Dyck!”

There is something sombre, something reverend, and something paradoxical in the closing paragraph of the story. Having counted the three dollars and seventy-two cents that the pedlar gave him for the total book sales, the writer retreats into a pensive reflection: “Dann machte ich das Licht aus und setzte mich an das Fenster. Draußen weihnachtete es mit zunehmender Dunkelheit immer stärker. Das würde mir helfen zu vergessen. Ich wollte, ich mußte meinen Weihnachtsmann vergessen, denn Weihnachten stand doch vor der Tür” (4. 383).

Pessimism in the story is shrouded in humor. Dyck attributed the poor market to the sheer “Interessenlosigkeit unseres *Volkes*, und die wächst von Jahr zu Jahr, auch hat sie nichts mit der Deutschsprachigkeit unseres Verlags zu tun” (CK 13. 2. 1951). Years later he said to Gerhard Wiens that he did not want to complain about the book sales, because, per capita, Mennonites were buying more books than others, but the Mennonite population was simply too small to support its own publishers and writers. One cannot forget an earlier comment though, made to B. B. Wiens

when **De Opnoam** was not selling: “Wenn ich noch mal was herausgebe, wird es wohl müssen ein Kochbuch sein. Denn sieh mal, der Magen der steht bei uns in Ehren” (BBW 26. 1. 1952).

The attitude toward Dyck among the critics was vastly different than that of his potential readership. Several of his correspondents acted as critics for his works, if not voluntarily, then upon his request. Quiring wrote a brief criticism of Dyck’s works, and after the first one Dyck requested them. In critiquing **Koop enn Bua** (30. 12. 1946), Quiring compliments him on the content and says not a word should be lost, but he criticizes the presentation of the material – the flow – which is encumbered by his superfluous reflective passages. It is not the “what” but the “how” that is criticized. Dyck’s ensuing request for a critique of language usage in **Verloren in der Steppe** (WQ 21. 2 1947) suggests that he valued Quiring’s frank assessment or at least he appreciated that he was getting any reaction at all. In this instance, when he requested criticism on what became his major work, he asked Quiring to criticize the language usage specifically, “ganz einfach die Sprache als solche [apart from style], die deutsche Sprache als Ausdrucksmittel. Es ist eben ein Unterschied, ob man in eine Literatursprache schon in der Kinderstube hineinzuwachsen beginnt, oder sie sich mühsam aus dem Buch herausklauben muß . . . ” (WQ 21. 2. 1947). How critical this discernment was in the scope of the success of the novel is difficult to determine; but the ability to recognize such differences is an invaluable skill for an editor.

Dyck held Jacob H. Janzen in high regard as his personal literary critic. Janzen’s criticism of **Verloren in der Steppe, II** is esteemed highly and received graciously, although somewhat sadly with a compliment on his ability and his courage to criticize (JHJ 16. 1. 1946). There are indications of similar gratitude for Janzen’s frank critique on *Twee Breew* (29. 8. 1946), and **Dee Fria** (JHJ 31. 10. 1947).

Another correspondent who acted as critic of Dyck's work was writer K. Götz, who had won the Volksdeutschen Schrifttumspreis for **Das Kinderschiff** (KG 2. 1. 1948). Götz recognized Dyck's art and esteemed him highly. He told him that "Ihre Anteilnahme gibt mir sehr viel Kraft. . . . Sie sind ein Mann von hohen Fähigkeiten und tiefsten Einsichten" (KG 28. 9. 1947). Because he also recognized the value of Dyck's work, he was concerned that **Verloren in der Steppe** not appear in a *Winkerverlag*. He was willing to look for a publisher for the entire work and he was adamant that the five parts should appear in one volume. He understood its value as art and its value for the intended audience:

. . . Ihre Erzählung vom deutschen Leben in der russischen Steppe darf selbstverständlich nicht als Jugendbuch erscheinen. Es ist weniger ein Buch für die Jugend, als ein solches von einem jugendlichen Leben und Schicksal in der Fremde. Gerade nachdem das Rußlanddeutschtum aufgehört hat zu bestehen, erhält das Buch seine besondere Wichtigkeit. Ich werde mich mit warmen Herzen für das Buch einsetzen. (KG 16. 6. 1949)

In addition to providing careful criticism, such as the extensive critique on **Verloren in der Steppe** (KG 12. 1. 1948), he provided another kind of influence through the constant exchange of ideas and reactions to current literature. Götz also sent Dyck a subscription for **Christ und Welt** from Germany with a stated purpose: "Ich hoffe darüber hinaus, daß Ihnen diese Blätter Manches von einer neuen und interessanten Seite beleuchten werden" (KG 25. 5. 1949). The opinions of non-Mennonite critics were communicated to Dyck by Götz; these, too, were very complimentary (KG 2. 4. 1948).

Dyck's courage as a writer and his willingness to accept criticism and have his work tested by standards outside his community is noteworthy. When C. Krahn indicated to Dyck that he wanted someone to write about Dyck for **Mennonite Life** (28. 1. 1959) to honor him on his seventieth birthday, he asked Dyck who should



write the article. Dyck recommended Dr. Kurt Kauenhoven, wondering what a "*Deutschländer*" thought about him and his efforts, but he cautioned Krahn not to let Kauenhoven know that Dyck recommended him (CK 4. 2. 1959), for such knowledge might lead the critic to color his criticism in a certain way.

Krahn himself offered criticism to Dyck on several occasions, sometimes almost inadvertently so. After having produced *Dee Fria*, he wrote Dyck about the performances and the audience's reaction, stating that the people had not expected the ending; having become so engrossed, it took them awhile to realize that the play was over (CK 17. 5. 1948). Dyck obviously thought about this response and replied that it could be a problem with the work, and that he was going to rewrite the ending in a new edition in the following winter. He expressed his pleasure at having received this kind of criticism, especially since the play had already been staged three times in North Kildonan, apparently without any such feedback (CK 25. 5. 1948).

Years later Krahn, impressed and moved by *Daut Jeburtsdach* and planning to stage it, recommended shorter speeches, less High German, no Russian, and no Spanish. Dyck did not make those changes, but he gave permission to Krahn to make changes, provided that such changes were announced at the beginning of the performance.

Not only was Dyck very open to receive criticism, but the nature of his work required him to be a critic. The letters reveal his forthrightness and cautiousness in the editorial tasks. There are numerous instances. One example is the extensive criticism that Dyck gave P. J. Klaassen on his *Streiflichter*, which was prefaced by an explanation of risks involved for the author and publisher. He then targeted the sore points: deletions, changes, inappropriate language, which he evaluated as "nicht schlicht genug". He identified specific problems, such as having farm-boys speaking

High-German, which Dyck maintained was not authentic. In all this critiquing he remained very sensitive about how Klaassen would accept this criticism, reminding him that “Ich übe sie [die Kritik] sehr, sehr ungern” (PJK-V 2. 5. 1958). However, he realized it as a necessity for both the author and publisher.

For Dyck there was also an ethical consideration. On one occasion Krahn had asked him to write about Canadian-Mennonite literature for *Mennonite Life*. Dyck refused, believing it not appropriate to write critically about his *Waffenbrüder*, who were more than mere comrades, but competitors in business. He recognized that “jede Wertung enthält zugleich auch das Moment der Kritik” (CK 11. 3. 1952) and criticism should be written so that it can be taken seriously, otherwise it has no value.

Refusing requests for criticism was one way of exercising caution; not publishing inadequately substantiated claims and assertions was another. For example, when Alexander Rempel was working on a manuscript dealing with the Mennonite school system in Russia, he wrote Dyck that he had discovered that Johann Cornies, credited as the initiator of school reform, had not been the originator of the reform ideas; he had simply copied them from other sources. Not a single principle that he supposedly had formulated was his own (AR 6. 8. 1959). Along with other activities, Cornies alone had introduced the “Verhochdeutschung unseres Schulwesens”, which could then not be aborted or halted. Almost a year later, after more research, Rempel informed Dyck that the accusation against Cornies was an error and he retracted everything and reaffirmed Cornies as a genius (AR 29. 6. 1959). Dyck’s answer to the letter shows that he had not shared Rempel’s views with anyone, in the hope that Rempel’s continued research would shed more light on the subject and

possibly result in a more moderate judgment (AR 6. 8. 1959). Dyck's encouraging Rempel to verify his claims led to considerably more research on Rempel's part.<sup>8</sup>

In earlier chapters Dyck's ability in literary criticism was illustrated with various examples which related to his work as editor. The inclination to look at works critically was not simply a skill exercised in his work but a natural tendency which continued to express itself when his formal editorial work had already ceased. This is borne out in instances such as his critique on Frank H. Epp's *Mennonite Exodus*<sup>9</sup> published in 1962, which Dyck received from Goering, editor of the *Post* (SP 19. 8. 1964). He realizes that the sharp criticism launched against Epp is rooted in prejudice against Epp. While Dyck acknowledges that a great work has been accomplished in Epp's book,

[z]u bedauern nur ist, daß das nicht mit der erforderlichen Objektivität getan wurde, nicht ohne eine gewisse Voreingenommenheit gegen alles "Deutsche" – fassen wir es so zusammen. Von den Nachwirkungen der Kriegspropaganda hätte Epp sich frei machen sollen; denn heute, 20 Jahre nach Kriegsende, sollte ein Historiker schon klarer unterscheiden zwischen Tatsachen und Mache. Auch soll ein Geschichtsschreiber nicht kommentieren, und das schon gar nicht, um bestimmte eigene Ideen und Ansichten an den Mann zu bringen. – Übrigens sollte es bei Epp doch nicht um den "Exodus" – die Aus-

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- (8) The reader is surprised when three months later Rempel wrote again to retract what he had said in the previous letter. He had subsequently found out that the pedagogical statements were not Cornies's after all. Rempel had located the source of the statements and discovered that the best statements had been copied by Cornies word for word. In fact, he found that Cornies's statements might not have been taken individually from different sources, but perhaps from one single source (AR 8. 11. 1959). The last one reads about this issue is that Rempel is searching for further evidence of this and under the circumstances is happy that he has not given any of this to the publisher.
- (9) Epp's book documents the migrations and the settlements of the Mennonites from Russia after the Communist Revolution in 1917. A paragraph of eight lines in the chapter *Developments in the Depression* is devoted to Arnold Dyck in this book. (317)

wanderung der Rußländer [—] gehen, sondern um das Geschehen am kanadischen Ende allein. (SP 9. 12. 1964)

With his usual caution he tells Goering that this critique is not to be published, “denn dazu orientiere ich mich von hier aus vielleicht doch nicht genügend gut”.

Dyck was not a poet, and his only published poem *Keine Heimat*, which was written in 1923 and published in 1938, is not mentioned in the letters. While he does not talk about his own poetry, one can conclude that he was knowledgeable in this area. His appreciation for the poetry of others, evidenced by his request for their poetry and commenting on it, even editing it, as he did for Abram Friesen (2. 10. 1956), is proof of this. The comments made about poetry in Dyck's January 6 letter to G. Loewen many years earlier attests to this, too. He says:

Ihre Gedichte mögen nach Subjekt, nach Art der Darstellung, nach sprachlicher Einkleidung einer früheren Epoche angehören, ihr poetischer Wert bleibt, und die innige Liebe des Dichters zum Gegenstand seiner Poesie (Naturgedichte), die Unmittelbarkeit und die Tiefe seines Empfindens werden nie verfehlen, auf tiefer veranlagte Gemüter zu rühren (GL 6. 1. 1944).

Dyck had a strong grasp of what constitutes poetry and what makes it enduring.

Dyck belongs to the school of poets who look for rhythm, euphony, aesthetic appeal, and an embedded thought that is not too difficult to recognize. Though he appreciates these elements, he is not uncritical of this more conventional style of poetry. In selecting A. Friesen's poetry for Dr. Kloss of the *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen* for a German-Canadian poetry book, Dyck says of Friesen's poetry that it has form and one does not always get the feeling that the rhyming word has been selected before the meaning and the thought has been composed; it has

content and value that holds the reader even after the reading is done (AF 2. 10. 1956).

In view of Dyck's appreciation for this kind of art, it is not difficult to understand his perturbation with non-representational art of every kind, about which he said, "Das alles nimmt Formen an, über die einem die Arme am Leibe herunter-sacken" (EB 1. 2. 1961). He was alarmed at the wide following that it received.

Dyck's talent did not lie in the area of writing alone. His natural talent and the skill acquired in his art studies in Germany in his youth also revealed itself in his profession as a printer. This is particularly noticeable in his letter to G. Loewen concerning the publishing of his **Feldblumen**. Although Dyck could not take the task on as soon as he would have liked, and unfortunately, not before the author's death, he did not trust another printer to have the appropriate aesthetic sense to design a poetry book, which according to Dyck's taste was quite different from other books:

Und eine Gedichtssammlung muß sich auch äußerlich schön präsentieren. Darum möchte ich die **Feldblumen** auch gerne illustrieren, oder doch zeichnerisch schmücken. Natürlich nicht in der derben Weise, wie **Koop en Bua** etwa, sondern in einer feineren, der Poesie angepaßten Art. (GL 6. 1. 1944)

In a later letter, written while he was still working on the book, Dyck goes even farther than that, saying that the flowers which he drew should be recognizable to any good botanist (GL 12. 4. 1946).

It is obvious that Dyck took great pride in his work as a publisher. In preparing Loewen's book, he also edited out four poems, remarking that G. H. Peters, in his book, "hätte sollen mehr gesiebt haben" (GL 19. 11. 1945). He also made suggestions for cutting down the size of the book, probably for aesthetic appeal. His pride

in Loewen as the first Mennonite poet to publish his collected poetic works (GL 6. 1. 1944) was no less a reason for Dyck to produce a visually appealing book worthy of its content.

Even the quality of the printing of other fictional works was deemed by Dyck to be critical. He maintained on several occasions that mimeographing works, as Janzen and Klassen had done, did not harm only the book, but also the author (GL 18. 8. 1944).

If criticism influenced Dyck in the details of his work, then certainly it did so on the larger, general scale, too, and in various ways. It determined, in part, the length of some works, the nature of some, and certainly the financial success of some. With three different people he shared his original plans for what remained his major and largely autobiographical work, *Verloren in der Steppe*<sup>10</sup>. When Part III was going to print, he wrote B. B. Wiens “er [Part III] reicht aber noch nicht in die Jugendjahre hinein. Die kommen aber auch und werden es mir wohl recht sauer machen, weil mein Hänschen–Hans sehr eigenwillig ist und partout Mensch und nicht Engel werden will” (BBW 9. 3. 1946). Two years later he wrote Kurt Kauenhoven that the people are not interested in this novel, so he had decided to end it after Part V, which would be the conclusion to Hänschen’s childhood. He also explains what his intentions had been:

Geplant waren . . . drei, bzw. vier weitere Bücher – die Geschichte eines ganzen (volksdeutschen) Lebens, das in ruhiger Zeit seinen

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(10) While the novel is fiction, there is evidence that Dyck intended it to be autobiographical. Quotations such as the following one from a letter to Nick Klassen provide proof: “Also Gerhard Lehn, Sardis, schreibt über Kronsgarten. Da bin ich doch neugierig. Lehn ist Hochfelder wie ich. Er war unser erster Zentralschüler und tritt in *Verloren in der Steppe* als Gerhard Loewen auf” (NK 17. 5. 1961).

Anfang nimmt, dann aber, ab 1914, in den Strudel der Weltereignisse hineingezogen wird. Zusammengedrängt ein Spiegelbild des Geschicks der Rußlandmennoniten und im späteren der größeren Gruppe (rund 20,000), die nach Kanada ging. (KK 28. 10. 1948)

This he confirmed in a subsequent letter to W. Quiring in which he states: "Mit diesem Teil [**Verloren in der Steppe**, V] schließt nämlich die Arbeit auch, die einmal als erstes Buch eines größeren Werkes gedacht war" (WQ 3. 2. 1949). The lack of interest was only a secondary cause for his decision; the reason for the disinterest – the resistance to the kind of person which Hans had to become, that is worldly, by some standards – was the primary cause.

It is inspiring to see that Dyck continued to write in spite of the reaction of his people who could not or would not appreciate his work. His lack of success in this regard did not stop him from pursuing his ultimate goals from another angle, namely encouraging others to write. His **Auslese** was to have become an incentive for Mennonite writers, as he told G. Wiens in 1959 (4. 2. 1959), but unfortunately it had been a failure which resulted in financial losses (BBW 24. 5. 1951). Yet, it did not embitter him at that point. He had taken the failure like a man, admitting that the apex of the Mennonite culture had been reached in Russia and it could never again become what it had once been. There is a small note of sadness as he reflects that twenty-seven years of his life have been spent in devotion to the Mennonite person – his being, his soul, and his destiny. What he regretted was that those who could have made their worthwhile contributions did not. Writing to V. Peters about A. Friesen, one perceives a groan as he wrote, "Schade um unsere Dichter . . ." (VP 28. 9. 1956).

Undoubtedly, the groanings and moanings emanating from Dyck's soul were not nearly always a sign of artistic creation, but perhaps more frequently a sign of

utter frustration. That he perceived the needs, the dilemma, and the solution is not in question. But how does one change the mindset of an entire people, or how does one live among them when one cannot change this mindset? If, as a reader of the letters, one comes to understand the magnitude of the problem concerning this mindset from which the attitude to art flows, then one also comes to understand that the attitude does not stem from some isolated tenet or principle, but that it is deeply embedded in a belief system that because of its fragility has to be carefully guarded or it will be thoughtlessly abandoned.

Dyck, as a cultural missionary to his own people, found himself in an inextricable dilemma, for the very things that he believed were necessary to preserve the heritage of the people, more than that, to preserve their very essence, that which made them Mennonites, were the things that in the minds of his people made him suspect. What he saw as the tools, they perceived as destructive weapons. Therein lies the irony and the contradiction.

### *Religious Views*

If Dyck's convictions on art were regarded with suspicion, how much more so his convictions on religious matters, and matters related to them. It seems quite clear that most of his criticism was directed against religious issues, which in the Mennonite arena might include almost anything, since life-style and general conduct were so acutely linked with religious beliefs. Dyck, as a dissenter from the typical views, was a radical in the eyes of many of his people. To make this statement requires a further cautious explanation: to oppose the orthodox doctrine of the Mennonite church does not mean necessarily to oppose or denounce one's Christian faith. The line between what Mennonites accept as religion and what outsiders consider Christianity may be a fine line, but for Dyck it may still have been very defi-



nite one. His criticism and admonition is directed primarily at “religion”, rather than biblical truths or God, who is hardly even named, aside from idiomatic expressions here and there.

Many issues are addressed in varying degrees in the Dyck letters. The conflict between education or intellectual pursuit and religion, non-resistance, sectarianism among Mennonites, and the blind adherence to traditions (many of which were religion-based), collectively resulted in weak philosophical or independent thought on and expression of religious issues, in shallow and inarticulated views, and in the apparent inability of Mennonites to view themselves critically. Even in exposing these issues it is doubtful that Dyck actually expected people to perceive what he was saying. One need only recall the statement that in Gerhard Wiens he believed that he had found at least one person who would always “catch on”,<sup>11</sup> which also suggests that the majority probably would not. If one considers that there were many who thought that reading books, other than the Bible, was wrong, how would those same people ever become familiar with the content of his books to the point where they could criticize them legitimately?

One of the most challenging tasks in studying the letters is to try to come to a true understanding of Dyck’s personal faith. Was he a believer in the Christian sense of the word? If so, did he not want to talk about it, or did he consider it a completely private matter that did not require discussion? Was he an unbeliever? If so, why would he not have admitted it openly? There is a certain mystery in this area of his life, and since one is restricted to the content of the letters, one has to exercise sound judgment in trying to formulate a categorical conclusion.

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(11) See Chapter 3.

What evidence is there of any religious persuasion? In response to A. Rempel's research questionnaire one learns that Dyck was baptized on May 17, 1909, in the Mennonite Church in Chortitza by Ältester Isaak Dyck (AR 4. 3. 1955). One knows that he attended certain church functions, such as the dedication service of the Schönwieser Kirche in Winnipeg (WQ 5. 5. 1951), where he had been a member since its founding and where he remained a member, even while in Germany (JHE 26. 1. 1962). As learned earlier, his brother was a minister, which might suggest something of the nature of his upbringing. However, none of these facts without the supporting evidence is sufficient to make a claim about his religious position.

One could look to his knowledge of the Bible to help assess his position. It becomes clear very quickly that he had a comprehensive knowledge of it and he did not refrain from using biblical allusions, even in his letters — his most personal writing. Naturally, the context of the allusion and its application are more suggestive of his view than the allusion itself. Some of the references seem completely innocent and are practically a part of the vernacular. For instance, when he planned his first visit to Germany to see his daughter he told Götz that he was going soon, "wenn mir kein böser Feind in die Sache spielt . . ." (KG 31. 10. 1949). References such as this one are of too little consequence to support any claim. Similar examples occur throughout the correspondence. When talking about the weather, he refers to "Gottes Erdboden" (BBW 19. 4. 1945); when uncertain, he says, "das mögen die Götter wissen" (BBW 24. 7. 1946); in bemoaning the use of High German in the home he says, "sie wissen nicht was sie tun" (GW 19. 3. 1958); and in regards to Quiring's comment concerning Martha Cornies' article on keeping silent, he cites another common biblical image: "Merkwürdig (oder auch nicht!), in der Anti-Schweigen-Sache scheint es vielen doch wieder um den Splitter im Auge des anderen zu gehen" (WQ 10. 4. 1959). When G. Wiens sent Dyck a very lengthy biography that Wiens had written on Dyck, the latter, perhaps more embarrassed by the

sheer volume than by the magnitude of the task, responded in a literary fashion, suggesting to Wiens that his students will stone him if they fail their exams because their professor kills all his time with this stuff, and that C. Krahn reading this will turn pale and fall to the floor unconscious. His last thought, he said, was action: "Ich holte mir eine Schüssel Wasser und wusch meine Hände in Unschuld" (GW 6. 3. 1959). That religious convictions or the absence of them can be extracted from these allusions, however abundant they are, is more than dubious. They are particularly prominent in the G. Wiens file and the A. Friesen file, where one finds a good measure of humor, flavoured with sarcasm and cynicism.

In some instances the application of the allusion, though not applied in seriousness, approaches what some of his contemporary public would have called sacrilegiousness. In a letter to V. Peters, as Dyck is recalling his roaming through Southern Germany, he writes:

Ich übernachtete da in einem kleinen Örtchen, ringsum nichts als Natur. Bis spät in den Abend hinein spazierte ich da noch zu Fuß in die Berge hinein. Und vor dem Schlafengehen schrieb ich noch an meine Tochter, daß das mit dem Paradies zwischen Tigris und Euphrat nichts als Schwindel sei, ich hätte nun das wirkliche Paradies gefunden. (VP 9. 7. 1959)

One can attempt to make some deductions based on the absence of the religious utterances which one might expect from a believer. Several of the persons with whom he corresponded indicated that they were believers. Some conveyed this directly, as K. Götz did (5. 4. 1947), whereas other conveyed it indirectly. These frequently interspersed or closed their letters with religious comments, such as Götz's wishes "Fürs neue Jahr Glück und Segen und Gottes Beistand" (KG 29. 12. 1949) or as Regehr's "Ich bete für Sie" (JR 11. 11. 1963). Very few of Dyck's letters contain Christmas wishes. Again one cannot conclude from this that he was anti-religious.

This may have been due to his spending Christmas by himself<sup>12</sup> and not writing letters at such times. One example of this is found in a letter to C. Krahn, dated December 22. He says that the letter will arrive too late for a Christmas greeting but he wishes him the best for the new Year (CK 22. 12. 1951). Only very occasionally is there a religious greeting, and when there is it seems terse and abrupt, as in a letter to Karl Fast where he sends "Wünsche zum Christfest" (KF 4. 12. 1956). To suggest that Dyck deliberately wrote his letters so as to avoid this type of "necessary courtesy" would be presumptuous. It is puzzling, though, to note the virtual absence of religious messages in files such as the B. B. Wiens file and then to read the letter Dyck received from Wiens's son after the father's death which had a very different spiritual tone: "Uns ist das Leiden unseres Vaters, das Festhalten am Glauben und seine Hoffnung *Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit* . . . eine Predigt gewesen" (BW 12. 8. 1952). At the same time one must remember that the writer of these lines was a minister. When one finally comes upon a statement that appears to be genuinely spiritual, one is almost surprised; somehow such a statement also causes other more formal religious statements to seem more of a courtesy. Possibly Dyck's most religious words were written to Mrs. J. J. Dyck on the death of her husband, who was working on **Am Trakt**:

Möge Gott Ihnen und den Ihren über den Verlust weghelfen und Sie einen Trost in der Tatsache finden, daß Ihr Mann in so reichem Masse der Mahnung seines Onkels in Preußen nachgekommen ist – Nicht nur zu wirtschaften, sondern auch *unserm* Volke zu dienen. (EV 22. 4. 1948)

One immediately notices though that the comfort should rest in the service that Mrs. Dyck's husband has rendered to his people. Even though these kind of statements

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(12) See Chapter 2.

are rare, one cannot measure Dyck's convictions quantitatively when the matter of convictions is a qualitative issue.

Individuals or cults who attempt to define God in his infiniteness with finite minds inevitably define Him finitely, because of the inability of a finite mind to grasp the infinite. Add to this the acceptance of a concept of God that has not been subjected to a rigorous biblical examination and one invariably is led into an unreflective legalism. Behaviours which fall into this legalistic category, many of which are a matter of preference rather than morality, are quickly labelled as sinful by the legalist. Not only would Dyck, who indulged in such questionable activities, have been looked upon with disdain by the Mennonite legalists around him, but it also most certainly would have discredited him as a writer who had something to teach his people.

The letters do not conceal Dyck's habits, even those seen as undesirable by the kind of people described above. That Dyck imbibed the contents of "un-christliche Flaschen" (VP 26. 12. 1958) is no secret. Reflections of his travels as a youth in Germany, of which he is reminded by V. Peters's concluding report of his travels on Radio CFAM, are recorded in one of the letters: "Vor rund 50 Jahren hatte ich mich da [am Starnbergsee] schon einmal abgekühlt, mit drei anderen Kunstjüngern. In München hatten wir irgendwo gefeiert. Die ganze Nacht. Vom Lokal zu Lokal, immer bis man uns rausschmiß" (VP 9. 7. 1959). Letters to A. Friesen make references to their visit to a Ratskeller (AF 20. 7. 1955); the Gerhard Friesen letters make reference to a desire to sit and discuss issues with Friesen "bei einem Gläschen Wein" (GF 22. 4. 1963); the B. B. Wiens file also speaks of the testing of the "Göttertrank" (BBW 1. 7. 1946).<sup>13</sup>

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(13) It is of interest to note that when Regehr was trying to find a place to live for

Among the legalists, the second Mennonite deadly sin was smoking. Not even the characters in a work of fiction were allowed to do so. N. Klassen, in reporting about the performance of *Dee Fria* in Vancouver, said it had been a colossal success and even people from the Brethren Church, which historically was even more legalistic, had attended and "sie waren auch ganz begeistert, nur daß der Onkel Funk rauchte, regte sie etwas auf" (NK 23. 5. 1954). For a writer this kind of criticism becomes untenable. As stated earlier, Dyck did not so much condemn their actions as their refusal to think about them and to test their beliefs and actions for consistency. Too well he realized that their public confessions were not all consistent with their private behaviours. Yet, those very same people would not hesitate to make associations between what Dyck wrote or did and what his characters said or did. One senses Dyck's reactions to this kind of behaviour as he writes, telling Wiens that his books are not selling:

Ich kann ja nicht erwarten, daß man sie durch unsere Zeitungen empfiehlt, denn wer das tut, kommt in Verdacht, selber ein schlimmer Mensch zu sein. Mit meinen Büchern ist es wie mit dem Rauchen oder Biertrinken, sowas genießt man heimlich. Ich fange mir das bei unseren zunehmenden Heiligkeit bald an als Ehre anzurechnen. (BBW 26. 1. 1948)

These very people who were critical of these habits, were responsible for passively allowing acts of grave consequences to be perpetrated against their own people. P. J. Klassen of Yarrow, who was a victim of a narrow-minded congregation, related some difficulties, besides those mentioned earlier. Shoplifters had broken into

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Dyck in Winnipeg when Dyck was still in Germany, Mrs. Ediger, the prospective landlady had asked "ob Sie [Dyck] vielleicht ein Trinker seien" and Regehr had responded "sie soll sich darüber keine Sorgen machen" (JR 10. 3. 1964). While one cannot generalize from one example, it does suggest that there was a concern about drinking alcohol among the Mennonite legalists.

Klassen's store and got a suspended sentence while Klassen was to pay court costs. Klassen says, the fathers are singing and praying and are so '“fromm” während er fast sein letztes Geld für Brot ausgegeben hat' (PJK-Y 1. 4. 1952). Dyck responds sarcastically:

Übrigens aber sind ja das nette Zustände in ihrem frommen Yarrow, in das ich einmal nicht mit meiner glimmenden Zigarette hineinfahren durfte. Wenigstens sagte mein alter Freund B. B. Wiens zu mir, als wir uns dem Städtchen näherten: so jetzt rauchen Sie noch eine letzte denn bald heißt es schmock sein. (PJK-Y 15. 4. 1952)

For Dyck the writer this was hardly an atmosphere in which he could produce true artistic work which, by definition, could not have artificial restrictions placed on it. His options remained few. All along he realized that his writing did not fit into “das überfromme Zeug” of the **Bote** and “daß man auf [ihn] mit Fingern zeigen würde” (BBW 26. 1. 1948) if he wrote what he would like to write. Dyck's dilemma in regards to the impediments to his writing was apparent very early in his career:

Schon nach dem ersten Teil [von **Verloren in der Steppe**], sprach die “Kritik” die Erwartung aus, daß im zweiten Teile sich Hänschen bekehren werde, darüber wollte man gerne lesen. Und wenn selbst J. H. Janzen sich darüber stört, daß ich im **Fria** den altkolonier Bauern Funk rauchen lasse, wie kann ich unserer Gesellschaft dann lebenswahr den in der bösen Welt zum Menschen heranreifenden Hans Toews weiter vor Augen lassen. (WQ 3. 3. 1948)

As observed earlier, other behaviours such as reading books and attending movies were also suspicious activities. If reading were an evil thing, how much more so the writing of books. The issue of reading secular books is brought into the fiction work itself – a rather clever device on Dyck's part. One sees this in **Verloren in der Steppe**. It was his intention to show the varying attitudes to reading non-religious works. The disparity among the various factions of Mennonites on this issue is

revealed through the conflicting views of Hänschen's parents, his conservative mother and his more open-minded father, who not only permits Hans to continue his studies beyond the schooling in Hochfeld, but actually takes up reading himself. The author makes his point in the following passage:

Er sitzt und liest. Früher hat er nur in der Bibel gelesen, im Gesangbuch und im Katechismus, mit den Jahren aber und mit den heranwachsenden Söhnen ist auch er "weltlicher" geworden. Und heute liest er auch Zeitungen. Vor allem den "Botschafter", dann auch die "Friedensstimme". . . . Er liest auch die "Odessaer Zeitung", das Organ des Deutschtums im Schwarzmeergebiet. Um Weihnachten herum erscheint dann noch der Familienkalender, der immer eine sehr willkommene Lektüre ist. Oft läßt er sich auch von Hans den "Kinderfreund" geben. . . . In letzter Zeit nun hat Vater gar angefangen regelrechte "Geschichtenbücher" zu lesen. Dieselben, die Bernd liest und Hans. Das ist nun zwar "unnützes Zeug", aber Spaß macht's ihm doch, und Mutter muß oft zwei- auch dreimal rufen, ehe er das Buch weglegt und an den Eßtisch kommt. Mutter schilt in ihrer stillen Weise über solche Bücherleserei, und es sähe ja recht hübsch, wenn er, der Vater selber, nun auch noch mit der Unsitte anfangen, es sei grad genug, daß man die Jungen fast nicht mehr von den Büchern loskriege. Er werde wohl bald gar noch Romane lesen. So schilt Mutter. — Romane — etwas Schlimmeres, den Menschen gradwegs in Verderben zu stürzen, gibt's für die ehrsamten Hochfelder, wenigstens in ihren älteren Jahrgängen, nicht. Romane — huh! — Und eines Tages sitzt Vater richtig hinter einem Roman, Berend hatte grad nichts anderes. Und siehe da, es kommt kein Erdbeben. Und als dann die Welt auch sonst nicht aus den Angeln fliegt, liest Vater auch eine zweite "Liebesgeschichte." Berend aber, der Losleder, lacht sich ins Fäustchen, daß er Vater so schön zum Bösen verführt und daß er ihn jetzt in der ganzen Büchersache sozusagen fest hat. (Collected Works 1. 215 - 216)

The language which the author is using here is quite indicting and grows increasingly stronger, from the words ' "unnützes Zeug" ', and "Unsitte", to "Verderben", and "zum Bösen verführt". By including such terms, is Dyck, if not reflecting upon himself intentionally, indicting himself as the originator of such worldly material, which is seducing his people to sin? Obviously, Dyck, as a writer, held no such views and is



actually putting them to ridicule by showing how fragile these views are, that even a *Vorsänger* in the church could be led astray!

The convictions which Dyck held concerning the language of his people, as they appear in his letters, have already been discussed in Chapter 4. The exclusivity of the language to define the essence of his people can hardly be refuted. While the letters remain almost mute on any associations between language and religion specifically, his works deal with the associations in an overt fashion. One wonders why this is so. Perhaps his not making any connection between the two reveals his lack of concern for the religious factor in Mennonitism. One might conjecture that it was precisely the association of the High German with the church that also caused him to promote the *Plautdietsch* which did not bear this association. The attack, as noted in his works is a two-pronged one. In *Koop enn Bua foare no Toronto*, Bua on the tour at Niagara Falls speaks strictly High German, “[f]leijht, wiels daut hia aules so fuanam wea, worscheinlich oba mea, wiels hee daut Freilein wiese wull, daut hee uck emm Huachdietsche gaunss tus wea” (*Collected Works, Toronto* 2. 268). Bua translates for the others from English into High German, which results in a few comic errors, especially in his comprehension of the name of the boat “Maid of the Mist”:

“[D]aus ist mäd of Mist, dankscheen. Hörst, Brüder Iesaak, daus ist von Mist jemacht. Daus hauben sie denn auher gut susaumenjebakt und fleijht auch noch waus aundres mank jenommen . . . Waus söagst dü, Freilein? Maid, daus ist hier Jungfrau!. . . Nau, Iesaak, dann meint daus auf deutsch Mist-Jungfrau, und daus ist dann nur der Naume von daus Schiff . . .”. (2. 269)

He finally does get the correct interpretation of the commentary, but by this time Koop is totally annoyed with the geologist’s explanation of the life of the falls and Bua’s condescending translation and finally retorts: “Du sullst di nijch too fäl en-

nbille lote fonn de Merjal . . . . Wann etj daut tus fetal! Enn waut rädst du Huachdietsch, du best nijch enn'e Kjoatj, enn du best uck kjeen Prädja nijch!" ' (2. 270). On the one hand, by revealing the very poor quality of High German spoken by these Mennonites, Dyck is probably suggesting that profound theology could not possibly be discussed if even understood by the people who spoke the language so poorly. On the other hand, he may also have thought that it would have been better to leave the High German in the church where no outsider would be exposed to such an atrocious mutilation of it!

To criticize this ignorance was not to denounce the language altogether. In Winta's delightful description of the origin of Low German in *De Oppnom*, he concludes with Ohmtje Jaunzens admonition:

"Dertj," säd' a, "du weetst nu, wua onse plautdietsche Sproak hää ess enn woo sua dee ess fedeent worde, du weetst uck, daut daut dee baste emm gaunsse Sack wea, enn doaromm mott wi doabie uck bliewe, enn Schacht fält jiedrem, dee daut fejat enn nijch mea plautdietsch råde well. Daut schriew die hinjre Oare, Jung." (*Collected Works* 3. 295 – 296)

Jaunzen recognizes *Plautdietsch* as the best of all languages, while Kron calls *Plattdeutsch* a "plumpe, ungehobelte Bauernsprache" (3. 296). The author recognizes both views as being correct. Winta makes even further statements directed at the High German-speaking Kron:

[D]oa enn Burkutt ess eena, dee haft'n Noagel emm Kopp. Sien Foda mott'n kluaka Maun senne, daut hee 'et too 'ne Fabritj jebrocht haft. Oba wieda haft siene Kluakheit uck nijch jereatjt, enn nu haft dee Esel-jo etj meen dienen Foda-nu haft dee domme Esel sitj aun sienen browen Jung fesindijcht, am nijch plautdietsch råde jeleat, wiels am daut Plautdietsche met eenmol 'ne plumpe Buaressproak jeworde wea. Tratjt disem ennjebildnen Benjel mau mol dän Noagel üt'm Kopp. (3. 297)

While the humor is carefully sculptured, the undercurrent, in suggesting that not teaching the son *Plautdietsch* is a sin against God, is stronger than most critics like to concede. Yet *Plautdietsch* was not the language of the church. Is this then simply a flippant exaggeration or is the author mocking the blind association between language and religion? If it is indeed the latter, does this reflect upon Dyck's spiritual convictions? If this suggestion is overstating the significance of such passages in his works, are these passages there for didactic purposes? If this were to be the case, how does one reconcile this with the notion expressed in a letter to G. Wiens which clearly states that Dyck did not expect that most readers would grasp the real import of what he is saying. How deeply did he expect his readers to consider the matter about which he was writing? One knows that he expected someone to "catch on". Thiessen suggests that the attitude of the people towards the language in fact made it possible for "bedrohliches Schrifttum" to be published, that "das mennonitsche *Establishment*, d.h. die kirchliche Hierarchie mit all ihrer Engstirnigkeit – vielleicht genau deshalb – die plattdeutsche Sprache nie als ernstzunehmendes literarisches Mittel betrachtete und deshalb für sie recht bedrohliches Schrifttum unangefochten im Druck erscheinen ließ und läßt" (*Plautdietsch* 215).

It is also worth taking note that Dyck's *Plautdietsch* was not always refined and moderate. The *Koop enn Bua* series are peppered with expression such as "Tom Diewel uck", "Na dan Schiÿjat uck!" and "Hotz, Schinda". These were hardly used for shock value. For the writer they were simply a part of the language as it was used in everyday life. For some readers these expressions might have appeared irreverent when they were put in print. In any case, such inclusions made his works quite unsuitable for serial publication in the popular Mennonite newspapers which were under the jurisdiction of the church conferences.

The writer, critical of the Mennonite people's one-sided attitude, makes certain that he will not be condemned for also presenting a one-sided view, albeit it the other side. Bearing this in mind, he compensates for the sardonic remarks uttered from behind his comic mask, and removes it periodically to reveal the gentle, tender-hearted self. In his mind he separated the people whom he loved and for whom he wrote from their enslaving narrow-mindedness and legalism. This is what is meant by a statement made in reference to Dyck's position: "Er *verurteilte* ihre [the Mennonites'] Enge, aber ihre Seelen sprach er frei" (E. Peters, *Our Last Visit* 55).

To isolate Dyck's religious views and discuss them individually is an almost impossible undertaking. Because the views are being extracted from letters, one receives the elements of a very complex religious view in small fragments, which also tend not to be discrete, but connected to other related aspects of this view. Dyck does not argue in theological terms or expound academically on pure religion.<sup>14</sup> One is, therefore, compelled to extract these isolated fragments and attempt to build a broader concept out of them. For instance, if one wants to examine Dyck's view of God, one does so by looking at a view which one assumes he rejects as one perceives the satiric tone of the context. An excerpt from a letter to A. Friesen demonstrates this. The letters between Dyck and Friesen are humorous, sarcastic, satiric and often quite philosophical, dealing with the large issues of life. Dyck sees several attitudes to life and dismisses most of them. He makes satiric remarks about the *Oberlichter*, the religious contributors to the *Bote* who try unsuccessfully to uncover

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(14) While Dyck does not ever distinguish religion from Christianity, it is necessary to make the distinction in order to clarify what he is and is not saying. Dyck criticizes the religiosity of the Mennonites in terms of legalism and materialism, but he does not distinguish between the spiritual Christian and the religious person who carries only the outward trappings of a misunderstood Christianity, which, it could be argued, is not Christianity at all.

the mysteries of God; he denounces those who create their own concept of God then place their hands in their lap and say trustingly,

So, mein lieber Gott, von nun an führst du, ich lege mein Leben in deine Hände, du wirst – wie ich dich nun doch einmal habe beschaffen sein lassen – alles wohl machen. Es ist schon so, die meisten die so sprechen, fahren ganz gut dabei. Ihr Gott läßt ihnen einen dicken Bauch wachsen und glatte und runde Backen und schenkt ihnen auch ein schönes Auto und schließlich dann den Himmel, auf den man übrigens gern eine gute Zeitlang zu warten bereit ist, “so es dein Wille ist”. (AF 12. 1. 1954)

Chiding Friesen for his idleness and not using his creative “Pfund”, he says, those with talent who place their hands in their lap and do nothing but wait trustingly “kriegen . . . nicht nur keinen Bauch, sonder die gehen ganz sicher mitsamt Leib, Seele und Pfund vor die Hunde” (12. 1. 1954).

It is obvious that Dyck’s convictions about one’s attitude to life are deep and fixed. While his ulterior motive in this instance is to compel Friesen to use his talents, the emphasis of the letter also suggests that Dyck has taken this conviction to heart in the work that he did for his people. It also verges on ridiculing those who have shallow and contrived perceptions of God with which they rationalize their behaviour. He tells Friesen that he will have to create the circumstances and situations that will allow him to write and develop his talent, to put it to the test, and measure it with non-Mennonite standards, as Mennonite standards do not exist.

That Dyck was disgusted with the attitude of the Mennonites toward religion is obvious. He maintained that in Russia the Mennonites had not been merely a religious community, but also a *Volksgemeinschaft* with their own government; in Canada they are just a religious community (NK 10. 8. 1959). His lament for what they had lost in Russia and his yearning to retrieve it is deeply embedded in this con-

viction. His disgust is expressed to various people in various ways. He was perturbed that the narrow religious views kept his people from seeing some of the crucial things and that they were interfering with the development of the *Volk*. Dyck realizes that he is the only one who mutters about this as he tells D. H. Epp, therefore there is no point in defending his standpoint, but he can tell him privately that what makes Mennonites efficient and rich in character

kommt gar nicht zuerst und direkt aus Ihrer besonderen Religionsauffassung, sondern erstens einmal aus dem blutlichen Erbe und zweitens aus den besonderen Verhältnissen, in die uns unsere besondere Religionsauffassung immer wieder gedrückt hat. Durch diesen Druck sind wir geworden was wir sind. . . . In Nordamerika, wo der Druck fast ganz aufgehört hat, werden wir nicht mehr. Wir sind hier im Stadium des Verlaufs, also des Verfalls, . . . (DB 5. 4. 1946)

The compulsion to attribute or connect all the events of history and the cultural and economic progress to piety and godliness he believed bordered on exaggeration, and the acquisition of the mills, factories, farms, and estates had nothing to do with piety and devotion. Indeed, “[a]uch Cornies wurde groß nicht aus einer absonderlichen Gottesgläubigkeit” (DB 5. 4. 1946). It was time, he said, to see the history of the Mennonites without the halo.

One detects a note of exasperation in his comment to Victor Peters, “Vor lauter Mission und Bibelschulerei bleiben Sachen liegen die für unser Völklein viel wichtiger sind” (VP 7. 4. 1956).<sup>15</sup> Some time earlier he had already conveyed a similar notion to A. Friesen, in speaking about the role and the boundaries of the church in their Russian society. It was his belief that in Canada the Mennonites were nothing but a sect, “eine die die Bibel in der einen Hand, und den Dollar in der

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(15) Among the more important things was his aspiration for the establishment of an archive.

anderen hält, und was darüber ist, das ist vom Übel. Und wer das nicht aushalten kann, wem davon übel wird, der läuft weg” (AF 12. 1. 1954). Dyck was very subtle in his mockery in some instances. Only someone who has memorized the catechism<sup>16</sup> and still hears the familiar rhythms would recognize the parallel between what he has said and the answer to question 153 in the catechism: “. . . Eure Rede sei: Ja — ja, nein — nein, was darüber ist, das ist vom Übel” (*Katechismus* 52).

One ought not to be surprised after finding these kinds of mocking phrases in the letters to find them in his works as well. It also reinforces the claim made earlier that the apparently innocent religious references in the works are not as innocent as they may at first appear. While Dyck’s editorial comments often remain unspoken, occasionally his characters become directly involved in projecting the irony of the writer’s pen. In *Koop enn Bua foare no Toronto* Bua’s question, prompted by their apparently having lost their way, echoes the tone of the catechism questions, supposedly familiar to all of them. “Peeta Wiens fonn Russlaund, wannea enn wua heat Chikaugo opp, so auntworte!” (Collected Works 2. 226) is humorously mocking, imitating the phrasing of the questions in the catechism, such as “Was ist das Reich Gottes oder worin besteht dasselbe?” (*Katechismus* 9) Indeed, even the catechism is not left untouched. It could be argued that the assertion is an exaggeration of Dyck’s intention, but there is a measure of support to the contrary. In a letter to A. Friesen he indicated what his intention was:

. . . bei K. und B. ging es mir garnicht darum, mennonitische Menschen weder von früher noch von heute zu schildern, und überhaupt sind die ganzen Helden nicht ernst zu nehmen, gelegentlich nur einiges vom dem, was sie sagen oder was ihnen gesagt wird, oder was aus ihrem Anlaß überhaupt gesagt wird. (AF 12. 2. 1954)

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(16) The catechism commonly used in Mennonite Churches was published by the General Conference of Mennonites of North America in 1940.

The catechism also becomes the butt of humor in *Verloren in der Steppe*. Superficiality or shallowness of understanding is highlighted in the instance in which Hans talks about his learning the catechism:

[H]at er erst die Frage verstanden, dann schießt er auch schon mit der Antwort los. Und mit Bibelsprüchen und Liederversen soll man ihm nur kommen, davon weiß er wohl ebensoviel auswendig wie die, die ihn danach fragen. — Na, und dann gar der Katechismus. Den — sollte man es wünschen — sagt er her von A bis Z ohne anzustoßen mit sämtlichen Antworten und Fragen. Ja, auch Fragen. . . . Und wenn sie [seine Mutter] dann vorsichtig buchstabierte: Waus ist des wahren Christen Flicht und Schuldigkeit in aulem Tün und Laussen? — dann sagte Hans ihr die Frage erst einmal in richtiger Aussprache her, noch ehe sie zu Ende war, und lachte dabei. Bald brauchte sie dann nur das Stichwort zu lesen, und schließlich war auch das nicht mehr notwendig, Hans wußte schon. (*Collected Works* 1. 396)

Not only does Hans say that mother did not like asking the questions, but he also fails to suggest that any discussion on the content of the catechism takes place. One can dismiss this episode lightly with the excuse that it was not customary to discuss religious issues in the home. However, it appears that Dyck is unmasking something of greater importance, namely, the belief that committing the catechism to memory is more important than understanding it. In depicting reality, he has embarked on heretical ground. Considering Dyck's attitude, one can see considerable criticism in such episodes — criticism of a blind adherence to religious beliefs and practices that the adherents are afraid to discuss.

It is possible to extract Dyck's views not only from what he says of his own accord, but also from the manner in which he responds to the religious views of others. A friend with whom views are shared quite openly is Nick Klassen. In his letter of November 17, 1963, Klassen extensively explains his perceptions of how things work in the Mennonite religious circles. A brief paraphrase of it is as follows. In talking about P. Wiens's work on the *Bote*, he notes that the articles are still on the same



theme as before: the straight furrow and the men in the pews. He believes that people like Quiring, Thiessen, Sudermann, Cornies, Dyck and he have acquired a different mentality in comparison to the rest of the *Rußlandmennoniten* and that they have not grown into the church fellowship properly and hence are outsiders in the church and the conference. They do not participate actively in the services or the conference organization. The man in the pew is not taken into consideration for several reasons: few participate in conferences, 90% of conference attenders are ministers and the decisions are made by them. Even when the men in the pews have dissenting views, they do not bring those views forward, but vote along with the rest. Often the dissenters are not members of a church. The *Bote* has its men in the pews, too, but here it is precisely people like Quiring, Cornies, and Sudermann who get published, because the average readers do not contribute. Their views remain unheard. Klassen says he used to be of a different opinion, but he sees things differently now and it is not that simple. One ought to be happy that there are people doing the work of the church which is so important for the children and the maintenance of the church. He sees it in his own grandchildren, who are learning German in Sunday School. Those who do not participate, he concludes, actually have no right to criticize and thereby harm the church (NK 17. 11. 1963).

Dyck responds and admits that the selfless work of the church workers is to be valued, but one should also not underrate the significance of their mentality. He says that all the church reports are of interest only to the respective church members, who are already familiar with the reported activities. The majority are not interested in this. Articles that deal with questions affecting the *Gesamtmennonitentum* require more thought, discretion, and caution, because they are read by thousands, many of whom are very critical.

On the personal level, he asserts that N. Klassen has become more conservative and “kirchlicher”, in order to save what can be saved. The assumption is that it is the church which holds the people together. Dyck argues against this, saying that it is the church that is causing division. He cites as an example the eight churches in Steinbach, “die kirchlich nichts verbindet” (NK 21. 3. 1964). What binds them is the commonality of a mother tongue, origin, history, and blood — factors which has determined the development of mankind in general — and no conference has been interested in these. He cautiously says: “Was ich . . . sage, richtet sich in keiner Weise gegen die Kirche, denn eine Kirche, die uns alle einigte, wäre eine gewaltige Kraft im Kampf für unsere Zukunft” (NK 21. 3. 1964). But he maintains that the church does not have the strength or power to bind the people together. The evidence is in the numbers who are forsaking their people. Dyck’s skeptical response which denies the validity of Klassen’s assumptions strongly suggests that Dyck was not sympathetic to Klassen’s new conservatism.

His particular view of the role of the church influenced his friendships and his views of others’ works. For instance, he criticized Frank Epp because he too depicted the Mennonites only as a *Glaubensgemeinschaft* (NK 27. 11. 1964). For Krahn he had considerable admiration, partly because Krahn secured his material for **Mennonite Life** from those who did not see Mennonites as only a “kirchlicher Begriff, sondern sich als völkische Gruppe präsentiert” (WQ 21. 2. 1947). Of H. Görz, whom N. Klassen continually praised as minister for including fiction, history, religion, and literature in his messages (NK 18. 2. 1962), Dyck says, “Ja, Görz ist auch sonst unser Mann. So wie er müßten alle unsere Prediger sein. Mit Sinn und Verständnis für unser Auch–Menschsein und unser Verbundensein mit unserer Geschichte und wozu uns das verpflichtet” (NK 21. 5. 1962).

His attitudes towards certain institutions were also influenced. To a large degree his negative attitude toward Mennonite conferences stemmed from the fact that they had only to do with the church and not the *Volk* (NK 16. 4. 1963). Years earlier, when he had made plans to go to the Mennonite Conference in Leamington, he had already admitted that “[e]s geht mir nicht um die Konferenz, ich möchte einmal den kanadischen Weg nach dem Osten fahren, vor dem mich einmal schon der Mut verließ” (WQ 14. 6. 1951). On another occasion, when he represented the *Schönwieser* Church at the Sixth Mennonite World Conference in Karlsruhe in August, 1957 (VP 5.10.1957), his attitude was not bitingly critical, but the tone in his comment concerning the Conference in a letter to A. Friesen certainly suggests that attending the Conference was less that a serious matter for him. Dyck wrote Friesen, who by this time was living in Mainz, Germany, to inform him that they had both been appointed to represent the *Schönwieser* Church. (Dyck had feared that Friesen’s correspondence would have been misdirected to Göttingen.) In the letter he encourages Friesen to join him at the conference:

... sehen wir uns einmal an, was man auf so einer Weltkonferenz tut. Immerhin findet sowas nur alle 5 Jahre statt. Wir haben weiter keine Pflichten, als den Sitzungen nach Möglichkeit beizuwohnen. Abstimmungen gibt es da keine, so daß wir nichts verderben können, selbst wenn wir wollten. (AF 17. 7. 1957)

Even radio CFAM, for which he expressed considerable regard on at least one occasion, receives criticism for its narrow perspective. The following remarks apparently stemmed from V. Peters’ request to CFAM to transmit *weltliches* material in Low German, but his suggestion was rejected on the basis that it might offend English listeners (VP 13. 9. 1957). Peters writes to Dyck who has just spent a few years in Germany: “Jedenfalls werden Sie sich in Manitoba kaum zurechtfinden. Man dreht das Radio an and hört die mennischen Evangelisten der ganzen Welt die Wahrheit sagen. Das ist natürlich der Minus, aber der Radiosender Altona ist wirklich gut. . .”

(VP 6. 4. 1957). Dyck says that he finds Peters' comment good, and adds, "Sie haben anscheinend immer noch was von Ihrem hübschen Humor behalten. Übrigens – alle Achtung vor Altona!" (VP 9. 5. 1957) So strong is his view against such narrowness, which he inherently blames on the church, that he stipulates to Epp that if the *Verlag* should fold, the assets are not to go to the church or church-supported institutions, only to Mennonite historical and cultural institutions (DB 8. 9. 1953).

As intimated earlier, Dyck believed that one of the greatest obstacles for the Mennonites in reconciling their religious beliefs with their actions was materialism. Dyck seemed to view the enviable progress of the first Mennonite immigrants as being the result of their positive qualities – adaptability, tenacity, and efficiency. The fourth quality – the love of money or *Dollarliebe* – he cynically viewed as a negative one:

Und wer so alles sieht, besonders aber wer da mitten drin ist und selber mitmacht, dem schwellt mit dem Beutel auch das Herz, und man ist voller Dankens und Selbstgefälligkeit, da man neben dem Mammon doch auch dem Himmel dient. Wer aber ein kritisches Auge für diese Entwicklung der Dinge hat, der sieht auch, was an Gutem verfehlt wird und daneben auch das Negative, das von dem angeblich Guten gezeugt wird. (WQ 7. 11. 1946)

Dyck singled out the Mennonites in British Columbia, who, according to him, had found, more so than any others, their heart's delight. Nowhere had Mennonites made so much money so quickly after settling. The criticism that he launches against them is biting:

Leider sind sie im Geldmachen auch stecken geblieben. Nicht daß sie neben dem Gelde nicht auch den lieben Gott anbeteten. Doch, das tun sie schon und dazu sehr eindrucksvoll. Man sehe nur die Kirchenbauten an, und die Schulbauten, die im Grunde demselben Kirchengedanken dienen. Die sehen so aus, daß man bei ihrem Anblick

unwillkürlich an den Turm zu Babel erinnert wird, so imposant sind sie und so sehr aus demselben Gefühl des Hochmuts und des Dünkels aufgeführt. Und auch sonst ist diese Parallele am Platz. Zwar ist es nicht die Sprache – sie sprechen alle dieselben zwei Sprachen, wobei die neuere die Vorherrschaft gewonnen hat – was hier verwirrt wurde, sondern der Geist. Ich möchte nicht ungerecht sein, besonders dem einzelnen gegenüber, es hat mich aber bitter gemacht, zu finden, daß man so ganz restlos in der Jagd nach dem Dollar und in Frömmigkeit aufgeht. Darüber hinaus gibt es kaum etwas, daneben aber eine gefährlich verwahrloste Jugend. (WQ 5. 8. 1947)

The criticism which at first is directed specifically at the B.C. Mennonites becomes a general criticism. In this letter Dyck calls himself “ein nahezu hoffnungsloser Pessimist”. As one examines church-related issues that are brought forward in the letters, one is inclined to agree with his self-assessment. His pessimism concerning the possibility of a renewal of the church in Germany is one example. The underlying pessimism is more critical than the superficial one, namely, his pessimistic view of Mennonite missionary undertakings. To Walter Quiring he wrote, “Auch unsere mennonitischen Missionäre, die immer wieder *hinaus in das neue Missionsfeld*, Deutschland, ziehen, werden nur so lange Erfolg haben, als sie die zu rettenden *Seelen* mit Geld kaufen können. Denn die weißen Neuheiden sind wohl kaum weniger smart als die farbigen Altheiden” (WQ 31. 5. 1948).

His scepticism of missionaries is also seen in his attitude towards “das heute allmächtige MCC” (WQ 21. 2. 1947) which he views as not only a relief but a missionary organization. That Dyck was aware of the founding purpose of the Mennonite Central Committee in 1920 as a post World War I relief organization is certain. That he viewed it as a missionary organization,<sup>17</sup> (which he implies it ought not to be), is

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(17) Dyck’s viewpoint would still concur with the current broad and sweeping statement of purpose of the MCC which includes “to help fulfill the mission of the church ‘in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace’ ” (*The Constitution of the Mennonite Central Committee of Canada*, 1 .1.1991: 1).

also certain from the comments that he makes. He does not distinguish one purpose from the other, and on the whole, his comments are bitingly critical. Again the persons with whom he shares his opinions are carefully and appropriately selected. There seems to be an understanding between Quiring and Dyck concerning the MCC which is not clarified altogether. When, for instance, Dyck was sending care packages to Quiring after the war, he sent them direct, because he did not want to channel them through the MCC, "aus Gründen, die Sie wohl ahnen" (WQ 25. 3. 1948). In his letter exchange with ältester A. A. Harder of Paraguay, his thoughts are expressed more specifically. Harder indicated that he would like to come to Canada to get out of the heat in South America just like the MCC workers who were able to return after a one or two year term "*des 'Opferbringens'* " (PAR. 26. 12. 1949), and that he, too, would beg for freezers and amenities that MCC workers were able to afford. This criticism comes from a man who closes his letters with biblical blessings, such as John 3:16 (PAR. 26. 12. 1949). Dyck replied that the situation could not be helped – "[e]s sei denn, daß MCC ließe ihre *äußeren* Missionsfelder mal fahren und täte an den eigenen Brüdern ein gutes Werk. Jene sind nun aber einmal Schoßkinder" (PAR 11. 7. 1950). This comment was made a few months after Dyck had gone to hear C. Dyck's audio-visual presentation on the Mennonites in South America. He told Harder that the pictures had looked very inviting, seeing the bright sunshine without feeling the heat. People sensed that the MCC was speaking here "und sie sind froh, daß sie sich auch bei dieser Gelegenheit wieder mit einem Dollar von der Sorge um Paraguay loskaufen können, daß MCC wird das Übrige schon machen" (PAR 11. 4. 1950). As Dyck talks about the international mission of the MCC, one gets the impression that it does not impress him that its work spans the whole world, which included bringing the Russian Mennonites stranded in Germany to Canada, as he writes: "Diese sind immer gemeint, wenn man trotz der Opfermüdigkeit immer wieder und schon immer tiefer in die Tasche greift. Die Franzosen-, Polen- und Äthiopienhilfe, die läuft dann so nebenbei mit, ohne gemeint zu sein" (PAR 11. 4.

1950). He maintained that this work would continue till the last immigrants would have arrived. This explanation, Dyck granted, would provide neither comfort nor help for Harder, for surely there would be no help for Paraguay from the MCC. He also indicated that a ladies' group wanted him to send money to Harder again, but the task was very complex when the money had to be channeled through the MCC. It is conceivable that the frustrations of dealing with the organization itself might have led him to his pessimistic attitude towards it. He was also frustrated by the discrepancies between the reports from people like Harder and the official ones of the MCC. This is evident in his remark in response to Harder's pessimistic outlook on the future of Paraguay as a settlement area for the Mennonites while the MCC reports were speaking of visible success — "Da werde mal einer klug daraus" (PAR 8. 4. 1949). Of greatest frustration, though, to Dyck seems to be the people's false notion that they can appease their consciences by giving their token indulgences, a monetary penitence, to the MCC and absolve themselves of further personal responsibility for their brothers and sisters elsewhere, when, in reality, those who serve with the MCC are doing so for altruistic reasons; meanwhile, he says, the heathen are taking advantage of a naive missionary-minded people. Whether Dyck's negative view of the MCC was perpetrated by some single, painful incident cannot be determined from the letters. If it were not, then one may assume that his negativism towards the MCC is simply a sentiment inseparable from his anti-religious inclination.

Another central and contentious topic for and among Mennonites, which Dyck does not leave untouched, is that of non-resistance. The first significant statement on the topic is made a few years after the end of World War II. The statement appears to be prompted by the resurgence of non-resistance movements in the United States and Holland. Since the precept of pacifism is embedded in the religion of the Mennonite people, it is not surprising that Dyck should compare the resurgence to that of an evangelistic revival:

[D]as ganze Theater ist eine Wiederholung im grossen Maßstab dessen, wie es jeder "Erweckungsprediger" damit hat: nach jeder "Bekehrung" zählt er die Häupter der Neugeretteten und trägt sie in sein Registerbuch ein. Und dieses Registerbuch ist so gut und so sicher wie ein Bankbuch, nach ihm wird er einmal die Schecks ausschreiben, die ihm im Himmel all die guten Dingen verschaffen werden, für die er hier so schwer gearbeitet und so selbstlos "gedient" hat. Es ist zum Staunen, wie sehr auch wir Rußländer schon in diesen Dingen stecken. (WQ 25. 3. 1948)

He also makes several references to the Mennonites not wanting to admit to the fact that many of their people did go to war, and voluntarily at that. Quiring, who himself fell into this category, as did many of Dyck's correspondents, informs Dyck "Seltsam, daß das MCC nun den westpreußischen Mennoniten die Wehrlosigkeit aufzwingen will, wo meines Wissens in ihrer Heimat rund 60 v.H. der mennoniteschen Jungmannschaft im Heer gedient hat" (WQ 31. 12. 1947). In a letter to John Kroeker in Kansas, Dyck substantiates Quiring's statistics and that these young men took up arms without having to do so, solely out of their own desire and without some rationalization or justification: "Und wir können nicht einmal besonders ausgeprägte Vaterlandsliebe oder Nationalgefühle zu unserer Rechtfertigung ins Feld führen. Auffallenderweise tut das auch niemand, nicht einmal die jungen Krieger selber" (WQ 19. 3. 1952).

That Dyck corresponded with people who had been unsympathetic to the non-resistance position demonstrates a definite leaning toward such views. Quiring not only lost his only son of twenty-three years in the war (CK 29. 8. 1946), but reported for military duty himself in 1941 and fought in battle (WQ 29. 12. 1948); L. Froese fought in the war, verified by the loss of his leg in battle (NK 17. 11. 1963); A. Friesen formally revoked his status as a conscientious objector (AF 26. 4. 1944); E. Behrends (a non-Mennonite) mentions his war-time injury (EB 6. 5. 1961); K. Kauenhoven spent nine months in captivity, although the exact causes are not ex-



posed (KK 28. 10. 1947). The letters in the Jacob H. Janzen file do not reveal much about Janzen's stand, but articles about Janzen reveal that the issue may not have been an entirely black and white one for him. Although he was opposed to the *Selbstschutz*, he accompanied a group of young Mennonite men who actively supported the White Army in the civil war and he spent a winter with them in the Crimea as *Seelsorger*. "Viel Kritik hat ihm das Feldpredigeramt gebracht", writes N. N. Driedger (*Jacob H. Janzen als Prediger* 40). In all the letters that reveal information relating to this topic, there is not a single statement to suggest that Dyck disagreed with their actions in regards to this issue; there is no criticism and there are no compromising rationalizations to excuse their military involvement. Perhaps, the absence of such remarks is as strong an argument to suggest that he shared their views as statements to the contrary might have been.

The topic is not explored extensively in the letters, but the remarks that are made leave little doubt as to where Dyck's sympathies lay. Where this issue is brought up in his works, the attitude is the same, although the tone may be different, since it is customary for Dyck to shroud his controversial convictions in humor when expressing them through his works. One is once again reminded of the accusations made by Warwara Pavlowna, which indicated less than a pacifistic co-existence between the Russians and Mennonites in *Verloren in der Steppe* and also of the coverage of this topic in the *Koop enn Bua* story. If Dyck is not convincing in making his views known in the serious tone of Warwara, then he does make certain that they will be heard through his humor, as heard in *Koop enn Bua faore nao Toronto* through Bua at the Mennonite Conference:

"Liebe Brieder! . . . Weils mich daus so vorkommen tüt, dauss hier mit die Wehrlosijchtjeit waus los ist, waus festjemacht werden soll, dauss es nicht wieder so jeht wie im letzten Kjriejch, dauss unsre Junges erst lange im Busch im Verborjenen sitzen müssen, wo die Polis sie nicht finden kann, und wenn der Kjriejch dann ieber ist, dann kraufen sie hervor an die Offenbarlijchtjeit und werden dann in den Jail jestetjt

meist bis ein neier Welttjtjriejch anfangen tüt. Ja, und die Junges von unsre rusche Nachbars, dauss heisst, die bauen sich jetzt scheene Heiser vor ihr Kjriejchseld. Und daurum söag ich, mit die Wehrlosigkeit, daus muss . . .” (Collected Works 2. 253)

For whom did the author intend the message delivered by Bua? Before the foursome even arrives at the conference, quite an ordeal is made about this being a “rußländsche Konferenz”, which does not interest Koop in the least, and which makes no difference to Bua. Dyck has obscured his criticism here through the use of a mixture of High German and Low German, exposing Bua’s poor expression in the language of education, through the striking contrast in the end result of going to war and not going to war, and through suggesting a certain senselessness in hiding and subsequently sitting in jail till the next war breaks out only to repeat this scenario. The general confusion and disagreement on the topic is already suggested in the beginning of the chapter “Op’e Konferenz”, when Bua discovers the topic under discussion is *Wehrlosigkeit*: “See wulle hia femütlich ’mol ütfinje – soo kaum am daut fäa – woo daut enn disem Kjrijch doamett jewast wea enn woaromm, enn woo daut nijch jewast wea enn woaromm nijch, enn woo daut fleijcht jewast wea, wann ’et nijch aundasch jewast wea” (252).

Wrapped up in the humor and circumlocution, Dyck was probably snickering to himself about the real message and thinking whether his readers “aunketsche wurd[e]” (GW 19. 2. 2960). However, before he drops the topic altogether, he allows Bua one last word about what he had actually intended to say, namely: “. . . Etj wull dee Lied mau saje, daut onse Junges, etj meen dee Kanädia äare, nijch emm Kjrijch brucke, wiels daut wie daut Priwiläjum habe. Dee Russlenda äare Junges motte emm Kjrijch, wiels daut see daut Priwiläjum nijch habe. Wauts doa wieda äwa too konferense!” (254). The issue is clear-cut according to Bua, and reflects on a historical reality: non-resistance was not entirely a matter of choice. Bua’s statement

also seems to imply that the *Priviläjum* was something that simply came into being on its own without request or lobbying, which is a rather naive view. Wiens' comment about Bua becoming involved in something which was none of his concern is even more elucidating — as long as one is not involved in a war, it is best not to become involved in such controversial issues. Dyck's ridicule in Bua's statements and attitude implies that non-resistance is not an issue in peacetime, that is, it does not extend into the everyday life of the so-called pacifistic Mennonite, since non-resistance is just a military issue.

Not only was there a reluctance to admit to this or to talk about pacifism, there was even a reluctance to read about it or anything related to it. At least this was Dyck's experience after having completed *Welkoam op'e Forstei* "wobei ich mehr an die Forstei als an einen Bühnenerfolg dachte. Es ist ja, als ob die Forstei überhaupt nicht dagewesen wäre" (CK 9. 10. 1950). Even among his literary cohorts he found disfavour. Awaiting public reaction to the *Forstei* drama, he told B. B. Wiens that it was good that J. H. Janzen, who sharply opposed the *Forsteien* and did not share Dyck's view, was no longer alive. Dyck writes, "Ich urteile über die Forstei ganz anders" (BBW 1. 12. 1950). Dyck contended that many Mennonites would like to have struck the *Forsteien* out of their history, thinking they had to be ashamed of them. His own view was that "sie waren gute Anstalten. Warum sie gut waren wollte ich in meinen Forsteistücken zeigen. Ich weiß, viele sehen da nur den Humor, aber ohne den würden sie es überhaupt nicht sehen wollen" (JCT 28. 2. 1952). Toews, to whom Dyck wrote this, saw the educational value of the *Forstei* himself and believed that the methods that had brought reason to many a young man in the last hour might have been better than the current humane educational means. To Gerhard Wiens he wrote that Wiens should have been there too, for "unverfälschtere Mennisten gab es nirgends" (GW 25. 4. 1958).

## *Political Views*

Considering Dyck's unconventional views in the area of non-resistance, it would have been easy for his peers, community, and readership to attribute radical views to him in other areas, especially in the political realm. His sympathetic attitude towards Russians and his intense efforts to preserve the Russian-Mennonite experience might have been misinterpreted by some, however Dyck saw the Russian as something quite apart from his communistic ideology and makes it quite clear that he was not a communist sympathizer. He associated the Russian with great music and literature, and he regretted very much the change that had taken place which affected these areas, namely, censorship — the restrictions about what a writer could write, indeed must write — even though it had one advantage over the free world, that being that “[e]s ist da kein Schmutz, weder im Text noch in den Bildern” (PJK-V 19. 5. 1961). His political world view was not all too optimistic, even in his younger, albeit, post-war years. Speaking about Western reform, he wrote to B. B. Wiens: “Heute will alleman die Welt reformieren, die Klugen und die Dummen, hauptsächlich aber die Niederträchtigen, und leider Gottes sind letztere in der Mehrheit” (BBW 29. 8. 1946). Years later, having spent several years in Germany in the meantime, he felt that Canadians were far removed from the tensions of Europe and, therefore, could not understand the political situation as it existed there.

It is evident that Dyck gained a thorough understanding of the tumultuous political situation for the Mennonites during the early part of the twentieth century and the post-war decades through his past experience in Russia, his reading, his steady correspondence with Mennonites abroad after immigrating to Canada, and his travels. Yet, he makes very few statements in his letters which define his political stance categorically. One, therefore, has to compose his political leanings from his opinions on and reactions to isolated historical incidents and political figures. One

such figure who emerges in the letters is Nestor Machno whose atrocities against the Mennonites have been well documented. One senses considerable disillusionment as Dyck talks about this wicked bandit not having had any concern for cultural issues, and that although the Russians after Stalin had spent 45 years building a paradise, their efforts had resulted in mass starvation (NK 21. 3. 1964). Neither disillusionment nor trepidation kept Dyck from having the historical details recorded. On the contrary, he proposed and encouraged the writing and publishing of books on these issues. In 1954 he proposed a book to G. Lohrenz on the Mennonites' flight out of Russia and into Germany. However, he cautioned him to limit the account to the bare facts, and not to take a stand on the political issues which brought on the catastrophe, "denn wir wissen, daß selbst die Flüchtlinge oft diametral entgegengesetzt urteilen" (EV 9. 1. 1954). Two years later Dyck wrote his brother-in-law requesting a contribution to a book with a possible title **Rußlands wehrfähigen Mennoniten im ersten Weltkrieg**. He was very concerned that it be written, because

[d]ie Mennoniten in Amerika halten uns gerne unsern Selbstschutz vor. Das ist nicht schwer, sie sind nie in so einer Zwangslage gewesen. Wie sieht nun aber ein anderer Vergleich aus: Wie hoch war der Prozentsatz, der bei uns ohne Zwang das Gewehr im Kriege ergriff? In Amerika waren es 50–60 Prozent. Davon spricht man aber nur in den Statistiken. (EV 2. 2. 1956)

The most contentious of all the proposed works was the book on Machno. It seemed that V. Peters had indicated an intention to write such a book and Dyck was prepared to help finance it. It also seems that Dyck was very concerned about the image that would be projected in this book, so one finds in his letter to Peters a lengthy explanation that not only gives one some insight into the person of Machno, but also sets Dyck up as somewhat of a credible critic for such a work. He writes:

Weiter – Machno. Was der alles angerichtet hat, gäbe Stoff für ein vielbändiges Werk, denn einen größeren Räuber, gemessen an der Zahl seiner Komplizen, hat die Welt nicht gekannt. Ich sage mit Bedacht Räuber, denn mehr als ein Räuberhauptmann war er nicht und nicht etwas der Führer einer Volkserhebung wie etwa Pugatschow oder gar auch Stenjka Rasin. In meinem **Das Steppendorf im Bürgerkrieg** komme ich auf Machno zu sprechen, saß eines seiner Reiterregimenter doch sechs Wochen in unserm Dorf, wobei ich unter ihrer Herrschaft den Sekretär des Dorfsowjets zu machen hatte. Auch war ich, vorher noch, mit in seiner Bande, als die die Weißen aus Jekaterinoslaw hinaus und hinter den Dnjepr warf, allerdings nicht mit dem Gewehr in der Hand, sondern mit der Peitsche, als Fuhrman im Train also, meiner Batterie zugeteilt. Bei der Gelegenheit habe ich den Batjko dann auch aus nächster Nähe gesehen, während er kurz das Feuer meines Geschützes dirigierte. Er segelte unter der Fahne des Anarchismus, den hatten wir schon lange ehe Machno auf der Bühne erschien, noch vor Skoropadsky. Ich weiß nicht, wie Sie Machno sehen und ihn präsentieren wollen, ich glaubte aber, Ihnen das Obige sagen zu müssen. Soweit Machno. (VP 14. 10. 1964)

Two months later Dyck returned to the topic and in that letter one sees both Dyck's historical insight and his concern for an accurate assessment of the historical fact. He openly states the reason for the aforementioned letter:

... was ich Ihnen in Bezug auf Machno schrieb, das als Warnung klingen mag, den Mann doch nicht zu verkennen, war tatsächlich auch so gedacht. Man hatte mir zu verstehen gegeben, da... Sie im Sinne hatten, diesen Batjko als Volksheld darzustellen, dem es nicht minder als einem Marx, Lenin etc. darum ginge, die geknechtete Menschheit zu befreien. Davon, so glaubte ich, müßten Sie abgebracht werden. Nun stieß ich inzwischen aber auf einen Ihrer Artikel in unserer Presse, aus dem hervorgeht, daß Sie Machno doch so einschätzen wie [er] nur eingeschätzt werden darf. Sie sind also im Bilde, mußte ich mir sagen, und ich glaubte das auch Ihnen sagen zu müssen, und Sie bitten, meinen Dazwischenruf zu vergessen. (VP 14. 12. 1964)

In regards to Machno the majority of Mennonites, especially those who themselves or whose families suffered at his hands, would have been sympathetic to Dyck's view.

One might be curious about the origin of Dyck's more untraditional viewpoints, especially his view on pacifism, which was as much a political view as a religious one. It certainly did not arise out of ignorance. The letters testify to Dyck's knowledge concerning current affairs and trends. As shown earlier, while in Germany he kept current by reading a large number of regularly published papers, and in Canada this was no less the case. His interest in current events was demonstrated in such activities as listening to the United Nations talks in Winnipeg (EB 18. 8. 1960), constantly exchanging reading material with his correspondents,<sup>18</sup> and commenting on current affairs and political matters in his *Dies und Das aus meiner Sammelmappe* in *Mennonitische Welt*. Because he is a man of knowledge and insight, one cannot dismiss as thoughtless or unreflective Dyck's comments concerning a report that David Janzen had given at the Altona Conference:

Weiter dann dieser David Janzen. . . mit seiner Kommunistenliebe. Man stelle sich nur einmal vor: unsere Feindesliebethoretiker wie dieser Janzen und seinesgleichen, von denen viele unserer Gemeinschaft den Weg weisen, saßen in Washington, London, Paris etc. und ständen vor der Aufgabe, eine Lösung für das Ost-Westproblem zu finden und durchzuführen, wie sie das mit dem Mittel der *Feindesliebe* wohl fertig brächten! (AS 6. 4. 1964)

Dyck is offended by the connection between international peace negotiations and the Christian doctrine of loving one's enemies. He saw this approach as not only being an impractical one, but also an impossible one. His non-pacifistic position can also be supported further with his comment, and among those who disagreed with his position he would have been viewed as a heretic and a rebel.

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(18) This included trying to obtain *Die Rote Kerze*, a fascist book, which he discovered was banned after the war (KG 3. 5. 1950; 23. 5. 1950).

In part, Dyck's viewpoints can also be explained in terms of Germanism, which influenced many Mennonites in their stand on non-resistance. In his article *The Relationship of Prussian Mennonites to German Nationalism* J. Friesen explains the reasons for the Nazi leanings of the Prussian Mennonites. Having been well aware of the hardships of the Mennonites in Russia and fearing Communism in Germany, they were willing to support Communist Party opponents, such as Adolf Hitler. Friesen explains this further:

In 1934, even before Hitler introduced universal military conscription, the *Kuratorium der Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden im Deutschen Reich* passed a resolution stating that should compulsory universal military service be reinstated they would not request exemption from military service for Mennonite men. . . . It [this decision] indicated a readiness to accept the values of the regime in power. This interpretation of this action was certainly substantiated by articles in the *Mennonitische Blätter*, all of which were laudatory of Hitler when Hitler came to power and saw his regime as God's blessing to the German people. (*Mennonite Images* 66.)

The named periodical also provided biblical grounds for supporting Hitler and his policies. Friesen also discusses how this led to racial Germanism and cites H. Schroeder's attempt to convince the Russian Mennonites who had moved from Prussia of "the purity of their racial origins" (67). Besides his book which was published in 1936, Schroeder also published articles on this theme in *Der Bote*. F. Epp suggests that the fact that Communism strongly opposed Christianity and Hitler clearly opposed Communism was interpreted as evidence of Hitler's sympathy towards Christianity (*An Analysis* 134). This, he says, may have inclined some Mennonites to accept and endorse Hitler and his party.

To suggest that those Mennonites who became adherents of Germanism, whether cultural, racial, or political, did so on account of an uncritical acceptance of National Socialism or ignorance is not consistent with research which documents the



development of increasing intellectual and political awareness and increasing political involvement of the Russian Mennonites. H. Loewen, in *Intellectual Developments among the Mennonites of Russia, 1880–1917*, acknowledges the increasing political consciousness of the Russian Mennonites during this critical period in Russia (101). L. Friesen's *Mennonites in Russia and the Revolution of 1905: Experiences, Perceptions and Responses* delineates the Mennonites' political involvement before, during, and after the 1905 Revolution and the opposing political viewpoints among them concerning involvement in politics, which were published in their newspapers the *Friedensstimme* and the *Botschafter* on an ongoing basis. Loewen maintains that "[i]t was the Mennonite intelligentsia which was most conscious of the changes which took place in the outside world and who then sought to adapt to these changes realistically yet within the tradition of Mennonite faith" (*Intellectual Developments* 104) and V. Doerksen states that it was mainly the academics who relocated in Germany, some of whom remained there (*Arnold Dyck's Only Poem* 135). It was with these academics and those who stayed in Germany to study that Dyck corresponded.

One may be tempted to link Dyck's associations with various individuals to their various persuasions of Germanism. The complexity of the interacting personal and professional factors could readily invalidate such attempts. It is, nevertheless, interesting to note the leanings and persuasions of the persons with whom Dyck interacted. F. Epp in his dissertation on Germanism examines, among others, Götz, D. H. Epp, G. Friesen, Janzen, Krahn, Loewen, B. B. Wiens and Quiring who, with the exception of Götz, all favored cultural Germanism (*An Analysis* 220). (Götz could probably be assumed to be in favor, since he chose to remain in Germany). Cultural Germanism is defined primarily in terms of the preservation and cultivation of the German language, although for some it might also include the arts, science, customs and character (75). Götz (192), G. Friesen (220), Loewen (258), and A.

Suderman (220) all favored racial Germanism, which is defined primarily in terms of racial origins and pure race ideology. The ideology supports the belief that “the mixture of these [racial] groups is as wrong as it is harmful” (104). Racial Germanism is not easily separated from political Germanism. The latter is equated with National Socialism, and aside from the obvious associations, it includes “non-resistance, militarism, anti-Communism, and those aspects of racism (i.e. anti-Semitism) inseparable from political Germanism” (36). D. H. Epp favored political Germanism (254–255), as did Quiring (229–237) and Götz (192). Jacob H. Janzen remained ambiguous on racial and political Germanism and took issue with extreme views (240–242). It is also interesting to note that the **Bote** was almost entirely pro-Germanist on cultural and racial matters (283–285) and slightly less so on political matters (285).

Based on the Dyck letters, critics would probably hesitate to label Dyck by any of the terms employed by F. Epp, other than cultural Germanism, which can be supported on the basis of Dyck’s commitment to the preservation of the German language, although his primary concern was for the preservation of Low German. Epp, too, does not label Dyck. In fact, Dyck is hardly mentioned. His name appears only in the context of his work as editor of the **Post**, and since the **Post**, in contrast to the **Bote**, did not contain the Pro-Germanism sentiment, it was not included in Epp’s research in the manner that the **Bote** was. When such sentiment was expressed in the **Post**, it was mainly cultural Germanism and expressed by the 1920’s immigrant sources rather than by their conservative 1870’s immigrants (315–316). Dyck is mentioned only twice by name (22, 313), and later when his view is expressed, he is simply referred to as “editor” (319). In this instance mention is made of his speaking favorably of the German revolution and of his endorsement of “German renewal as a religious movement born in the heart, arising out of high and noble ideals such as the union of all Germans . . .” (319).

Isolated details from the letters might give hints of Dyck's attitude towards Germanism. For instance, he was happy that Götz decided not to emigrate to Canada but to stay in Germany to help rebuild it (KG 31. 10. 1949). He corresponded with Behrends who talks freely about his former National Socialist persuasion (EB 8. 11. 1961; 15. 6. 1969). In regards to a Quiring manuscript, Dyck suggested that it be edited so as to soften the anti-Semitic tendencies (HLW 28. 5. 1957), but this might just have been cautious journalism.

If there is anything that one can extract from the letters to suggest that Dyck was Germanist racially or politically, it might be his references to "blutliche Erbe" as being the cause of the rich character of the Mennonites (DB 5. 4. 1946). When writing to N. Klassen he maintains that what binds Mennonites is not the church, but language, history, origin, and blood (NK 21. 3. 1964). He also iterated a similar idea in his *Schlußwort* in the *Warte*. The unifying elements among Mennonites are "Blut, Sprache, und Schicksal" (414). In his correspondence with Klaassen in which he laments the loss of the Mennonite young people to "das fremde Völkergemisch" who are not "unsere Blutsbrüder" (PJK-V 21. 2. 1961) the idea is reiterated. In another instance he seems to argue for inherent racial characteristics (PJK-V 19. 12. 1960). The question remains, nonetheless, whether Dyck's views were as extreme as those of the typical racial Germanist. The evidence does not appear to exist in the letters. However, even perceived leanings towards Germanism, especially racial or political, would have alienated him from a certain faction of his people.

### *Conclusion*

Dyck's acceptance or rejection by his Mennonite people was significantly attributable to his distinct and discreetly camouflaged views, particularly those on art, religion, and politics. They were not received with equal passion by the conservative and

liberal factions in the larger Mennonite community. Whether he is considered an apostate (one who abandons his religion and principles) or an apostle (one who advocates new reforms) depends on whether one measures him quantitatively by his following or qualitatively by the tenets and notions which comprise the generally recognized meaning of "Mennonite". Not many would have agreed with him on every point. His baptism and membership in a Mennonite church provided the fundamental requirements for religious adherence. Conservative legalists would have considered his social habits and his writing and promotion of fiction as non-Mennonite behaviour — a definite departure from the "faith". Some from both the liberal and conservative groups would have seen his lack of regard for Mennonite institutions such as the MCC, Mennonite Conferences, and Conference newspapers as suspect. His views on Germanism, cultural and racial (moderate view), on Mennonites as a *Volksgemeinschaft* rather than a church denomination, and the necessity to maintain Low German, even the less refined words in the vocabulary, would have had sympathetic adherents across the Mennonite spectrum. Based on the statistics of Mennonites enlisting for military service, his following on account of his non-pacifistic stance might have been considerable; however, its standing diametrically opposed to a fundamental Mennonite tenet would still have placed him into the apostate ranks on this point. His anti-pietism would have been considered a progressive development among the liberals but a deviation from the "faith" by devout conservatives. His anti-materialistic inclination defies an easy categorization. Declaring blood, language, and destiny rather than the church as the main unifying factors among Mennonites would hardly qualify him for orthodoxy. Precisely those things which some considered heresy thrust him beyond either of these two categories, into the category of a visionary. From his perspective, he had been successful in mobilizing potential writers to recapture and record the past through the written word for future generations who might still appreciate the works. He also had prompted many to reflect on and to change their views, particularly on literature and fiction, views that were to have a lasting effect on the Mennonite world of the arts.

## Chapter 7: Wandering and Wondering

As one reflects upon Dyck's life-work and accomplishments, one surmises that the closing years of his life ought to have been satisfying and enjoyable. Instead, as one reads the letters of his last decade, a parade of images flood the mind's eye: the would-be prodigal son who cannot find his way home, a Ulysses who returns unsatisfied, a prophet in the wilderness whose revelation is ignored. He is not the typical artist who is perplexed by the large issues of life, not a Keats who wrestles with the issue of mortality, not a Van Gogh who commits suicide in desperation, and not a Solzhenitsyn who goes into exile because his works cannot be published in his homeland. He was an artist who chose to conceal much of his torment and bore his disillusionment silently. The sadness one perceives and experiences with the author in reading the last letters is profound and leaves an indelible impression on the reader.

As one reads through the files one by one, one finds that there are periodic tendencies to despair, even relatively early in his life. At first these intermittent expressions of discouragement are not seen as a serious matter. As early as 1943, in Dyck's correspondence with Gerhard Loewen which dealt largely with the publishing plans for the second edition of Loewen's *Feldblumen*<sup>1</sup>, the despondent tones emerge. Dyck had no confidence in the declining book market. Not only was his target group a relatively small one, but the younger Mennonite generation had little interest in Mennonite books per se, or in any books at all, and the number of interested older folk and immigrants was decreasing. His hopes for a prominent Mennonite writer were already growing dim: "Ich irre bestimmt nicht, wenn ich sage, daß das Mennonitentum nie einen Dichter oder Schriftsteller hochbringen oder tragen wird.

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(1) The first edition had been published by Loewen in 1895 in Halbstadt, Russia (Unsigned and undated enclosure, presumably written by Dyck, based on the details of Dyck's letter to C. Krahn, 2. 2. 1954).

Und dabei sind die Talente da; wo sie sich aber nicht ein anderes Feld suchen, verkümmern sie" (GL 6. 11. 1943). The source of his despondency rested fully in his concern for his people and the preservation of its culture and history.

Already in the late 1940's one begins to detect a spirit of restlessness; however, at this point one finds easy reasons and excuses for him: yearning for those of his family who were in Germany and the growing tensions in that country which could put them in danger. At this point, the factors that kept him in Canada were practical and political. These are explained to B. B. Wiens as Dyck imparted his plans to go to Germany. Two things, he said, were holding him back — the possibility of selling his house which held considerable financial appeal for him under the circumstances, and his awaiting important news from his family in Germany (BBW 1. 5. 1947). The fact that visiting permits in Germany were issued only to those who were going to visit the very ill or old (WQ 27. 11. 1947) disqualified Dyck for a visit on both accounts. During the next two years as the situation in Europe was growing increasingly more tense, his apprehension grew because of his children being there and he admitted that "man fängt dort an nervös zu werden" (CK 12. 4. 1949). That his book sales were going poorly (BBW 6. 1. 1948, BBW 26. 1. 1948, BBW 5. 5. 1949) was, no doubt, also a contributing factor to his despondency. A statement such as "Warum ich doch noch immer schreibe, weiß ich selber nicht recht" (BBW 5. 5. 1949) supports this conjecture. A final factor is his attitude towards the Manitoba climate, both in geographical and in spiritual terms. In a letter written in winter (a season for which Dyck held little appreciation) he states: "Ich bin nun mit Manitoba wirklich fertig. Innerlich war ich es schon lange, es waren aber verschiedene andere Dinge, die mich daran hinderten, bestimmte Entschlüsse zu fassen. Die haben sich jetzt mehr oder minder geklärt, und ich will nun wandern . . . ." (BBW 7. 1. 1947)

If one has made the claims concerning Dyck's state of mind somewhat tenuously, the uncertainty about his state of mind is readily dispelled in the letters of the 1950's and 1960's. These decades became decades of increasing restlessness and wandering. To suggest that this was the typical restless search for self-realization, a perpetual *Bildungsreise*, or merely a romantic *Wanderlust* is a misassessment of his agitated spirit. If there was anything that his quest had in common with that of the typical artist's quest it was the fact that that for which he was searching existed only metaphysically; what differentiated his quest from the typical artist's quest was the fact that he knew (although he was reluctant to admit it categorically) that that for which he was searching had already ceased to exist in reality.

How did Dyck's restlessness express itself and to what degree did he describe it in his letters? When one studies the letters of Dyck's last twenty years one readily sees how his mental restlessness expressed itself in his physical movement from place to place. Aside from this observation one also sees how he expressed his discontent verbally to those who were of the same mind — those who were closest to him. A brief catalogue of his moves and related comments quickly bears this out. Because there are so few letters in his earlier years in Canada, it is difficult to determine precisely when the restlessness began to set in. The Epp file acts as a reasonably reliable diary of his movement, since the business letters were written with regularity over a long period of time. Having lived in Steinbach, Dyck moved to Winnipeg in the first week of June, 1947 (BBW 8. 6. 1947). Although the named file does not indicate a subsequent move to Steinbach two years later, a statement in a letter to B. B. Wiens indirectly suggests that a move had taken place. In extending an invitation to Wiens he wrote, "Komm Du mal herüber und bis Steinbach, hier ist es gemütlicher als in Winnipeg. Obwohl Steinbach für mich jetzt sehr viel leerer geworden ist—ohne meinen Freund Peter Heese" (3. 9. 1949). The Epp file consistently shows a Winnipeg address till the end of the following year. However, the letters to Krahn as of Au-

gust 1, 1949, bear a Steinbach address. Although he still had his house in Steinbach, he had temporarily rented a room in Winnipeg and had his correspondence sent there (PAR 13. 9. 1949). Having been successful in making a brief visit to his family in Germany in December 1949 (CK 16. 3. 1950), which had been in his plans for a long time (BBW 24. 7. 1946), he returned to Winnipeg (BBW 17. 8. 1950) in March (PAR 11. 4. 1950). It was not very long before he moved back to Steinbach, as the letters to Epp, Wiens, and Krahn indicate. (The letter to Wiens (29. 11. 1950) indicates that he had rented out his house in Steinbach for several years). The Epp file suggests that he moved prior to November 23, 1950. What caused the confusion is that he retained a Winnipeg mailbox and used letterhead with his Winnipeg address in his business correspondence. He remained in Steinbach in his original house (BBW 24. 5. 1951) until his next silent departure for Germany. This second excursion to Germany can be considered a move, based on the duration of his stay. He arrived on October 10, 1953 (CK 17. 11. 1953) and returned four years later (CK 11. 1. 1958). Although Dyck had taken his business with him, with the expectation of continuing with it in Germany, he began to make plans for a return after the death of D. H. Epp, possibly to settle important matters concerning the future of the business (CK 18. 2. 1956<sup>2</sup>). He also found the damp and cold climate very unpleasant (17. 11. 1953). It was somewhat ironic, because the weather in Manitoba was one of his reasons for having left. His plans to leave Germany were changed when he managed to arrange warmer living quarters (AF 10. 11. 1955). While he spoke of returning to Canada at this point, it was not until the end of 1957 that he did so (CK 21. 8. 1961; 11. 1. 1958). Some reasons for the delay become apparent, but there may well have been reasons which he did not explain in his letters. In the August letter to C. Krahn noted above, he indicated that he had spent time looking for someone to take over *Verlag* work (21. 8. 1961). Dyck told Klaassen he would like to have stayed in Germany, but he feared

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(2) The date was not clear; however, since Epp died on March 31, 1955 (CK 1. 4. 1955) and this letter was written in February, it would have to have been 1956.



the Russians (PJK-V 15. 2. 1960). His accident which resulted in a lengthy hospitalization was another reason for his extended stay (AF 4. 9. 1956). In addition to these factors, the time during which he lived in Cuxhaven with his daughter, who had taken on a teaching position there, was also unpleasant due to the cramped quarters which allowed him very little privacy and due to the cold house which had only one heated room. Furthermore, these conditions were not conducive to writing. The adjustment was particularly difficult after having had his own house for the past few decades (AF 11. 2. 1957). Just having returned from Germany, one finds him already making plans to return as soon as the business affairs can be settled. Not unusual either is the secretiveness of such plans, evident in a letter to G. Friesen, in which he wrote that he would be leaving, "Ganz unter uns – sehr wahrscheinlich, nachdem ich hier geordnet habe, was hier zu ordnen war" (GF 4. 5. 1958). Later he wrote, "Von mir muß ich wohl sagen . . . daß ich es hier nun bald wieder satt habe" (2. 7. 1959). This was due to the many negative changes that had occurred in Canada while he had been away and that he was faced with the sad task of initiating the liquidation of his business (GF 22. 1. 1960). But it was almost three years before he left again, arriving in Germany on December 1, 1961 (CK 20. 1. 1962). However, when he got to Germany, he found that it was in a state of confusion and unrest and he indicated that he might soon return to Canada (GF 22. 4. 1963). How quickly he longed for Manitoba, where although the weather was cold, at least his living quarters were warm (NK 6. 12. 1962). But ill health and the failure to find accommodation in Winnipeg kept him in Germany. It was not until 1966 that he returned to Winnipeg. By October, 1968, he had once again returned to Germany (GF 23. 6. 1969). He had intended to stay at least till October, which intimates that he intended to go back to Canada once more, even though he was already eighty years of age and in poor health.

One other reason for the intermittent returning to Canada is one about which Dyck says virtually nothing. It is one that is raised by Klaassen to which Dyck does

not respond, namely the eligibility for receiving the old-age pension abroad. While the regulations are not spelled out in Klaassen's letter, he does say that sooner or later it will drive him back to Canada (PJK-V 7. 11. 1961).

The increasing restlessness and pessimism in his later years is not altogether surprising when one examines the earliest signs of it in retrospect. Already in 1947 in his letters to W. Quiring there are blatant statements of admission of pessimism. Upset by the tendency of the Mennonites to be wrapped up in money-making, all the while sacrificing their heritage, Dyck concludes the letter on a dismal note: "Alles in allem — Sie merken schon, daß hier ein nahezu hoffnungsloser Pessimist spricht" (WQ 5. 8. 1947). This, however, is not the pessimism that one sees in his later years. There were still many periods of optimism in the two decades.

It remains interesting, though, to see how openly he admits to this pessimistic inclination, which is frequently rooted in the despair over the lack of interest in and appreciation for the work he is doing and in the gradual and certain disappearance of the characteristic nature of his people. The initial disillusionment stemmed from some early disappointments in the reactions towards his works and poor book sales. The statements that appear in a letter to W. Quiring bespeak not only disillusionment but a deep-seated hurt: "Aber ich habe schon lange keine besonders hohe Vorstellung von der ganzen Gesellschaft. . . . Was einem den Glauben und die Hoffnung nimmt und der Liebe fast zu viel zumutet, ist die rapide wachsende Uninteressiertheit unserer 'Intelligenz' in allem was man vielleicht mit Volksmennonitentum bezeichnen könnte" (WQ 3. 3. 1948). In a tone of dissatisfaction he comments on how easy things are for his "Freunde", former *Zentralschullehrer*, engineers and doctors, all well-educated, who do not even think about reading his books and probably do not even know that he is a publisher, because they do not read the *Bote* or *Rundschau*. He concludes, "Was uns an Intellektuellen bleibt ist die Oberschicht der

Predigerschaft . . . . [M]it der Schreiberei für das Mennonitentum ist es so gut wie aus. Mein Programm will ich aber doch zu Ende bringen, im übrigen bin ich wohl reif für das Moor". One can hardly dismiss these as insignificant causes. On the first point, one has to remember that writing was his livelihood, something many did not understand. For him it was a matter of fact. In a letter to B. B. Wiens in which he laments the people's lack of interest in *Auslese*, he explains the situation this way: the farmer raises and kills his chickens and pigs and eats them, but books cannot be eaten. Looking upon his efforts from his point of view, one can understand that he felt justified "etwas pessimistisch in unsere Zukunft zu schauen, weil ich mich doch eben 27 Jahre lang mit nichts anderm als dem mennonitischen Menschen, seinem Leib und seiner Seele und seinem Schicksal befaßt habe" (BBW 24. 5. 1951). His disappointment is heightened by the fact that even the old people are not moved by his books, and this causes him to see his labours as labours of futility, which results in despondent statements such as "Oft überkommt mich dann das Gefühl, daß meine Arbeit —und es ist recht viel Arbeit— eigentlich in den Wind getan ist" (BBW 23. 7. 1951). Not only is his pessimism directed at his own efforts, but as already suggested, at what he saw happening around him. In another letter to B. B. Wiens, with whom he shared many of his most intimate passions, he says: "über die mennonitische Zukunft bin ich sehr pessimistisch geworden. Wir Mennoniten werden andre Menschen, sind es weitgehend schon geworden. Und wir sind so geworden —und werden es immer mehr — wie ich uns nicht liebe. Ich liebe uns so, wie wir in Rußland waren" (BBW 6. 11. 1951).

Even though Dyck seemed to be a very private person even as a young immigrant, one can conjecture that the intense feelings that developed within him over the years on account of an apparent rejection are largely responsible for the increasing tendency to isolate, if not alienate, himself from his fellow man. More and more he

seems to revel in pleasant memories and introspection, claiming that he has need of no one but his family:

Wie gesagt, ich brauche keine fremden Menschen. Was ich brauche ist ein kleines Häuschen ganz für mich allein, sind meine Bücher, mein Radio, meine Schallplatten und mein Schreibtisch. . . . Zu all dem brauche ich die Ruhe, die aber dadurch gewährleistet ist, daß ich keine Gesellschaft suche, ja ihr aus dem Wege gehen werde und daß alles, was an Mennonitischem mich aus dem Gleichgewicht brachte, in die Ferne gerückt ist und ich so nicht nur überhaupt, sondern auch für die Mennoniten werde arbeiten können, denn das will ich auch im weiteren. Und ich spüre es schon heute, daß ich es können werde. Die freie Zeit aber, und die lege ich mir zu nach Bedarf und Laune, benutze ich, um in Fühlung zu kommen mit dem deutschen Land. . . . Wenn ich so überland fahre . . . gewährt mir das, eine eigene, in dieser Tiefe kaum erwartete Freude. Dann, gerade dann fühle ich es, ich bin trotz allem . . . zu Hause, wie ich es in Rußland, sobald ich über die Koloniengrenzen hinaus kam, und wie ich es noch viel weniger in Kanada gefühlt habe. (AF 12. 2. 1954)

One senses something cathartic in his having found a corner devoid of inner conflict, where he can be at peace with the people and the surroundings. These feelings are probably intensified by his negative feelings toward the North American Mennonites, specifically those feelings which stem from his aversion to their *religious* preoccupation, which he describes to A. Friesen in this manner:

[M]ich packt ein Gruseln, wenn ich an Kanada denke. Dabei meine ich nicht das Land (ich liebe Kanada als Land), ich meine eben die Menschen, in denen nach Ihnen das Stückchen Rußland enthalten sein soll, das angeblich meine Heimat ist. Die Menschen mit der Missionarrerei und Bibelschülerei als letzten Lebenssinn und — Inhalt. (AF 8. 4. 1956)

After several months in Germany where he was removed from all things Mennonite, he admits though that there was a strong affinity between him and his Canadian blood-brothers, saying, “ich gestehe aber gerne, daß mir durch den räumlichen

Abstand und durch die neue menschliche und landschaftliche Umgebung, mit einem Wort – durch das Entrücktsein – *mein Volk* näher gerückt ist” (VP 6. 8. 1954).

With increasing frequency one sees the signs of disillusionment and resignation. While there is still a positive spirit and a desire to push forward in his ultimate purpose, there is simultaneously an acknowledgement that it is futile. In a note of encouragement to V. Peters, urging him not to abandon his people, he writes:

Ich bin nämlich immer noch derselbe *Volksmennonit* wie einmal. Vielleicht mehr als je, denn fast alle Tage gewinnt meine Überzeugung mehr an Grund, daß unser Mennist ein verdolt wertvolles Menschenexemplar ist, das man nicht untergehen lassen sollte – oder muß ich heute schon sagen: das man nicht hätte untergehen lassen sollen. (VP 18. 4. 1955)

As time goes on one might expect that Dyck would have become ever more resolute in his purpose; but instead the disillusionment is exacerbated as his yearnings for the distant past are heightened. Still in Germany where he had so much time for reflection and introspection in his idyllic surroundings, Dyck could be expected to idealize the past and to bathe in nostalgia. He talks about this in a letter to Gerhard Friesen:

Auf meinen Spaziergängen lasse ich mich einigemal gehen und träume davon, wie es mit unserm Völklein und mit allem was in ihm an schöpferischen Kräften aller Mut enthalte war (ist?) hätte gehen können, wenn unsere Kolonien nicht in Rußland gelegen und nicht hätten unterzugehen brauchen, und aber auch nicht dem Amerikanismus hätten verfallen können. (GF 11. 2. 1957)

It is characteristic of Dyck, however, not to be so mesmerized by idealistic visions to the extent of retreating from reality altogether. To his dreams of could-have-beens he quickly adds, “Doch diese ganzen Träume sind weiter nichts als ein Stoßseufzer,

der niemals erleichter [sic], sondern ein Ausdruck des Sichergebens ins Unvermeidliche" (GF 11. 2. 1957). One is reminded of what Dyck's Hauns says about Beerend in *Daut Jeburtsdach*, and it might well be said of Dyck himself, "Daut ess je nu mett am doch soo, daut hee sitj nijch'emol no Hus bange kaun. Enn soo'n Bange, daut ess eensjemol aules, waut eenem eensaum jewordnen Mensch jebläwe ess" (Collected Works 4. 260).

Another factor which contributed to his emotional disequilibrium was the aging factor. This is not to suggest that aging necessarily brings to the fore the sentiments and emotions that are noted in Dyck's correspondence. Whether any of these are causes or results is not an issue. It is simply important to note that these factors have been observed, that they existed, and that they contributed in some way to his final state of mind and soul. Dyck himself admitted that "Mit dem Alterwerden [sic] richtet sich der Blick immer mehr nach innen" (GF 11. 2. 1957) and that "wenn man erst alt zu werden beginnt . . . und wenn man keine Heimat hat . . . und nicht einmal die Heimatssehnsucht sich auf ein bestimmtes Objekt richten kann, da kann man mit einmal noch zu hadern anfangen" (GF 6. 8. 1957). Already a couple of years earlier he had recognized the inextricable dilemma in which he and his cultural cohorts were trapped:

Zu früh ist unsere Generation geboren, zu alt wurden wir, um uns vom Russentum zu lösen, zu alt, um Amerikaner zu werden, zu alt, um mit Neu-Deutschland mitgehen zu können, das selbst mit seinem Goethe nicht recht was anzufangen weiß. Und was bietet uns das Schicksal als Ersatz? Das Bewußtsein, 40 Jahre lang bewegteste Weltgeschichte miterlebt und ausgehalten zu haben! Was kauft man sich im Alter dafür? Und wenn man sich das alles wenigstens von der Seele schreiben könnte. Aber wer will das schon lesen. (GF 24. 11. 1955)

All the various factors must be considered as working together; one factor can not be isolated from the next in trying to establish Dyck's ultimate condition. His emotions were not far removed from his ultimate passion — to write — which, for him was “that talent which was death to hide” and which, in terms of readership response “lodged with [him] useless”.

That Dyck should return to Canada after finding relative contentment in Germany is somewhat puzzling. In Canada he returned to Winnipeg, the place that had become home for him there, but how quickly he tired of the city he had called his Canadian *Heimat*. One detects dejection in his words, “Ansonsten gibt es auch hier, nein, wohl besonders hier in Amerika kein besinnliches Leben. Und erst recht nicht in einer Großstadt wie Winnipeg” (GF 17. 7. 1957). Longing for the hours of contemplation which he had enjoyed in Germany, he writes of how he took the bus every day to the outskirts of Winnipeg in search of a peaceful spot for a walk, all to no avail. This is a stark contrast to his recent pastime in Germany, where, in spite of his ailments he went for three to four hour bike-rides, up to 90 kilometers a day, and for long, long walks. That he would return to Germany seemed inevitable. Within two years he was already making those plans. He told Gerhard Friesen that he had had almost enough of Canada again. His comments explain the reason why: “Sie werden es kaum glauben, wie sehr sich hier während meiner vierjährigen Abwesenheit alles verändert hat und sich jetzt unter meinen Augen fort fährt zu verändern. Ich meine gerade auch in der mennonitischen Gesellschaft. Veramerikanisierung” (GF 2. 7. 1959).

In January of 1960, at age seventy-one, Dyck began to make plans for going back to Germany. His daughter and grandchild who were spending the year in Canada were departing at Easter time, and Dyck made plans to go with them. He imparted these plans to Gerhard Friesen, still with the parenthetical comment “Aber

nochmals — es braucht das weiter niemand zu wissen” (GF 22. 1. 1969). Not only had he tired of his surroundings by this time, but also of a certain part of his work. He began to realize that he would not be able to finish what he had set out to do before his departure. One notices a change happening in him. No longer is he caught up in feelings of anxiety over not being able to keep his business alive; instead, there is regret over some of the things he has tackled and a veritable envy of those, like Gerhard Friesen, who have been able to separate themselves from outside responsibilities: “[H]abe gelegentlich schon verwünscht, was alles ich mir mit der Büchermacherei und was damit zusammenhängt eingebrockt habe. Und ich möchte schon so gerne das haben, was Ihnen doch zuteil geworden ist: frei sein von jeglichen Pflichten anderen gegenüber und nur für sich selber in der Abgeschiedenheit arbeiten können” (GF 29. 3. 1960). Again and again he reflects about his work, and the futility of it in view of the change that he sees happening around him. Dyck never would have thought back in Chortitza, Jekaterinoslw, or Petersburg, that he would one day, as a heptogenarian in Canada, philosophize so pessimistically (PJK–V 21. 2. 1961). In such a mood and with such desires begins Dyck’s last decade. It was almost a year later, in December of 1961, having sold the books of his publishing company but having retained the company (CK 4. 9. 1961), that he returned to Germany. His sense of belonging is waning as his travel between the continents increases. There is an ambivalent attitude toward Winnipeg. While he fully acknowledges that “[d]iese Stadt ist nun aber einmal meine kanadische Heimat”, he also claims “aber richtig heimisch bin ich in ihr nie geworden” (NK 20. 8. 1960). Is this a rationalization on Dyck’s part that makes his dissociation from his Canadian counterparts bearable, or is he admitting openly to an attitude which has heretofore been denied?

It is not surprising that in this state Dyck’s writing diminished, and interestingly, that which he wrote had its setting in Germany, namely **Koop enn Bua enn Dietschlaund**. Less surprising is the fact that the tone of the work reflects the mood



of the writer. Al Reimer, in his article *Innocents Abroad: The Comic Odyssey of Koop enn Bua opp Reise*, states that Dyck's last Koop enn Bua work is "more sombre, less comical" and "verges on the morbid and sentimental in places" (38). He also contends that the work has serious flaws, among them "Dyck's almost undisguised didactic intention . . . to get the strongest possible contrast between his naive, culturally unsophisticated new-world travellers from Müsdarp and the wise mellow old-world civilization of Germany." (38). One might readily conclude, in the light of Dyck's disillusionment, that the contrast would serve as a glorification of a *Heimatland* of his people. How appropriate for what proved to be his last published work. Reimer notes that "there is something melancholy, almost depressing about the closing pages of this book, as though Dyck knew this was his valedictory and wanted to close on a serious, even portentous note. . . . The symbolic quest has come to a solemn, almost despairing end" (39).

Although there is nothing about a ten-year time span that makes it a notable time, and Dyck certainly could not have known that it was his last decade, this time period reveals itself to contain a disillusionment beyond remedy, one against which Dyck had struggled for many years. Initially, then, one can look at the correspondence of this decade simply as it was written, and by arranging the details of it in chronological fashion, it is possible to see the conflicting inner tensions more clearly, especially as they are accompanied by the unabated physical restlessness, a wandering to which he had already grown accustomed.

The letters written from Germany in the years which followed are noticeably more pessimistic. At first one might believe that this is because, as he says to Krahn, he has been cut off from the Mennonite world, without papers or letters, which he says may be alright for a short time, but that one cannot endure it very long. (CK 20. 1. 1962) When, however, four months later he writes Krahn that he had not

yet attained the necessary state of tranquility to begin to write again (CK 15. 5. 1962), one recognizes that there are other causes for his pessimism. Already after this short period of time, there is an intimation that he might not be staying long and that his stay is dependent on *Nebenumständen*. The regrets and the laments that are expressed in the correspondence invariably end in a note of despair, regardless of whether he is talking about his daily activities, the present generation, his present literary production, his work in the past, the hardships of aging, the cultural losses of the past, or the political situation of the present. For instance, the paragraph in which he tells V. Peters of his daily two to three hour walks and his desire to go on another bike tour begins with a sensitive expression of his appreciation for the beauty of nature, but ends in a condemnation for that which he and his people have lost. He writes:

Es gibt kaum etwas Schöneres – wenigstens nicht für mich – als so durch das deutsche Land zu streichen, das so vielgestaltige, das so geschichtsreiche und so sagen und geschichtenreiche. Dabei erlebt man seine Ur- und recht eigentlich einzige Heimat. (Die unzähligen Ersatz-Heimaten da draußen – Rußland ausgenommen – haben unsere völkische Entwicklung zum Stillstand gebracht, mehr als das: wir stehen heute vor der Degeneration. Daher: *verdammtes Mennonitentum!*). (VP 28. 4. 1962)

Concerning the cultural losses of the past, he expresses deep regrets about modern trends – the loss of a consciousness of history and the poverty of ideas – and about the would-be artists Jakob D. Sudermann, Johann P. Klassen, and Heinrich Dück, who could have been great in their Russian culture. More regrettable he found that they believed “. . . dennoch, daß wir die Scherben zusammenlesen und sie zusammenzukleibern versuchen müßten” (PJK-V 6. 3. 1962). But Dyck found a solace for his despair: “[A]us solchem Drange heraus sucht man die Gesellschaft der Gleichaltrigen und Gleichgesinnten” and that is what he did. Concerning his *Heimatlosigkeit*, there was no solution. He was resigned in this regard as indicated in

his letter to E. Behrends: "Das Hin- und pendeln zwischen Ländern und Kontinenten ist wohl das Schicksal solcher Heimatlosen, die ohne Heimat nicht fertig werden" (EB 17. 7. 1962). A few years earlier he admitted that he had been more optimistic about this issue. In a letter to V. Peters he issued his thoughts on the matter:

Als ich vor fünf Jahren zurück nach Kanada, nach Winnipeg fuhr, da war es als ob ich nach Hause ginge, weil – Sie mit Ihrer Lisbeth da waren und Sie mich aufzunehmen sich bereit erklärt hatten. Und ich fand dadurch, was ich von Winnipeg erwartet hatte. Wenn ich jetzt an Winnipeg denke – es ist mir kaum mehr Heimat. Und doch, wie unzulänglicher ich selber auch als Kirchenmennonit war, auch ich komme von den Mennoniten nicht los. Zu sehr war meine ganze Lebensarbeit auf sie ausgerichtet und zugeschnitten. (VP 28. 4. 1962)

The reader cannot escape from the pervasive pessimism, as it has penetrated the very essence of his being.

Indeed, the reader becomes overwhelmed by the very things that overwhelmed the writer. As reader, one cannot dismiss these concerns by the simple excuses of aging and the like, even though Dyck, at times, conceded that it was a factor in his thoughts. At other times he clearly stated that it was not the major factor of his physical, mental, and emotional fatigue. Almost seventy-four years old, he is still very much aware of the real issue of his fate: "Wenn ich müde geworden bin, so sind daran wohl weniger die Jahre schuld, vielmehr wohl ist es das Erkennen müssen, das es zwecklos ist, gegen das Schicksal ankämpfen zu wollen: Der Rußlandmennonit mußte untergehen . . . . (NK 6. 12. 1962)

The following year, after having received an unexpected letter from Gerhard Friesen in South Africa, from whom he had not heard for three years, Dyck wrote him and informed him that he had been living in seclusion in Germany since 1961

with the intention of completing several of his works, but that the trends among the Mennonites in both of the Americas, (of which he was keenly aware for he read all the German Mennonite publications), did not provide any encouragement for the continuation of this undertaking. This, among other things, stirred him to contemplate another move. He wrote: "Und so mag ich bald wieder zurück nach Kanada gehen. Das umsomehr, als auch das neue D[eu]tschland], wie es sich durch Presse und Rundfunk darbietet, in Verwirrung und Unruhe versetzt" (GF 22. 4. 1963).

One senses that his disquiet has turned to agitation that will not be quieted. Once more he wants to pursue his passion. Despite every obstacle and almost unconquerable despair, he is driven once more to writing, to do what Klaassen is doing — reaching into the past and preserving it in writing in the modest hope that through an appealing presentation of the material today's folks and possibly tomorrow's will be charmed into reading it and thereby learn how things of the past and the present can still be effectual today in creating something good (PJK-V 8. 8. 1963).

If there is anything that changes in Dyck's attitude as the years go on, it is a decrease in the preoccupation with his political and social environment. His love for the natural environment, however, is not diminished. He continues his daily walks and "[d]abei genieße ich dann das Schönste, was Deutschland heute zu bieten hat — seine Landschaft. Dabei denke ich dann 'als Kind mich zurücke' . . . Ja, nicht mehr in die Zukunft gehen die Gedanken, sondern in die Vergangenheit" (GF 2. 10. 1964). Although walking became increasingly difficult on account of the leg injury, he continued to walk four or five kilometers a day, contending that "ich muß nun einmal drausen im Freien und dazu allein sein, dabei bin ich dann im Leben fast wie einmal; denn was im Hause so der Rundfunk, die Presse und die heutige Literatur bietet, da mag ich nicht mehr mitgehen" (GF 8. 12. 1964). He also continued to read a lot, "fast

Tag und Nacht” (GF 2. 10. 1964) (with a pair of glasses that he had bought in a fifteen-cent store decades ago in Winnipeg at a cost of \$1.25).

Concerning his writing, he tells Klaassen that he spends his mornings writing, either completing works or revising works that he had already completed, but concludes despondently, “Weiß aber nicht, für wen ich das schreibe” (PJK-V 7. 2. 1964).

On the common front Dyck is sounding the death-knell, both for himself and his people. Talking to Friesen about his most compelling topic—*Heimat*—he wrote: “[W]ir sind die Generation deren Schicksal in einem neuen Lande der Tod ist. Nicht etwa der leibliche Tod infolge materieller Not—das gibt es heute kaum noch—nein, der geistige Tod, das Absterben bei lebendigem Leibe. Das ist unser Los” (GF 2. 10. 1964). He is also not about to be deluded or dissuaded from this conviction, hence was not impressed by what some Mennonites were planning to do to keep the *Mennonitentum* alive. In words of warning he wrote, “Da baut man groß das Museum in Steinbach. Alle Achtung: aber letzten Endes wird das nur ein Denkmal des Vergangenen sein” (VP 14. 12. 1964). This warning bears a tone of dejection.

One could expect that in time the conflict within Dyck would be resolved and he would have become resigned unwaveringly to one conviction or another concerning all the areas of dissatisfaction, but the battle was to continue for some time. By 1965 he had resolved to go back to Canada soon, and naturally to Winnipeg as he wrote to Klaassen, “denn das ist nun einmal meine kanadische Heimat”, (PJK, no date, 1965), although he had earlier admitted that he never felt quite at home there. The book market scene had also not changed much, at least not for the better, which he well recognized, especially so in the demand for books in German. Again, though, his doubt was tempered by optimism, having been removed from the situation for a number of years. On the one hand, he knew the reality of the situation; on the other

hand, there was the hope that he was wrong, as communicated to Krahn in these words: “. . . so will es mir erscheinen, daß die breite Leserschaft für das, was ich zu sagen hätte, kaum Interesse haben würde. Dieser Eindruck aber mag sich als falsch erweisen, wenn ich mich wieder ‘medden mang unseren Leuten befinde. Und dann dürfte auch meine Schreiblust wieder wach werden” (CK 15. 2. 1965). This same dichotomy is indicated in his attempt at producing another book later on that year. As he was working on the manuscript *Das Steppendorf im Bürgerkrieg*, he was all the while dismayed by what he saw on the Mennonite market and was losing his courage to try to produce another book, particularly a “nichtevangelisierende[s]” (GF 20. 7. 1965). Consumed by the fond memories of the steppe, he also realized that they were permanently something of the past. In a tone of wistfulness he writes, “mit zunehmenden Alter [gehen] meine Gedanken immer häufiger in mein Heimatdorf zurück. . . . In die Steppe überhaupt . . . erst am Abend wurde sie schön, und herrlich war sie in der Nacht. Etwa bei einer Fahrt über Land, mit Pferd und Wagen. . . . Nun ja, die Steppe und unsere Dörfer in dieser Steppe – das war einmal” (GF 20. 7. 1965). Other statements of that same year are more than wistful; they are characterized by a deep and mournful sadness. It was with Gerhard Friesen that he shared many of his profound personal thoughts in his later years and it was to him that he wrote, “All mein Tun und Schaffen seit 1918 galt meinem *Volk* und dieses Volk nun gibt es nicht mehr” (GF 22. 9. 1965). He was saddened by the fact that the young people were more concerned about the letters behind their names than a genuine education, that they had no curiosity about their origins and history or language, and that their brothers in Central and South America were only a missionary concern for them, insofar that it allowed them to make missionary trips into other countries. In the end, the very things he cherished and the very people to whom he had devoted his life had ceased to exist. Was he resigned to this fact at last when he wrote, “Jawohl, nicht nur ohne Heimat, auch ohne Volk ist man geblieben” (GF 22. 9. 1965)? How did Dyck

deal with such ultimate realizations? In Germany at least he had one escape: to leave his little house and go out into the open and enjoy the beauties of nature.

His respite in Canada was brief. In October of 1968 he was back in Germany at his daughter's place (GF 23. 6. 1969). By this time his desire to write was in a state of paralysis, although he did not find it easy to lay down his pen and to ponder "dazu das Viele, das man an Enttäuschungen in seiner Lebensarbeit hat einstecken müssen" (GF 23. 6. 1969). Hedwig Knoop, in an article in the *Bote* in September 1980, describes the evenings that her father spent reading his last and still unpublished work *Das Steppendorf im Bürgerkrieg* and also comments on the novel:

Was ich über die Auflösung und das bittere Ende der mennonitischen Siedlungen in Rußland aus mündlicher Darstellung wußte und vieles mehr, rollte nun in geordneter, dichterisch bewältigter Form vor mir ab. Weder klagen noch anklagen will diese authentische Schrift, sondern schildern: sachlich und überaus anschaulich. Dieses Buch ist das Schlußkapitel der Serie *Verloren in der Steppe* und darf als sein Abschiedsgruß an seine Leser gelten. (11-12)

In the latter years of his life, the number of letters written by Dyck dwindles. The few that he sent, no longer typewritten but written with his own hand, have a somber tone. Perhaps the saddest letter is five years before his death. It was written when Dyck was in Germany, and after he had become resigned to his fate. The arrival of a letter and Christmas card from Klaassen evokes in Dyck an intense longing to be with his contemporaries in order to reflect on and learn more about their common past, but he realizes all too quickly that for them it is too late, and the younger folk have no interest in it. Contemplatively and in a melancholic strain he writes, "Blättere ich in meinem Gedächtnis etwas nach: Es ist fast niemand mehr da, soweit mir bekannt, und der einzige, mit dem ich in Verbindung stehe, bist Du" (PJK-V 21. 2. 1965). He is still hoping that they will meet again, and concludes with so humble and plaintive a note "Schließe mit dem Wunsche, daß auch das neue Jahr für Dich

ein erträgliches wird (mehr verlangen wir ja schon nicht)". His last letter to Klaassen was written January 18, 1969. In this letter he recalls meaningful specific details of his past – the Molotsch, before and after the war, memories of his father – and then proceeds to talk about his daily walks and his reading, and finally raises the issues of his plans for the future, when he comes to an ominous and sudden halt with the phrase "Besser ich spreche nicht davon" (PJK–V 18. 1. 1969).

The letters, too, come to a sudden halt, and that also conveys an ominous message to the reader. For the reader who has read all the private thoughts that the writer has conveyed to his many friends about so many aspects of his personal life in the most intimate of media, it becomes painfully difficult to live through the final struggles of the writer in the last decade of his life, to see him pressed to and fro between eternal hopes and ruthless reality. Just as one would like to have been there to console the writer in his time of greatest torment, so the reader seeks to console himself with an image of contentment. Fortunately, Dyck, probably unknowingly, left his reader with one such image, and it is found in a letter to one of his closest friends, Nick Klassen, written in 1960, before the harshest realities had driven him to and fro between the continents, and before his final years of wandering in a virtual wasteland, and during the time that he was still wondering whether his efforts had been worth it all. It is a picture of Dyck before retiring at night. His own pseudo-subtitle, in a literary fashion and for the reader with symbolic overtones, reads "Vor dem Schlafengehen", which he describes in comforting detail:

Diese halbe bis ganze Stunde ist nur zu oft die schönste des ganzen Tages. Warm unter Decken, das Fenster einen Spalt offen, auch im Winter bei below zero Wetter, daß die frische Luft gelegentlich über das Gesicht streicht (meine Glatze muß ich allerdings bedecken) – das sind dann Zeit und Umstände mit Tschechows Gestalten durch die Steppe zu ziehen. Ja, so ist es eben, wenn es einmal so recht heimisch und traut sein soll, wandert man zurück in die Steppe, und es sind dann die großen Russen, die sie uns erst ganz groß machen. Schicksal der Heimatlosen. – Das also ist mein Schlafmittel. (NK 7. 12. 1960)



A decade later the writer was no longer wandering physically, but the wandering in his imagination surely never ceased. And the wondering? Well, surely, if he was still reading the amazing stories of the great Russians, he must still have wondered whether somewhere they did still exist. Or even, perhaps, some true Mennonites?

## Appendix A: List Of Files

The following list of entries is comprised of the key persons with whom and topics about which Dyck corresponded. They are listed in alphabetical order. The dates represent the years during which correspondence flowed between Dyck and the individuals in that file. The abbreviation which follows each name is the code that is used in the parenthetical footnotes in this work.

1. Ahornblätter/Dr. Kloss (1955 – 1960)
2. Allgemeines [AL] (1946 – 1961)
3. Alt – Kolonie [AK] (1957 – 1958)
4. Ernst Behrends [EB] (1959 – 1969)
5. Der Bote: Epp/Heese [DB] (1945 – 1959)
6. Echo Verlag [EV] (1945 – 1956)
7. Echo Verlag: Am Trakt Manuscript (1933)
8. Dietrich H. Epp (Verlag)<sup>1</sup> [DHE] (1930 – 1955)
9. Jakob H. Enns [JHE] (1952 – 1969)
10. Karl Fast [KF] (1953 – 1957)
11. Feldblumen I – IV
12. Abram Friesen [AF] (1947 – 1965)
13. Gerhard Friesen (Fritz Senn) [GF] (1955 – 1969)
14. Dr. L. Froese [LF] (1948 – 1954)

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(1) These letters are not included in the Dyck files; they are located in the CMBC Heritage Centre Archives.

15. Heinrich Goerz [HG] (1949 – 1960)
16. Karl Götz [KG] (1947 – 1957)
17. Heft III Gedichte
18. Jakob H. Janzen [JHJ] (1942 – 1953)
19. Dr. Kurt Kauenhoven [KK] (1947 – 1964)
20. Peter J. Klassen, Vancouver [PJK-V] (1958 – 1969)
21. Peter J. Klassen, Yarrow [PJK-Y] (1947 – 1953)
22. Nick Klassen [NK] (1952 – 1969)
23. Dr. Cornelius Krahn [CK] (1942 – 1965)
24. Gerhard Loewen [GL] (1936 – 1946)
25. Paraguay [PAR] (1939 – 1962)
26. Dr. Victor Peters [VP] (1948 – 1968)
27. J. S. Postma [JSP] (1958 – 1959)
28. Presse Druck (1955 – 1957)
29. Dr. Walter Quiring [WQ] (1946 – 1962)
30. Radfahrt
31. Jacob Regehr [JR] (1961 – 1970)
32. Dr. Alexander Rempel [AR] (1949 – 1960)
33. H. Sawatzky (P. J. Klassen file)
34. Steinbach Post [SP]: Derksen, Block, Goering (1958 – 1965)
35. Anna Sudermann [AS] (1958 – 1965)
36. J. J. Thiessen [JTT] (1948 – 1958)
37. J. C. Toews [JCT] (1949 – 1960)
38. B. B. Wiens [BBW] (1943 – 1952)
39. Dr. Gerhard Wiens [GW] (1956 – 1969)
40. H. L. Willms [HLW] (1944 – 1958)

## Appendix B: A Sample Letter

4, 3, 1965

Lieber Freund N. Klassen!

Da ist also Dein Brief vom dritten Weihnachtstag, den es übrigens in Kanada ja nicht gibt. Hier in Deutschland auch nicht. Der war eben etwas richtig Rußlandmennonitisches. Da schreibst Du nun allerhand, und alles interessiert mich in hohem Maße, da alles auf unser Volk und sein Schicksal Bezug hat. Ich bin in meinem Leben immer wieder von den Mennoniten weggewesen, bin dabei aber nie von ihnen losgekommen. In den jungen Jahren macht man sich darüber nicht viel Gedanken, oder auch gar keine. Ganz anders wenn man erst in die Jahre kommt, und erst recht, wenn man beginnt alt zu werden. Ich hätte hier (auf dem Lande und in der Nähe eines kleinen Landstädtchens, wo jeder jeden kennt) genug Gelegenheit, gesellschaftlichen Anschluß zu finden. Ich suche ihn aber nicht nur nicht, ich gehe ihm sehr bewußt aus dem Wege. Für mich muß es schon eine mennonitische Atmosphäre sein, um mich wohl zu fühlen. Nicht unsere dörfische, rein bäuerliche, sondern die unserer kolonistischen Intelligenz, wie sie etwa auch durch Dich, Peter Klassen, H. Goerz etc. repräsentiert wird. Altkolonier-Molotschnaer, das spielt keine Rolle. Seit Abgang aus der Zentralschule waren es mesitens mehr Molotschnaer als Altkolonier mit denen ich es zu tun hatte. So in Jekatinoslaw, in Petersburg, auf der Forstei und auch während des Krieges; wobei die gelegentlichen Gegensätze zwischen den beiden Gruppen das Interesse an einander höchstens noch steigerten. Und es war dabei recht merkwürdig, wie das verschiedenartige Fachinteresse bei den Studenten, sie nicht von ihrer Heimat und ihren Heimatmenschen abzulenken vermochten. Wie gerne fuhren sie aus den Großstädten wieder zurück ins Dorf. Es lag etwas Gesundes in diesem Zug ins Dorf zu den Seinen, das so viel für die Zukunft versprach. Es sollte aber anders kommen. Ganz anders, wie wir es heute sehen.—Nun ist es doch so, daß von allen Ländern, in die das Schicksal uns nach der Katastrophe in Rußland führte (Kanada, USA, Paraguay, Brasilien, Argentinien etc.), Kanada uns die meisten Chancen bot, unseren in Rußland begonnenen völkischen Entwicklungsgang fortzusetzen. Und der Anfang dazu wurde auch gemacht wobei ein sehr gewichtiges Faktum die Gründung des Boten war. Dann aber kamen die Brüder aus den Staaten und nahmen uns in ihr Fahrwasser. Und nahmen uns jetzt auch den Boten. Das ist eine Tatsache, um die wir nicht herumkommen. Auch hier zeigt sich die Macht des Dollars: Die Amerikaner waren reich, wir waren arm. Wäre es umgekehrt gewesen, es stünde heute anders um uns. Und dann würde auch P. B. Wiens einen Boten machen können, wie er unter D. H. Epp einmal begonnen wurde. Und er würde es bestimmt wollen.

Und wenn man es sich so überlegt, so ist eigentlich die Presse das einzige Mittel, das uns Alten geblieben ist im Kampf um ein Mennonitentum, wie es uns auch für die Zukunft vorschwebt. Unsere Bibelschulen, unsere anderen Hochschulen, soweit sie in unsern Händen sind sind das Mittel nicht, da werden doch grade diese Frank Epps herangebildet und ausgerüstet. Jedermann sieht das und erkennt es auch, niemand aber wagt es, das auch zu sagen, davon zu sprechen. Dabei würden wir unserem Glauben, unserer Kirche, nichts vergeben, wenn wir neben dem Glauben- und Kirchengemeinschaftlichen auch das Volksgemeinschaftliche bauten und als Mittel im Kampfe für unsern

Weiterbestand in Anwendung brächten. Und das ist doch auch so, daß grade kirchlich wir uns weiter und weiter spalten, nachdem damit einmal von der Brüdergemeinde der Anfang gemacht worden war. (Siehe auch den Aufsatz von H. Goerz.) Während doch das Völkische – unsere gemeinsame Muttersprache, unsere bürgerliche Grundhaltung, wie sie uns durch die Jahrhunderte eigen wurde – immer wieder auch die kirchlichen Grenzen überbrückt und unsern Willen zum Zusammenhalten stärkt. Man nähme doch einmal unsere Mexikaner (die Sorte war es, die mich in Kanada zuerst aufnahm). Kirchlich liegen die uns so fern, daß sie heute zu einem Missionsobjekt geworden sind; ist man aber bei ihnen im Hause, in der Familie, da fühlt man sich daheim, sicherlich viel mehr als bei einer Missionarsfamilie im Kongo inmitten unserer schwarzen Brüder. Nein, alle unsere Ländergruppen in Mittel und Südamerika – es sind doch alles Rußlandmennoniten – mußten zusammengehalten werden, über alle Grenzen weg, und mit uns in Kanada ein gemeinsames Ganzes bilden. Dieses Ganze als bewußter Besitz würde auch uns Kanadiern mannigfachen Halt gewähren. Was bei so einer Aktion diese Presse für eine Rolle spielen könnte, darüber schrieb ich in meinem Beitrag zur Jubiläumsausgabe der Post.

Wenn man in unseren Jahren – auch Du bist ja nächstens 70 – so den Gang unserer Geschichte mit unserm heutigen Zerstreutsein in so viele Länder oft unter völlig artfremden Menschen überblickt, da fragt man sich unwillkürlich: War es immer recht, auszuwandern? So fragte auch ich noch vor dem 2. Weltkriege: Hätten unsere Väter nicht in Preußen bleiben sollen, dann hätten wir jetzt Heimat und Vaterland wie es unsere zurückgeliebenen Brüder dort doch haben! Und da kam der neue Krieg, und auch diese Brüder wurden vertrieben und ein Teil von ihnen teilt jetzt unser Schicksal in Südamerika. Da fragt man unwillkürlich noch weiter zurückgreifend: Hätten vielleicht schon unsere Vorväter überhaupt nicht die Niederlande und Niederdeutschland verlassen sollen, was wäre dann unser heutiges Schicksal?: Weitgehen Auflösung, aber Auflösung und Aufgehen in einem Volk gleichen Blutes und gleicher Herkunft. . .

Warum ich das alles schreibe statt eines Briefes, wie es sich gehört? Weil es das ist, womit meine Gedanken sich immerzu beschäftigen, hier in meiner Abgeschiedenheit weit mehr noch als in Kanada. Ich bin gespannt, wie ich nach erneuter, mehr als dreijähriger Abwesenheit bei uns zu Hause alles finden werde und inwieweit ich mir nach unseren Blättern und der Privatkorrespondenz das richtige Bild gemacht habe.

Nimm dieses also hin wenigstens doch als Lebenszeichen!

Mit besten Grüßen

Dein

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