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The Relation of Land and Faith in a
Selection of Mennonite Novels

by

Carol Elizabeth Enns Goossen

A Thesis submitted to the University of
Winnipeg/University of Manitoba
Joint Master's Program Committee
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Department of Religion

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THE RELATION OF LAND AND FAITH IN A SELECTION OF
MENNONITE NOVELS

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CAROL ELIZABETH ENNS GOOSSEN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Relation of Land and Faith

We are human beings shaped in the image of an unimaginable Creator. We learn to know and love this unnamable One in communities extending across time and space. John R. Ruth

Through art we come to discover the sorts of people we are, the problems of our cultures and our communities, the depths of meaning in our common life. Gordon Kaufman

I.

In literature we are provided with portraits of people's lives, both individual and communal. We are invited into the world of the author's creation to experience how life was and is lived, and we are urged to perceive the myriad forces of culture, history, and faith which shape human self-understanding and world view. From our excursions into these other worlds, we can derive meanings about the nature of our own human existence. With these thoughts as my starting point, it is my intention in this thesis to examine a selection of Mennonite fiction for each author's presentation of the Mennonites' faith and religious life. In particular, I

will focus on the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience.

I have chosen four historical novels written by Mennonites about Mennonite life. The books are organized in chronological sequence according to date of publication. In this order, they form a spectrum of Mennonite life spanning roughly fifty years of Mennonite history.(1)

The first selection, A Russian Dance of Death, by Dietrich Neufeld, is set in Russia in the early 1920's. The book, though not strictly fiction nor a novel, relates the experiences of the Mennonite colonists who, after 120 years of peaceful and prosperous existence, suddenly experience the collapse of their world in the upheaval of the Russian Revolution and the terrorist activities of Nestor Makhno and his bandits.

The story No Strangers in Exile, by Hans Harder, occurs about ten years after the events depicted in A Russian Dance of Death. The novel portrays the lives of a small group of Mennonites who are exiled from their ancestral home in the Volga region to a labor camp in Russia's far north.

In Peace Shall Destroy Many, by Rudy Wiebe, the setting shifts from Russia in the 1920's and 30's to Canada in the early 1940's. This novel focuses on the lives of a small community of Mennonites, the older generation of which has emigrated from Revolution-torn

Russia. The community has, to some extent, re-established a peaceful existence in the bushland of Northern Saskatchewan.

The final selection, The Blue Mountains of China, by Rudy Wiebe is an epic novel detailing the lives of several Mennonite families dating from Pre-Revolution times in Russia to the 1960's in Canada and Paraguay.

Since the Mennonites live by a faith of the Bible - a faith that is reflected in both the style and content of the novels - I have confined my own analysis of the novels to Biblical categories. What this means is that the aim of this thesis is to discover not only how the authors of the selected Mennonite fiction portray the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience, but also to seek to understand these portrayals in terms of the Biblical experience of land and faith.

As an aid to defining and understanding land motifs in the Bible, I rely on Walter Brueggemann's, The Land. In this book, Brueggemann suggests that land is the central theme in the story of the Bible, and so focuses his Biblical interpretations particularly on the relation of land and faith.(2) For this reason The Land is an especially relevant text for the interpretive intention of this thesis.

It must be noted that aspects of Brueggemann's Biblical interpretation may be considered

somewhat unorthodox. As we shall later discover, his conclusions regarding the New Testament are particularly innovative. In order to place his perspective in context, it is helpful to understand Brueggemann's own attitude toward his research. He explains:

I have in each turn of the history of people [Israel] and land tried to focus on particular texts [Biblical] and explore how these might permit a different reading of the whole of Israel's history. . . . It is my hope that this study may hint at the categories of perception which will permit us to see the text differently and also permit us to discern ourselves and our history differently. . . . The following discussion is offered in conviction that the Bible provides us with peculiar and decisively important categories for facing the crises of the human spirit. I am aware that my conclusions on the relation of the Old and New Testaments are innovative. . . . I hope there is a legitimate suggestion of fresh ways in which the intent of the text might be discerned. (3)

Generally, Brueggemann's work has been well received by the academic community.(4) Thus, it is legitimate to regard The Land as Brueggemann intends; that is, as one among many valid contributions to the ongoing research of Biblical scholarship.(5) It is also important to recognize that it is not my intention to prove or disprove Brueggemann's claims, nor is it to develop a comprehensive Biblical theology of the land. Rather, my intention is to accept Brueggemann's perspective as a prism through which I am able to perceive and illuminate the spectrum of Mennonite experiences of land and faith as they exist in the fictional works.

For this thesis, the particular relevance

of Brueggemann's perspective in The Land lies in his categorical division of the Old Testament story of the land and its inhabitants. For as we shall see, the movements of the people of Israel in and out of the land are in many ways analagous to the stories of the Mennonites upon which this thesis will focus. Thus, more specifically, Brueggemann's text will be used as a point of reference or paradigm for defining terms and identifying Biblical analogy in the Mennonite novels.

In order to clarify the focus of this thesis, the following two sections discuss several key concepts which, together, form the foundation for discussions in later chapters. First, I will define how the term "land" is used in our study of the novels. Second, in order to understand the role of Brueggemann's interpretation of the Old Testament in subsequent chapters of this thesis, I include a brief outline of The Land. Finally, as an aid to understanding the relation of land and faith in the Mennonite novels, a brief historical sketch of the development of the Mennonites' own relation to the land is provided.

II.

The following analysis of the relation of land and faith involves a dual understanding of the term "land." Land refers to actual soil and landscape, but also includes the concept of land as "place". Land is

made place by its inhabitants.

Mircea Eliade's description of how humans create a "place" out of "space" is a helpful introduction to this idea. Eliade explains this phenomenon by distinguishing the two terms cosmos and chaos. Generally, the terms delimit a society's "inhabited territory [cosmos] and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it [chaos]." (6) He comments further:

To settle in a territory . . . is undertaking the creation of the world one has chosen to inhabit. . . Establishment in a particular place, organizing it, inhabiting it, are acts that presuppose an existential choice - the choice of the universe that one is prepared to assume by creating it. (7)

According to Eliade, inhabiting a land involves the act of creating a world, the basis of which is a particular structure of meaning. People create a cosmos by infusing a territory with meaning. Moreover, Eliade ascertains that space is infused with meaning through an act of consecrating the turf. (8) People create a world by making their space "the center of the universe"; the center being the place where communication exists between heaven and earth. Existence is made real or meaningful by the presence of God in the land. By extension, the world outside of consecrated space is regarded as a formless chaos or space.

In his text, The Land, Brueggemann generally affirms Eliade's distinction between place and space regarding the land. "Place" is distinguished from "space" by the addition of meaningfulness in human

life.(9) But Brueggemann adds another dimension to Eliade's idea of meaning through consecration of turf. He writes: "There are no meanings apart from roots."(10) Thus for Brueggemann, humans derive meaning not only from the presence of God in the land, but also from the abiding nature of His presence through history:

Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny.(11)

So, for Brueggemann, land as place is land where humans find meaning in life not only by the experience of God's presence in the land, but also from the communal memories of God's presence in the land through history. In this way, the land itself takes on special meaning for its inhabitants: " Land is . . . always the bearer of overpluses of meaning known only to those who lose and yearn for it."(12)

This notion of land as place (versus space) is, for Brueggemann, the essence of the Old Testament experience of land:

The land which Israel yearns and which it remembers is never unclaimed space but is always a place with Yahweh, a place well filled with memories of life with him and promise from him and vows to him.(13)

Brueggemann suggests that, for the people of Israel, faith is always connected to the land and centers his analysis on this aspect of Israel's history. As a result, the distinction between land as space or place

underlies Brueggemann's entire interpretation of the Old Testament experience of land and faith.

Brueggemann organizes the history of Israel into three separate histories, each determined by the people's status in relation to the land: 1) Egypt to Canaan, the history beginning with the promise of land and ending with Israel's arrival at their promised land; 2) Canaan to Babylon, the history of managing the land ending in exile; 3) Exile to Jerusalem, the new history of promise which begins in exile and culminates in kingdom. Around these three histories, Brueggeman builds the thesis that, by his word, God gives the land as gift. As such, the land always remains in God's possession. Land, therefore, must be held in covenant. We are responsible for its care according to God's word.

By expanding on this premise, Brueggemann observes in the Biblical story a dialectic regarding care for the land. Those who neglect God's ownership--who grasp the land and presume ownership of land--lose it; while those who risk having no land receive the gift of land.

The term "land," in this context, implies the dual meaning discussed above; namely, as both place and turf. For Israel, land meant not only a chunk of soil, but a place characterized by the presence of Yahweh, "social coherence and personal ease in prosperity, security and freedom." (14) So not only land, but also place in the land, are God's gift and subject to the

dialectic of gift and grasp: ". . . grasping for home leads to homelessness and risking homelessness yields the gift of home."(15)

Drawing on the above mentioned observations, Brueggemann perceives the history of Isarel as a series of histories based on the Israelites' situation in the land. During each history, the Israelites live a particular relation to the land which shapes their relation to Yahweh. At the end of each history, life as it had been known comes to an end. With new history, the people experience a new situation in the land which, in turn, affects their faith. And this is so for Israel precisely because the land is not simply turf, but place.

Subsequently, Brueggemann defines the three histories of Israel in terms of the people's landedness and landlessness.(16) Generally speaking, the terms are correlatives of Eliade's cosmos and chaos. Brueggemann describes the status of landedness as a community securely in possession of land and feeling God's sanctioning presence in the comfort and prosperity resulting from such security.(17) The Israelites' history in Canaan is the Old Testament example of landed existence. The danger inherent in such status is the tendency of humans to regard the land as their own, thus forgetting God's word that land is always a gift.

The result of grasping for land is loss of land. Brueggemann defines landlessness as the condition

of being displaced: ". . . alienated from the place which gave security and identity. . . . alienated from all the shapes and forms which gave power to faith and life."(18) The two examples of landlessness in Israel's history are their forty-year wandering in the Sinai desert and their exile from Canaan into Babylon. In the context of these examples, the meaning of landlessness becomes closely aligned with the Biblical motif of wilderness. That is, to be landless is to be cast into the wilderness.

G. H. Williams comments that although the Hebraic words for wilderness in the Old Testament are numerous, they all translate into the same basic meaning: ". . . the wilderness was the Unsown as distinguished from the Sown (land)."(19) These two terms fall directly in line with the chaos/landless, cosmos/landed distinctions of Eliade and Brueggemann. For the Israelites, unsown land was synonymous with desert, disorder, darkness, and death; while sown land referred to the created order of gardens, orchards, and pastures.(20)

The distinction between wilderness land and paradise land is perhaps most clearly expressed in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. The garden of Eden symbolizes the paradise in which God's presence is known, and security and prosperity are certain. The world of Adam and Eve exemplifies perfect landedness. In contrast, when the couple is cast out of the garden, they suffer displacement and alienation from God. Consequently, the wilderness is perceived as wasteland.

If we were to extend the symbolism in the story of Eden to the Old Testament distinction between sown and unsown land, it can be seen that the created order of human settlement is, in fact, a re-created Eden, bearing the same connotations of security and the presence of God (landedness). Likewise, unsown land is wilderness wasteland characterized by insecurity and alienation (landlessness).

What all these terms express is the concept that reality or meaning in human life is derived from having a place in the land and living a landed existence. The factors that transform space into place--community, history, and the experience of God's presence--are also the factors that form meaning and provide humans with a sense of security and identity in life. Hence, to be landless is to be severed from all of these reality-shaping structures.

Paul Tournier, in his book A Place For You, suggests that all humans essentially quest for place in the land. The yearning is often defined as a "paradise lost" syndrome or nostalgia for a world of perfection.(21) We desire a place of security, a place with God, a place as perfect as the lost world of Eden.

In short, the meaning of land as place refers to the idea of inhabited land as a world created and divinely sanctioned. It involves the nature of community, part of which is their experience of God in the land. Land as place, therefore, is integral to any

treatment of the relation of land and faith. The concept points to the significance of the interaction of land and people in shaping faith. Faith is affected by one's feeling of having or not having a place in the land. Landed community--life in the garden--provides structures that support faith. On the contrary, to be landless--adrift in the wilderness--is to be in a place where feelings of alienation cause such insecurity and doubt that faith is threatened.

We must not, however, be misled by the categorical distinction between landed and landless existence. For as will later become evident, to live a landed existence does not guarantee a strong and perfect faith. The very security and prosperity designed to support faith can lead to a callous neglect of God's Word. Likewise, life in the wilderness does not automatically imply the demise of faith. For example, during the Israelites' years of wandering in the desert, there were indeed people who succumbed to doubt and lost faith in God's promise of land. But there were also people who never relinquished faith in God's abiding and sustaining presence. These faithful people regarded the wilderness as the place where God's voice was heard most clearly and the covenant bond most secure. Hosea, for one, writes of Israel's relation to God during their time in the desert using the intimate imagery of a bride and her bridegroom.(22) Later, the prophets and early saints of the church write of the wilderness as a place of refuge to

which one might escape from the world and experience mystical union with God.(23) So there is both a positive and a negative understanding of wilderness in the Biblical story and in Christian tradition.(24) The conditions of landed and landless existence, therefore, must not be regarded as having singular and preordained repercussions on faith. Rather, these states of existence must be understood in the context of Brueggemann's dialectic. Grasping for land results in landlessness and risking landlessness yields the gift of land.

III.

In addition to the Old Testament landed/landless paradigm regarding the relation of land and faith, the selected novels also reveal a relation between land and faith that is peculiar to the Mennonite people. As the history of the Mennonites unfolded, these people developed their own particular bond to the land, which directly relates to the understanding of wilderness as a place of refuge. A brief historical sketch will highlight this dimension of the relation of land and faith for the Mennonite people.

The Anabaptist movement, out of which the Mennonites evolved, began in the urban centers of Germany, Holland, and Switzerland during the sixteenth century Reformation.(25) Its founding members are described as having "no proletarian common denominator. . . . the movement was heterogeneous in character with adherents

from all social classes and vocations."(26) As the movement sought ways to sustain itself, however, it became increasingly linked to an agrarian lifestyle.(27) By the time Mennonites began to emigrate to Canada in the late nineteenth century, agriculture was an integral part of the Mennonite way of life.(28)

The Anabaptist/Mennonite transition from a heterogeneous group, which included urban professionals, to a society of rural agriculturalists was encouraged and shaped by several forces in history. A brief overview of these forces will identify the major factors contributing to this change. It is important to note that all of these influences are presented as distinct for the sake of simplicity and clarity. Just as the movement of history is known to gyrate, these factors overlap, interconnect, and repeat over the course of time.

The most direct force that propelled Anabaptists into rural areas was oppression. The first Anabaptists suffered violent persecution from both Catholics and Protestants, and from civic and ecclesiastical parties.(29) Between 1525 and 1560, thousands of Anabaptists were imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. The struggle to simply stay alive kept Anabaptists on a migratory path, and moving increasingly into rural areas where they were less conspicuous to their persecutors.(30)

Secondly, the Anabaptists themselves were committed to separating from the rest of the world.(31)

The foundation of this commitment rested in a dualistic world view, often now referred to as a two kingdom theology. A brief overview of this theology will help to explain the Anabaptists' desire to live in rural areas. Early Anabaptists applied the New Testament distinction between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness to their own existential situation.(32) The kingdom of Christ was not perceived as a sometime future event; rather, Christ's return was anticipated to be imminent. To prepare for this event, true followers of Christ must begin the work of initiating the holy kingdom on earth, here and now: "The Anabaptists believed they were the forerunners of a time to come, in which the Lord would establish His people and His laws throughout the earth."(33) The world was regarded as the kingdom of darkness and sin which must be cast away, both spiritually and geographically, for purity of faith to exist.

Article 4 of the Schleithem Confession of 1527, one of the earliest statements of Anabaptist conviction, details this two kingdom Weltanschauung:

For truly all creatures are in but two classes, good and bad, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who have come out of the world. . . . everything which is not united with our God and Christ cannot be other than abomination which we shun and flee from. By this is meant all popish and anti-popish works and church services, meetings and church attendance, drinking houses, civic affairs, the commitments made in unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God, in accordance with all the unrighteousness which is in the world. From all these things we shall be separated and have no part with them for they are

nothing but an abomination . . . (34)

The religious practices and underlying precepts of the Anabaptist religion reflect this basic two kingdom theology. An outline of their main tenets of faith reveals a concern to maintain a community representative of God's kingdom over against the larger fallen world:(35)

1) Believer's Baptism--baptism based on knowledge and confession, and involving a genuine rebirth out of the state of sin

2) Discipleship as "Nachfolge Christi"--following Christ in complete obedience, which includes maintaining an ethic of love and non-resistance

3) Use of the Ban--excommunicating those people of the fellowship who act in disobedience

4) Church as Gemeinde--". . . the living together in peace and mutual exhortation, or the sharing of both material and spiritual things"(36)

5) The Suffering Church--"Conflict with the world was inevitable for those who endeavored to live an earnest Christian life."(37)

Menno Simons summarizes the credo of the Mennonites in these words: "The entire evangelical Scriptures, teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life, and worship, a people separated from the world."(38)

Because of the Mennonites' conviction to separate from the world, the rural setting was an appropriate location for them to live. As a natural isolator, rural areas served to protect the people from their persecutors, while also serving as a practical location for living out their commitment to avoid the sins

of the world.

The Mennonites were further encouraged into rural areas by the influence of the earlier born Waldensian sect.(39) The Waldensians, drawing on Revelation 12:6, maintained that the true church of Christ must withdraw from the world into the wilderness. Through the influence of this group, the idea of wilderness as a place of refuge made further inroads into Mennonite thinking. The effect is understandable, as the Waldensians' proclamation only supported the Mennonites' own belief in separation. The idea that the true church must locate in the wilderness also intensified the link between Mennonite faith and land. The wilderness was God's sanctioned place for his followers; and the most practical way to survive in wilderness areas was to farm. Thus, more and more Mennonites adopted an agricultural lifestyle.

By the late eighteenth century, when Mennonites began migrating to Russia, working the land had already become a tradition; and it was a tradition that influenced their faith:(40)

The Mennonites brought to their new Russian environment a brotherhood-type of church, but not a brotherhood in the creative evangelical sixteenth century sense. It was a quietistic, non-missionary Mennonitism which sought to preserve an historic faith by formalistic, tradition-honoured means. The Mennonites brought to Russia, also, a faith which had acquired certain cultural accretions which in turn had been absolutized and sanctified.(41)

As we shall see, one of those "cultural accretions" was working the land.

The period of history that the Mennonites lived in Russia seemed to solidify the bond between Mennonites and an agrarian lifestyle. During this 130-year period, the Mennonites lived without external strife, and achieved monumental success as agriculturalists. At their peak in 1920, the Mennonite population stood at 120,000 with land holdings amounting to more than 3,000,000 acres.(42) In addition to agricultural prosperity, two other developments occurred during these years that strengthened the bond between Mennonite faith and the land.

One, they developed as a cultural and ethnic group to the extent that they considered themselves to be a distinct people. There are several reasons for this occurrence.(43) First of all, the Mennonites already carried within them feelings of segregation when they arrived in Russia. The governments of their previous homelands had never fully accepted them as citizens. As a result, the Mennonites already understood themselves to be a distinct group. Second, the long distance from their parent churches, combined with the "insulated" environment of the new homeland, further reinforced feelings of peoplehood. Third, the privilege of freedom to govern themselves and to establish their own economic, social, welfare, and educational institutions served to create a "state within a state." Such factors naturally intensified their already existing emotions of detachment. Lastly, the Russian government itself perpetrated this

state of affairs by treating the Mennonites as a group distinctly different from all other colonists who were settled in Russia at that time. Thus: "As a church and as a social, economic, and political entity . . . [the Mennonites in Russia] also assumed the attributes of an ethnic subgroup, or people, and also invariably spoke of itself as *das mennonitische volk*."(44)

One cannot help but call to mind here the two kingdom theology so central to previous generations of Anabaptists and Mennonites.(45) In consideration of this element of Mennonite faith, the social and political factors contributing to the development of a "mennonitisches Volk" lose their incidental quality. The religious/theological goal of the Mennonite people was to develop a community "in the world but not of the world."(46) Religiously, the formation of the community of Mennonites in Russia represents the fulfillment of the two kingdom theology to an extraordinary extent.

The second development during the "Golden Age" in Russia that intensified the bond between Mennonite faith and the land was the integration of religious values into all other affairs of life:

The first settlers to Russia brought with them the machinery for ethnic survival and applied it instinctively to the new setting. . . . group survival depended . . . on a definite cultural identity and a strong social system. Both these dimensions found expression in institutionalized religion. . . . religious values . . . set the boundaries of major institutions and defined the basis of interaction within the community. . . . ecclesiastical and civil interests tended to merge.(47)

With freedom to govern their own civil, economic, social, welfare, and educational institutions, in a closed environment almost exclusively Mennonite, religious values became an institutionalized factor in community affairs, influencing both ecclesiastical and civil decision-making. For example, church and civil authorities often acted together to protect each other's interests. (48)

Mennonite culture also developed integrated with religion and agriculture:

. . . Mennonite culture was the Mennonite way of life, firmly rooted in Biblical religion, holistic in its theology, with a seven-day-a-week life-embracing ethic that called for a separation from the state and from the larger society. It centered in the family and in the congregational community, both of which were viewed as images of the kingdom of God; both present and coming.

Culture also meant or had come to mean, particular styles in which the Mennonite way of life appeared and without which it could not exist. Thus for some Mennonites, culture above all meant agriculture and land-based communities. (49)

Thus, the commingling of religious values, civic affairs, and culture only deepened the bond between Mennonites, agriculture and the land. Correct worship was maintained by isolation which was maintained by farming.

This development in Mennonite life extended even to the personal level:

The Mennonite pioneer believed in his land in the same direct way that he believed in God. Working it was a sacred trust. He gave it his lifelong devotion and unceasing toil and through his commitment to God's bountiful gift he found his meaning here on earth. (50)

Very simply, a Mennonite lived his faith by working the land.

In conclusion, one result of the integration of religious values with all other dimensions of Mennonite life was that land became an essential factor in the maintenance of Mennonite religious tradition. Mennonite Christianity required a plot of earth to maintain the truth of its faith. Land embodied the possibility of freedom - freedom to worship God in traditional Mennonite ways.

A second result was that the land itself became sacred. Recalling the notion of Eliade's that space is made place through an act of consecration, the Mennonites' desire to live separated from the rest of the world only intensified the sacred land/profane land distinction. In this context, the Mennonites' land holdings delimited the holy enclave they had created in the otherwise fallen world. Thus, the land itself held religious significance for Mennonite people.

A third result was that religion remained the focal point of life.(51) However, although religion continued to predominate in the Mennonite colonies of Russia, the structural interweaving of religious values with civic and other community organizations eventually had a negative impact on the faith of the Mennonites: "In the Mennonite commonwealth religious tradition and practices became communal rather than private values . . . symbolic of the difference between the Mennonite community and the outside social order of which the state was a part."(52) Consequently, there was never any demand that

religious values become a matter of individual conscience. The years of peace and relative stability, likewise, allowed that religious principles never be challenged or questioned. Rather, they served as a part of the total structure that promoted and sustained ethnic exclusivity. As we shall see in chapter two, the lack of individual commitment to faith eventually fostered a religious apathy among some Mennonites that allowed them to become preoccupied with the land to the neglect of their original principles of faith.

In 1917, the Golden Age of the Mennonites in Russia came to an end. War and the great Russian Revolution once again brought destruction and persecution to Mennonite communities.(53) Under tragic and horror-filled circumstances, thousands of Mennonites left their "Heimat" for Canada, United States, and South America. However, although they left their homeland, they did not leave behind their love and need for land. Of the Mennonites emigrating to Canada, Frank Epp writes:

The availability of an abundance of land, preferably in parcels sufficiently large and compact to allow formation of strong agricultural communities, was probably the most essential external condition for Mennonite continuity and the preservation of everything important to them.(54)

It could be conjectured that Mennonite immigrants were merely attempting to transplant the successful lifestyle of Russia to North America, but it is more than that. The Mennonites were concerned to preserve their faith; and traditional faith could be maintained

only by reconstructing the entire structure of society as it had developed in Russia.(55) Thus, land continued to be essential to the maintenance of correct worship.

To recapitulate, there are four basic factors that contributed to the Mennonites' evolution from a mixed urban group to a conformed rural society:

- 1) The struggle to maintain life and avoid persecution
- 2) The religious conviction to separate from the world's evil, based on a two kingdom theology
- 3) The intermingling of religious values with all other affairs of life, both personal and communal
- 4) The concern to maintain faith in a new country

Kauffman and Harder, in their book Anabaptists Four Centuries Later, explain the transition: "The traditional perspective has fostered the 'rural life hypothesis' that community agrarianism is an integral part of Mennonite faith and life because it reinforces the central doctrines of nonconformity to the world and non-resistance to inevitable persecution in the world."(56) So rural life, like the maintenance of German language, served as a daily reminder to the Mennonites of their religious conviction regarding the larger world. But, as we have seen, rural life not only reinforced these central doctrines; they became ideologically dependent on it.

The entire history of the Mennonites can

be seen as the story of a people in search of a homeland. From Europe to Poland and Prussia, to Russia, to China, and to North and South America the Mennonites have wandered in the hope of finding land they could call home. Their search has always led them into more and more isolated regions and is ongoing even today.(57) Over the last decade in Canada, only the Mennonites continue to pioneer wilderness lands.(58) Through these vicissitudes of history, the wilderness has come to represent a place of promise--an empty chaos that the Mennonites could settle and transform into paradise, and so take refuge from the world.

This practice of forging into the wilderness is also an expression of the paradise lost syndrome. Ever since the Mennonites lost the golden world they had known in Russia, they have wandered the globe in search of a place where feelings of landedness could be re-rooted. It is essentially a longing for Eden, which for many Mennonites was the world they had known in Russia.

IV.

The works to be examined in this study, all focus on some aspect of the Mennonites' wanderings from the time of the Russian Revolution onward. Harry Loewen suggests that much of Russian-Mennonite literature since that time is largely an expression of paradise

lost.(59) The older generation of writers, who experienced the collapse in Russia, focus on the loss of the physical world, while younger generations of writers express the loss more in the form of remembering.(60) Loewen concludes: "The land or home motif, whether understood in the physical-geographical-historical sense or in the spiritual-symbolic sense, runs like a red thread through most of Canadian-Mennonite prose and poetry."(61) So, we can see in Mennonite literature the drama of the people's historical-religious tie to the land, along with their longing for place in the land or a homeland.

In this thesis, I wish to examine a selection of Mennonite fiction for each author's presentation of the Mennonites' relation to the land. To this end, I will analyze the works using Walter Brueggemann's categories of histories of landedness and landlessness as a structure for identifying the Mennonites' relation to the land. In so doing, the writings can be seen as authors' visions of the Mennonites' own histories of landedness and landlessness, and their ongoing search for place in the land.

What becomes evident from the analysis is that the relation of land and faith in the Mennonite novels in many ways parallels Brueggemann's descriptions of the Israelites' experience of land. The Mennonites' experience histories of landedness and landlessness wherein their relation to the land profoundly influences their faith.

However, even as these authors portray the Mennonite experience of land as Old Testament in type, all of the works to be examined also include a call to break away from land-oriented faith. The authors' visions of true Christian life emphasize an individualistic, spirit-centered faith over against the communal, institutional, land-oriented faith of tradition. It is an existentialist, New Testament type of faith in that it involves personal choice, decision, and action based on discipleship in Christ; it is spirit centered as opposed to land related.

It must also be recognized that the Israelites and Mennonites are not the only groups in human history to suffer land loss. It is a phenomenon that is both ancient and global. The Israelites and Mennonites are but two representatives of the larger issue of rootlessness and alienation that is always the result of land loss/displacement. Peter Berger, in his book The Homeless Mind, determines that the high mobility and increasing urbanization of modern society have created this very problem in contemporary life. (62)

This topic is also particularly relevant for contemporary Mennonite self-understanding. The ever increasing participation of Mennonites in contemporary urban societies has called into question the nature of Mennonite faith identity. The requirements that Mennonite faith must be lived in a setting isolated from the larger world and in avoidance of non-Mennonites are considered by

many Mennonites today to be anachronistic ideologies. Moreover, the connection between Mennonite faith and working the land has, in part, been severed. Many Mennonites today participate in the landless nomadic society that characterizes modern life. In many respects, Mennonites today resemble the urban heterogeneous group that characterized the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. Appropriately, there is a trend to re-examine the meaning of Mennonite faith and identity in the context of these original Anabaptists' writings, before it was that cultural and ethnic influences played a part in the Mennonites' life of faith.(63) This trend is also evident in Mennonite literature, particularly in the work of Rudy Wiebe. As literature is both a reflection of and a contribution to the development of a people's self-understanding, the meaning of land as presented in Mennonite literature can play an important role in this process of re-discovery.

NOTES

1. Rudy Wiebe's novel The Blue Mountains of China is an exception to this statement. As an epic novel, it spans a time period closer to one hundred years than to fifty years.

2. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. xvi, xvii.

4. See J. F. Cragham, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Biblical Theology Bulletin 8 (April 1978): 91-92; R. C. Dentan, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Journal of Biblical Literature 97 (December 1978): 577-578; H. O. Forshey, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Catholic Biblical Quarterly 40 (April 1978): 232-233; A. Phillips, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Theology 82 (January 1979): 55-57; W. Johnstone, review of The Land, by Walter Brueggemann, in Expository Times 89 (January 1978): 124.

5. In The Land, p. xvi, Brueggemann writes: "I have persistently been mindful of critical scholarly judgement, which I take most seriously. I have not knowingly violated any seriously established critical judgement." See also W. D. Davies, The Gospel and the Land (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974).

6. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959), p. 29.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 34.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-47, 62-65. Also Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1958), pp. 367-385.

9. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 4, 5.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

15. Ibid., p. 189.
16. Ibid., pp. xv, 6-14.
17. Ibid., pp. 1-3.
18. Ibid., p. 8.
19. George H. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought (New York: Harper and Bros., 1968), p.12.
20. Ibid., pp. 12-15.
21. Paul Tournier, A Place for You (London, England: SCM Press, 1968), p. 12.
22. See Hosea 2:14-20.
23. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise, pp. 17, 18, 28-65.
24. This outline is not a complete analysis of land motifs in the Bible. It is designed only to highlight those Biblical land motifs most central to this thesis.
25. For more complete details see C. H. Smith, Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed. (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981), and C. J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967).
26. J. H. Kauffman and Leland Harder, Anabaptists Four Centuries Later (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1974).
27. Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), p. 4. Frank Epp also notes that the Mennonites in the Netherlands stand as an exception to this trend.
28. Ibid., p. 4.
29. For more complete details see George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) and Tielmann van Braght, Martyrs Mirror (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1950).
30. Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940, p. 4: ". . . there had been academics, professionals, craftsmen, and artisans among the sixteenth century Anabaptist pioneers--but their repeated search for seclusion and security had always pointed in rural directions."
31. The word "world" here denotes the political, religious, cultural, and geographical dimensions of the larger world.

32. Robert Friedmann, A Theology of Anabaptism (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 38f.

33. Franklin Littel, The Anabaptist View of the Church, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 109.

34. H. J. Hillerbrand, The Protestant Reformation (New York: Walker and Co., 1968), pp. 132-133.

35. There are numerous books and articles detailing the major tenets of Anabaptist faith. For a good general overview see J. A. Oosterbaan, "The Reformation of the Reformation: Fundamentals of Anabaptist Theology." Mennonite Quarterly Review 51 (July 1977): 171f.

36. Friedmann, Anabaptist Theology, p. 82.

37. Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," in Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale: Herald Press 1957), p. 48.

38. John C. Wenger, ed., The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Scottsdale:Herald Press, 1956), p. 679.

39. Williams, Wilderness and Paradise, p. 74.

40. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940.

41. Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951): 17-33.

42. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940, pp. 140-141.

43. The following paragraph is based on information from David Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review (October 1973, January 1974).

44. Ibid., p. 50.

45. For a full exposition see Chapter One of this study and also Friedmann, Anabaptist Theology.

46. See Menno Simons, "Foundation of the Christian Doctrine," in The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, ed. John C. Wenger, pp. 105f.

47. John B. Toews, "The Origins and Activities of the Mennonite Selbstschutz in the Ukraine," in Mennonite Quarterly Review 46 (January 1972): 7-10.

48. Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," p. 21.

49. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940. pp. 498-499.
50. Margaret Reimer and Ken Loewen, Meditations on a place and a way of life (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1982), p. 11.
51. Toews, "Selbstschutz," p. 7.
52. Ibid., pp. 7-10.
53. For more complete details see John B. Toews, Lost Fatherland (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967) and Czars, Soviets and Mennonites (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982).
54. Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940. p. 3.
55. Toews, Lost Fatherland. p. 126.
56. Kauffman and Harder, Four Centuries Later. p. 291.
57. Indeed, their search has taken them as far afield as the Canadian north, the Paraguayan Chaco, and the far eastern regions of Russia.
58. B. G. Vanderhill, "The Passing of the Pioneer Fringe in Western Canada," Geographical Review 72 #2 (April 1982): 200-217.
59. Harry Loewen, "Canadian Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland," in The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984): 73f.
60. Ibid., p. 77.
61. Ibid.
62. See Peter Berger, The Homeless Mind (New York: Random House, 1973) for more complete analysis.
63. Kauffman and Harder, Four Centuries. p. 292 and Epp, Mennonites 1920-1940. pp. 545-548. Harold S. Bender's "Anabaptist Vision" signals the beginning of scholarly interest in returning to Anabaptist roots.

CHAPTER TWO

A Russian Dance of Death

I.

Dietrich Neufeld's A Russian Dance of Death has been chosen as the first work to be examined in this study for two reasons. Categorically, it cannot be exclusively labelled as fiction; Neufeld did not set out to write a creative or imaginative work of fiction. The English version, translated by Al Reimer in 1979, is a compilation of three books the author originally wrote in German and published on separate occasions. (1) The first book is actually a diary Neufeld maintained while experiencing the life-threatening turmoil of the Russian Revolution and Civil war. In the second book, Neufeld writes a quasi-historical account of the massacre that occurred in his home village--Zagradovka. The third book is a fictionalized autobiography of the author's escape out of Russia.

This progression of perspective--from personal memoir to historical account to fictional form--is in itself significant, for it parallels the development of Mennonite literature in general. Following the Mennonites' nightmarish experience in Russia, their published literature generally took the form of personal

memoir or historical recount, and only subsequently did authors pursue a truly fictional form for their writing.(2)

Also in relation to the general development of Mennonite literature, Neufeld's books represent the first of their kind in Russian-Mennonite writing. While pioneering the Russian steppes, concern for survival left Mennonites no time or inclination for artistic endeavors. Subsequent prosperity continued to orient minds toward agricultural and materialistic pursuits.(3) As a result, art took on connotations of idleness and even evil.(4) Practically no imaginative literature emerged from the Mennonites in Russia until tragedy rocked their secure and orderly existence.(5) Neufeld's writing represents one of the first voices crying out of this wilderness. His work is the product of an artist's soul bursting to "write himself free" from the suffering he sees all around him. These factors make Neufeld's book a suitable precursor to the works that follow in subsequent chapters.

Regarding the relation of land and faith, nowhere does Neufeld deliberately or outrightly address the topic. However, as it is an essential factor contributing to the tragedy of destruction the Mennonites suffered in Russia, the theme often lies just beneath the surface of Neufeld's words. His critical evaluation of the self-defense units, for example, contains weighty implications regarding the significance of land in relation to faith. In terms of Brueggemann's categories,

the book as a whole can be seen as an account of the Mennonites' reactions to the loss of their land and "landed" way of life. This experience of the Mennonites parallels to a certain extent the Israelites' ordeal of exile from Canaan in the sixth century, B.C. On this occasion, the Israelites, like the Mennonites in A Russian Dance of Death, suffer sudden land loss.

For both Mennonites and Israelites, the loss of land is incurred by political oppression. In twentieth century Russia, the Mennonites lost their land to Bolsheviks and Anarchists; while in sixth century B.C. Canaan, the oppressors were Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian warriors. According to Brueggemann's analysis, however, political overpowering was merely the work of an instrument of a higher power.⁽⁶⁾ The Israelites lost the land because it was God's deliberate intention that it should happen. Israel had become unfaithful to the word of Yahweh, therefore, God took away the land using the power of Babylon as his tool.

Although we cannot claim insight into God's intention regarding the Mennonites, an analysis of the situations of Mennonites and Israelites reveals several likenesses. The reactions of the Mennonites to their situation also parallel those of the Israelites in some respects. Generally, the Mennonites in A Russian Dance of Death react to their loss in three ways--by despair, self-defense, and escape to new land. It is upon these three reactions that I will focus my analysis.

II.

Book one is the diary of Dietrich Neufeld's experience of the Russian Revolution and Civil war in the Mennonite village of Khortitza-Rosental. The first entry of the diary neatly prepares the stage for the ensuing drama. For one thing, it introduces the reader to the author's perspective. It is important to note that Neufeld is not a typical Mennonite of his time. Rather, he is an example of the educated and more broad-minded Mennonites that were beginning to emerge from the populace just prior to the Russian Revolution.(7) As a result of his education and heightened awareness, Neufeld often regards his fellow Mennonites with critical objectivity. His artistic nature no doubt also fosters in him a perspective somewhat removed from the average colonists.

Neufeld's attitude toward his fellow villagers is symbolized in the first entry: "From . . . high up on a slope I look down . . ."(8) Later, he states it outrightly: ". . . I don't know what the villagers interests and concerns are nor what rumors are making the rounds. I don't want to know."(9) The statement clearly removes Neufeld from the realm of the general thoughts and lifestyle of the Mennonite villagers' world.

Neufeld's faith is likewise atypical. Rarely does he speak of faith or God; rather, he uses expressions such as fate, hope, and optimism. Consequently, much of

what he writes typifies him as a "liberal humanist." (10) However, Neufeld's attitudes about brotherly love, the way of peace, and the suffering church, reveal a thinking that is authentically within Mennonite tradition. One can, I think, surmise that behind his words of hope and fate lies a sustaining faith. (11) The extremely ethnic faith of the Mennonites of his day, may be one factor that inhibits Neufeld from expressing his thoughts in religious terminology. (12) The language, in this case, would reflect his chosen status as an outsider. One must also consider that Neufeld is suffering persecution by atheistic powers. If a diary filled with expressions of faith were to be discovered by Makhnovites or Bolsheviks, he would certainly suffer their wrath.

In addition to revealing the author's perspective, the first entry of the diary presents a partial portrait of village life as it was prior to the tragedy that fills the diary's pages:

I look down over the peaceful settlement . . . I can see . . . fine farmsteads, half-a-dozen steam flourmills, several farm implement factories, and a brickyard topped by tall chimneys. There are also banks, shops, schools, and hospitals in the community. (13)

Drawing on Brueggemann's terminology, the picture is clearly of a "landed" people. (14) Despite the war that has "knocked their world out of kilter," this community appears prosperous and secure. (15) Neufeld's assertion that "these industrious people are sure to make their agriculture, trade, and industry, as well as their

schools and welfare institutions, flourish again when these turbulent times are over," distinctly reflects Brueggemann's description of landed people as those who "cling to continuities and believe that old forms surely continue."(16)

Lastly, the first entry foreshadows the action that is to come. Contrary to Neufeld's own assertion of Mennonite historical continuity, he also affirms that "the old conditions and traditions" are gone.(17) For the first time in over one hundred years, the Mennonites' religious conviction to live as "die Stillen im Lande" is threatened:

Even these peaceful Mennonite settlers who up till now have remained aloof from all history-making events are caught up in the general upheaval. They no longer enjoy the peace which dominated their steppe for so long. They are no longer permitted to live in seclusion from the world.(18)

Although hopeful that the change is the coming of a "new era", Neufeld's optimism is tainted by his political insight:

Looking closely at Russia's recent history one has a premonition of events to come which will be even more fateful than those we have already experienced. The political atmosphere is oppressive . . . (19)

The above two statements contain an almost clairvoyant insight into both the cause and effect of the Mennonites' downfall in Russia. As the diary continues, the reader experiences along with Neufeld, the political oppression that completely destroyed the Mennonites' peaceful and isolated lifestyle.

The diary entries date from Sept. 1919 to March 1920. During this time, Mennonite villagers were caught in the crossfire of the civil war. They were required to service both Czarist and Bolshevik armies with food, shelter, and equipment. In addition, their lives and remaining material goods were ravaged by the bandits of anarchy, the inimitable followers of "freedom fighter" Nestor Makhno.(20) Perhaps the most terrible scourge of all was the force of the typhus epidemic that followed in the wake of the first destroyers. Neufeld's diary focuses primarily on this epidemic and the activities of the Makhnovites who carried the disease into Mennonite villages.

The first incident Neufeld describes in his diary symbolically expresses that which occurs for all of Mennonite society. An old grandmother is forced to look on as bandits of anarchy rummage through her chest of drawers. She, "the very model of the order-loving housewife," is indignant that these barbarians should so disrespectfully rummage through her carefully arranged nest of trinkets. "Stop!" she cries, and steps forward to display the contents of the boxes herself. Twice she attempts to intervene the bandits' pillage, announcing in confidant Low-German, "He woat nich schloane." (21) He won't hit me! Inevitably, she is "knocked senseless" by a blow from a gun barrel. Mennonite society, like the grandmother with her trinkets, had lived a hundred years

of carefully ordered prosperity. Now, their valuables, their reality, and their lives are suddenly "knocked senseless" by bands of resentful Russian peasants.

Neufeld includes other profiles of loss that magnify this tragedy. H. H. Epp, a wealthy and prominent member of the village, flees in fear for his life, leaving his wife and children as vulnerable as "a Makhnovite to lice." Epp, like many, loses his wealth, livelihood, and community. Still others witness the brutal torture and death of family members, and for many more it is the occasion of "death's final dance." (22)

Brueggemann informs us that this is the nature of land-loss: "The end of land . . . means the collapse of all public institutions and all symbolic expressions of well being and coherence." (23) And this is precisely what happens to the Mennonites in A Russian Dance of Death. Their land is taken over first by Anarchists and then Bolsheviks for redistribution to Russian peasants. And with the loss of land, the Mennonites also experience the collapse of family, church, community, and livelihood, or in other words, all of the historical continuities that structure reality and meaning in their lives. For the Mennonites, the sense of Russia as "place," characterized by security, prosperity, and the presence of God in history, vanishes like their material possessions in the arms of soldiers and bandits. (24)

In effect, these Mennonites witness their wilderness paradise abruptly transformed into wilderness

wasteland.(25) In the context of this terminology, the event marks a radical end to the historical process the Mennonites had experienced for over a century. Their entire history in Russia had been characterized by the progressive transformation of wasteland to paradise--from barren steppe to flourishing agricultural community.

Likewise, beginning with God's promise to Abraham in Egypt until their arrival in Canaan, the Israelites' entire history had been marked by a progressive movement toward their promised land.(26) The fulfillment of promise represented both a culmination of the historical process and also the ongoing progression of covenant history. The loss of land brings an end to this process. The history of promise, of security, and of prosperity end with land-loss; and in this sense, it is the end of history. The people's history of life in the land and landed existence comes to an end.

The extreme nature of the event of land-loss elicits equally extreme feelings of displacement. Neufeld himself expresses this sentiment: "We Mennonites are aliens in this land. . . . This is no longer our homeland."(27) As previously mentioned, Neufeld documents three basic reactions to this tragedy of displacement. All three can be seen as reactions of faith directly linked to the land.

The response witnessed primarily in part I is that of despair. Survivors confront a life so foreign to them, many fall into despondency. They cannot farm, for

their machinery, livestock, and even grain seed has been stolen. They are bereft of all personal comfort, and many are homeless and without food. Lastly, the always reliable continuities of family and community have been broken by death. The rootlessness of this existence causes complete despair. Neufeld describes these sufferers as having relinquished all desire to live: "Faces are fixed in stony expressions of resignation or apathy. Eyelids twitch in pain and mouths are etched in grief: there is no hope left in those faces.(28)

Neufeld himself occasionally falls prey to this malady. During these times the ambiguity of existence overwhelms him: ". . . what is left for us except sorrow and want, emptiness and death? . . . now all we can do is lie down and die. . . . What will become of us?"(29)

This reaction is basically an expression of deep pathos over land-loss. Israel, too, mourns the loss of her land. The response in Lamentations expresses much the same sorrow. Israel, the abandoned widow, the homeless orphan, is without comfort.(30) Her sorrow is a suffering of displacement and alienation. The depth of these feelings is revealed in the writer's expression of envy of the dead: "Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who pined away, stricken by want of the fruits of the field."(31) With striking similarity, Neufeld describes the sentiments of the surviving Mennonites: "At least the dead are relieved of

all their sufferings. Many of the living actually envy them. So long as we are alive we require food and other provisions."(32)

This reaction of despair raises an important question. Can a historical faith survive the end of history? It would seem that for these Mennonites Neufeld refers to, faith was overwhelmed by despair. As outlined in chapter one, the very institutional nature of religion in Mennonite colonies in Russia never required individual commitments or decisions of faith. Perhaps, for some Mennonites, faith was so integrally linked to their way of life that their faith could not sustain the loss of the historically supportive structures of land and landed existence. For these Mennonites, the end of land was also the end of faith in God. This notion resurfaces in the context of the second response to landlessness and will be discussed more fully in that context.

II.

The second response to landlessness is documented most fully in part II, "The Ordeal of Zagradovka." It represents an opposite reaction to the first described above. Rather than resign themselves to certain torment, the Mennonites of Zagradovka choose to obtain weapons and organize themselves into self-defense units (Selbstschutz) in an effort to protect their lives and possessions.(33)

In part II, Neufeld's narrative changes

substantially. Neufeld himself does not experience the ordeal of which he writes. Rather, he approaches the event as a historian, relying on the eyewitness accounts of others to embellish his story. In a rather fragmented way, Neufeld presents the horror that was the destruction of his home village, and the political/emotional circumstances that provoked it. Although reporting from a historian's perspective, Neufeld does not endeavor to maintain any semblance of objectivity. Rather, he betrays an emotional involvement of great passion. Anger and bitterness pervade his writing, especially when he turns his attention to the issue of the Mennonite Selbstschutz.

The opening pages of the section describe, in first person, Neufeld's departure from the Old Colony and arrival at Muensterberg, the first of the destroyed villages in the path of his travel. The desolate scene before him is dreadful, the silence deafening:

Not a sound anywhere. Not even the barking of a dog. Not a person to be seen in the farmyard in front of me. A dreadful hush in the dark of the moon.

The house no longer bore a roof. Through the eerily gaping window-holes I could see blackened inner walls. Trees devoid of life or motion surrounded walls which once had enclosed a happy home. (34)

The description is an ugly foreshadowing of what he is yet to confront. But rather than continue the narrative to the logical conclusion of his arrival in Zgradovka, Neufeld diverts to a discussion of the political circumstances that preceded the crisis of destruction. Neufeld analyzes the cause and effect of the Selbstschutz with a critical finger pointed at the

Mennonites. In his view, the Mennonites' isolated lifestyle fostered a political naiveté that, in turn, caused them to "foolishly" misinterpret political events. (35)

The retrospective view of historical scholarship supports Neufeld's assessment:

The overwhelming majority of the Mennonites were absolutely apolitical. Few of them read any Russian newspapers; they knew little of the seething cauldron of agitation that was threatening the Czarist regime. . . . and most of them cared even less about what was happening about them. . . . (36)

And again, the experience of Israel informs us that this is the nature of life before the land is lost. The comment about Israel in Lamentations 4:12 reflects a similar problem among the Israelites: "The kings of earth did not believe, or any of the inhabitants of the world, that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem." Of Israelites and Mennonites alike, no one really believed they could lose the land.

Neufeld presents himself as a Jeremiah-like figure in that he seems to harbor some insight. He writes of how he tried to warn the colonists of the consequences of their actions and bitterly condemns the Selbstschutz as both a moral and a tactical blunder. (37) And like Jeremiah condemning the Israelites apostasy, Neufeld recalls the Mennonites' four hundred-year history of commitment to pacifism, declaring:

One can criticize the Zagradoovka Mennonites for taking up arms instead of holding fast to the principle of non-resistance. As good Christians they had no right to show hatred toward their neighbor.

Their duty was to love him even when he wronged them. . . . A Mennonite who surrenders the fundamental idea of peace and affirms war has judged himself. He is no longer a Mennonite. (38)

Neufeld, in the tradition of his earliest forefathers, is adamant that "to suffer wrong is better than to do wrong." (39)

In addition, Neufeld criticizes that the Mennonites' resorting to arms exposed them to their Russian neighbors as self-centered political hypocrites, thus inciting the peasants to more violent acts of revenge:

A bitter truth was held up to the colonists: "When our Russia," so it went, "our women and children, were threatened with attack in 1914, then you refused to take up arms for defensive purposes. But now that it's a question of your own property you are arming yourselves." (40)

The Mennonites of Zagradovka, indeed, suffer almost total annihilation for their "selfish" attitude. Moreover, the hypocrisy of the Mennonites that the Russians so resent is an issue about land.

Neufeld himself regards the quarrel between the Mennonites and their Russian neighbors as an issue about land. (41) The Russians' desire for land and the Mennonites' reluctance to cooperate with redistribution procedures, created an animosity between the two groups that Neufeld describes as "mutual hatred." (42) Using the village of Muensterberg as his example, Neufeld describes how each people's desire for land resulted in the destruction of that village. Neufeld conjectures that quarrels over land allotments reached such a heightened

pitch that the Russian peasants enlisted the aid of Makhno's banditry to destroy the village.(43) After bandits devastated the town, "the local peasants laid claim to the collective farmlands."(44) So the Mennonites concern to keep their land was the very factor that contributed to its loss.

As Neufeld presents these events, it becomes evident that he feels that the Mennonites' preoccupation with land superseded their historical religious conviction about the practice of brotherly love and the way of the suffering church. Neufeld expresses his bitter contempt:

The Mennonites were not exactly disposed to love their enemies. One could hardly expect such an exalted level of Christian charity from the German colonists, whose cultural practices tended to lag well behind their ethical claims. Measured strictly by their own emphasis on positive Christianity, however, they [Mennonites] might have been expected to manifest a higher moral level.(45)

This statement supports the idea mentioned in reference to the response of despair. Perhaps the upheaval these Mennonites endured was, indeed, too overwhelming a tragedy for their simple faith. It can be conjectured that because of the historical lack of necessity for personal, individual commitments of faith, the Mennonite colonists identified their faith with the institutions that defined and supported it. With the loss of those institutions, their faith degenerated to meaninglessness.

One might also question whether Mennonite

faith had already degenerated to meaninglessness prior to the tragedy of land loss. Neufeld's presentation of the Mennonites' denial of religious tradition, and their covetousness of "their" land, certainly points to such a conclusion. From his perspective, the Mennonites had indeed become graspers of the land.

Drawing further on Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites' experiences of the land as a paradigm for understanding the relation of land and faith in Mennonite experience, it can be conjectured that land was lost because faith had become apostasy. For, as we shall see, in the situation of landedness, faith tends to become obscured by preoccupation with the land.

It is clear in the words of Jeremiah that the land was lost because the people of Israel had turned away from Yahweh and his word.(46) Israel is presented in the image of a harlot, whose infidelity is to both covenant relation and the land.(47) In particular, Israel had turned away from God's word about the land.

The history of royal land management is the story of Israel securing the land for herself outside of covenant.(48) The kings of Israel, those appointed to manage the land, forget the covenant perception of land as inheritance. Their overriding concern is ownership of the land.(49) By their actions, the land that was inheritance becomes abomination; and so, by Yahweh's hand the land is lost.(50)

Walter Brueggemann describes the effect

selfish securing of land has upon the people of Israel. It is these descriptions of the nature of faithless land management that bear particular insight for our analysis of Neufeld's depiction of the Mennonites in Russia.

Primarily, the Israelites, during their years as a landed people, become self-oriented--so self-oriented that they can no longer recognize or remember who gave them the land: "Israel had become numbed and dull, stupid . . . non-reflective . . . Covenantal realities had lost their power for Israel. It knew itself to be neither addressed nor accountable."(51) As a result, the life of the people of Israel became one of "self-seeking complacency" and "self-indulgent consumerism."(52) Both history and covenant are forgotten.

After the reign of David, the kings of Israel come to regard the land as a commodity which they both covet and exploit.(53) Writes Brueggemann:

The very land that promised to create space for human joy and freedom became the very source of dehumanizing exploitation and oppression. . . . Society became the frantic effort of the landed to hold onto the turf, no matter what the cost.(54)

The cost, indeed, was dear. During the reign of Solomon, a bureaucratic state was established: ". . . built upon coercion in which free citizens were enslaved for state goals. Remarkably, in one generation, he [Solomon] managed to confiscate Israel's freedom and reduce social order to the very situation of Egyptian slavery."(55) Land ownership is bought for the price of freedom.

Drawing on Jeremiah's distinctions between justice and righteousness/cedar and vermillion, Brueggemann further defines royal management from the reign of Solomon to the time of exile as kings who traded justice and righteousness for cedar and vermillion: "Nothing here of Torah but only horses, wives, silver and gold."(56) In other words, selfish materialistic pursuits replaced covenant faith. Kingly ownership and rule of the land was total.

When finally Jeremiah announces the end of land: "Israel had been engaged for so long in a consumptive form of life, in self-seeking, that it became constitutionally impossible to address this other one [Yahweh] in a committed way."(57) Having land seduces Israel into not just a state of amnesia, but into an amnesia incapable of knowing:(58)

Israel controls a lot of data as royal consciousness does, but this knowing [that] consists in bowing before and trusting in, it cannot do. Israel's knowing is all of a monologic kind, of subject handling object, but knowing Yahweh as covenantal Lord escapes it, as it always does those bent on singularly self-sufficient management.(59)

So land is lost and history in the land is ended.

Part of the nature of Israel's infidelity, then, is characterized by selfishness over the land.(60) Slavery, materialism, and ownership are the key words depicting Israel's history of land management. These terms could as well be applied to the situation of the Mennonites in Russia prior to their experience of land-loss.

The issue of land ownership in the Mennonite colonies in Russia is a good example of how land fostered amnesia and vice. Neufeld himself makes only casual references to this issue. Hence, I will rely on the accounts of historians to provide the background details upon which Neufeld predicates his comments.

In the 1860's, the problems of rapid population growth and a land-law prohibiting the division of farmlands among heirs, combined to create a society of "landless proletariat" in Mennonite colonies. For the most part, these people were regarded by the landholders as second class citizens; which points clearly to the significance of land in Mennonite society at that time.(61) However, the size of the landless population was immense.

In the Molotchna colony, this group comprised nearly two thirds of the district population. These people were denied not only land, but were also deprived of the right to vote in village and district affairs. The obligation to pay taxes, however, was sustained.

In order to survive, some of the landless entered business, trade, or industry.(62) However, the majority of them, "gave little thought to any occupation other than farming," and so, worked as hired hands often on their own family farms.(63) The majority of them were also acutely dissatisfied with their lot in life.

A ready solution to the problem did exist.(64) Large areas of communal land had been set

aside to accommodate landless families. However, wealthy landowners had since discovered that a profit could be made by leasing these areas to the "proletariat." Not only did their wealth increase from collected land rents, but by keeping families landless, they provided themselves with a supply of cheap labor. Landowners, performing much the same function of land managers as the kings of Israel, thus, subjugated the lower classes to satisfy their own material greed.

The practice of "slavery" also extended to the neighboring Russian peasants. For the most part, these hired hands were outrightly treated as slave labor--receiving low pay and perhaps a place in the hay loft to sleep. Neufeld writes that the relationship between Mennonite landowner and Russian worker was that of "capitalist master and inferior servant and not that of equals or brothers."(65)

The church also supported this practice: "The church leaders were for the most part well-to-do farmers, who shared economic interests similar to those of the landowners."(66) Thus, the land seduced the conscience of both the church and landowners into greed for wealth.

Dissension between the "Anwohner" (marginal people) and the "Wirte" (landholders) escalated to a situation of "class hatred."(67) Hence, greed for land and wealth effectively undermined the communities' religious principle of brotherly love. Community leaders

governed according to "selfishness and rudeness of the human heart."(68)

The problem was finally resolved in a bitterly ironic way; that is, by appeal of the landless to the Russian government. In 1866, an "Imperial Rescript" laid the foundation for the establishment of daughter colonies, whereby, the landless would have farmlands made available to them.(69) That Mennonites had to appeal to the state against fellow Mennonites to solve their problem clearly reflects the dissolution of the brotherhood church of Anabaptism.

Even with this solution, however, "social differentiation or stratification" continued to exist in Mennonite society.(70) The political strife of war and the Russian Revolution even failed to unify class differentiation, as suffering often equalizes all humanity. In fact, as Neufeld describes it, the Revolution had the reverse effect:

As a consequence of the Revolution an evil, unbrotherly disaffection often appeared between the more affluent and the poorer Mennonites in Zagradovka. The landowners were reluctant to allow the landless a vote in congregational affairs, as the Bolsheviks had decreed they must.(71)

The emergence of social stratification over the issue of land bears significant implications about the faith of the Mennonite people. Both Neufeld and other historians point out how the land comes to dominate the minds of Mennonites to the extent that their religious mandate to love one's brother is overruled in the cases of

fellow Mennonites and neighboring Russian peasants.

These observations certainly indicate an atrophy of religious consciousness. Neufeld confirms this state of affairs at the end of part II. In a eulogy to his brother, Henry Neufeld, who was killed in the Zagradovka massacre, Neufeld describes the level of religious consciousness among the colonists and the dearth of true Christian activists like his brother:

The Zagradovka Mennonites have little social awareness. It has not been inculcated and developed enough, although Henry Neufeld tried to awake through his sermons precisely such an active concern for others. His words always made a deep impression and provided much food for thought. For a long time, however, he was a voice crying in the wilderness in advancing views designed to lead our Mennonites from mere lip-service to an active Christianity, to a higher ethical plane.(72)

Historian Cornelius Krahn reiterates Neufeld's assessment: "The Gospel had become all too much a 'Sunday' affair. Religion had hardened into a form, outwardly correct, but inwardly cold and dead."(73) He also contends that it is the behavior of the landowners toward the lower classes that most clearly reveals the Mennonites' atrophied faith.(74) Thus, the land, here again, plays a dominant role in shaping faith.

The issue of land also played a part in the development of schisms in the church.(75) As we have seen, the church supported the interests of wealthy landowners, leaving the poor and landless quite neglected. In the early 1800's, one group--having become

disillusioned by the faithless practices of the church--broke away from the established church to form the Kleine Gemeinde. In 1833, one pastor from this group penned a document entitled, "Faith and Reason." (76) Generally, the article presents an analysis of the diseased Mennonite church and a call to return to Anabaptist principles of faith and life. For our purposes, it provides an insightful embellishment to Neufeld's description of the Mennonites. In the pastor's view, the rise of secularism and a preoccupation with "riches and things of the world" had tainted the contemporary church. He lists the "passionate habits" of the Mennonites--among them: "pride, ostentation, greed for money, and lust for wealth, avarice . . . luxury . . . vicious life." (77) The description is starkly reminiscent of Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the "cedar and vermillion" interests of the kingly Israelites discussed earlier.

The example of the land issue in Russia illuminates how greed for land in Mennonite society led to the destruction of the brotherhood, the stratification of society, and social dissension. All of these historical indications affirm Neufeld's assessment, like Brueggemann's assessment of the Israelites, that the Mennonites became preoccupied with ownership and covetousness of the land, to the loss of their faith. The land, in both cases, is mismanaged because it is regarded as owned property rather than acknowledged as covenant

gift. In both cases, the result is social strife and finally loss of land.

In light of these conclusions, one might legitimately question whether the Mennonites suffer landlessness because of the apostasy of their selfishness over land, rather than because of political maneuverings beyond their considerable control. The example of Israel, of course, informs us that coveting land is the sure way to land-loss. Referring to the Israelites' land-loss, Brueggemann writes:

Land is not lost, history is not denied, because of some political eventuality, but because of the enmity of holiness in the midst of history. We of course do not believe that in our time about turns in land and in history. But they did not then either. (78)

Of course, we cannot make the radical assumption that, simply because the attitudes and resulting social situation of the Mennonites in Russia parallel those of the Israelites in Brueggemann's analysis, God's judgement of wrath repeats itself in history. However, as Neufeld presents it, the formation of the Selbstschutz and the state of religious consciousness of Mennonites in general manifest a selfish, unbrotherly people concerned to cling to their land. In any case, the true significance of these observations is what they reveal about the influence of the land on the Mennonites' life of faith. Essentially, the Old Testament pattern as presented by Brueggemann is duplicated in Neufeld's presentation. Landedness leads to forgetfulness

and selfishness, which ends in loss of land.

IV.

Both of the first two responses to landlessness--despair and self-defense--indicate that the Mennonites' faith and life was lived closely connected to the land. Generally, when they suffered the loss of their land, their faith was exposed as degenerate. It is only in the third response that a sense of ongoing and sustained faith is present; and again, it is integrally linked to land. As previously mentioned, this third response is longing for escape to new land.

In both the first and third parts of A Russian Dance of Death, Neufeld addresses the theme of hope for life in a new land. In part I, Neufeld writes the word "emigration" only three times. But significantly, another word appears alongside it each time--that word is hope. For Neufeld, the two concepts are inseparable. While surrounded by death and disease, he writes in his diary: "Anyone who still clings to life and hope for the future can think only of emigration. . . . It is the one idea that keeps us going, our one hope."(79) One can also see the interrelation of these terms in part III, "Escape from the Maze."

The story follows the journey of three prisoners of war--a North German, a Saxon with his new Russian bride, and a Czech--who pool their resources to facilitate their escape from Russia. The North German is

a rather subdued but intelligent, sensitive, and resourceful character. Contrarily, the Saxon is a somewhat swarthy fellow, more inclined to lose his patience than keep it. His Russian bride is virtually bereft of personality. The Czech is a man of words, often indulging in philosophical ramblings. Of the three men, he is also the most faint-hearted. Neufeld disguises himself as the North German in the story and, from that perspective, he narrates the events of their journey from Kherson province in the Ukraine to his homeland, Germany.

Of the three parts of A Russian Dance of Death, this is the most consciously fictionalized and is also the weakest. The story line often omits detail, leaving the reader with many unanswered questions. Characters, too, are largely without dimension. One reviewer appropriately summarizes the weakness of the story as "tending to draw too many blood out of stone conclusions." (80)

The themes in this book generally parallel those in "Under the Black Flag of Anarchy"; except that, in keeping with the author's non-Mennonite disguise, the world Neufeld describes is non-Mennonite. In this sense, many of the circumstances in the story of "Escape From the Maze" are analagous to the Mennonites' experience of land-loss Neufeld describes in parts I and II. For example, the suffering and feelings of displacement and landlessness that Neufeld describes in part I, reappear in part III in reference to Russian peasants. As well, the

devastation the sojourners confront in their travels effectively portrays an atmosphere of wilderness wasteland.

On one occasion while ambling down the road, the three men discuss the outrageous thievery in Russia--be it banditry, requisitioning, or other--whereupon the Czech summarizes the conditions of existence in Russia. His description could apply to either the Mennonites of Zagradozka or the Russian peasants of the Ukraine:

"All concepts are on shaky ground. It's most unfortunate when principles which have stood for many generations as pillars supporting certain views suddenly collapse and people are unable to find new ones of equal value; after all, values cannot emerge overnight but can only grow with time. Such a situation is not only unfortunate, it's disastrous. . . . The catastrophe comes about precisely because so many people follow the traditional and current laws only through force of habit or, if not through force of habit, then through fear of punishment. When fear of punishment no longer exists, when force of habit is broken, then weak dependent people are governed not by reason but by their passions."(81)

With startling accuracy, Neufeld here describes precisely the nature of existence when land is lost. The Mennonites of Khortitza-Rosental and Zagradozka experience the same upheaval that the Czech here describes as the situation for Russian peasants.

Moreover, we can also see that the same hope that sustains Neufeld through the tragedy of land-loss in Khortitza-Rosental, sustains him also as a North German in the hostile non-Mennonite countryside of the Ukraine. The first indication of the depth of Neufeld's hope is

manifest in the opening paragraph of the story: "As we looked around for the last time, . . . we felt no pain in saying farewell. Our new found hope left no room for regrets."(82)

The journey proceeds without major disturbance until one morning Neufeld's companions inform him of their intent to relinquish their dream of escape. Their hope had dwindled and, along with it, their determination. Neufeld himself is devastated by the news: "The idea of giving up my long cherished dream horrified me."(83) In fact, Neufeld is so filled with the idea of freedom from Russia that he decides to continue the journey in solitude, despite the evident danger of such an undertaking. As it happens, the influence of a few well-placed words from a shrewd old Russian peasant reinforces Neufeld's companions' weakened resolution and they resume their travels.

The next barrier to stall the travellers is a battle front. The Bolsheviks and Ukrainian Nationalists are waging war. Thus temporarily halted, Neufeld and his companions settle on the farmstead of a local peasant to await a shift in the battle line. As they wait, the tension of delay is almost unbearable for Neufeld: "The mere thought of being forced to postpone the journey home was inexpressibly painful to me. I clung desperately to the hope that somehow it would be possible to find a way through the front. . . . I simply wasn't prepared to turn back. The very idea made me shiver."(84) Here again is a

vivid expression of the depth of Neufeld's hope and determination. It is the power that sustains him in the surrounding wilderness.

Neufeld's undaunted hope reaps its reward. The battle front passes over them and they are once again able to resume travel. The final pages of the book describe the nighttime exodus of the group through the Sluch River and onto Polish soil. The terror and suspense of the experience are poorly depicted, but enough is communicated to give an impression of the strength of resolve needed to execute the dangerous excursion. The faint-hearted Czech betrays a fright so great he considers remaining behind.

In the end, the journey is successful. After appealing to Polish authorities for transport to Germany, they indeed accomplish their task of escaping Russia. The feeling of freedom is ecstasy: "We were suddenly overcome with the feeling that we had escaped from a monster which had clutched at us with a thousand arms so as to squeeze and choke us slowly but surely until we had gasped out our last breath. We had escaped from it. Free!"(85)

If one reads this story as an autobiography, thus "seeing through" Neufeld's disguise, these expressions make a significant statement about Mennonite faith and the land. All of Neufeld's strength and determination are derived from feelings of hope. These feelings Neufeld depicts, if not identical, are certainly analagous to the broader sentiments of all Mennonites

regarding emigration. In this fictionalized account, Neufeld is returning to a homeland rather than venturing into unknown regions. Nevertheless, because of the autobiographical nature of the tale, one can safely surmise that the basic feelings would be similar. Moreover, whether it is a homeland or a foreign territory, the key point is that the hope is land oriented. That is, there is potential for renewed life on new soil.

Neufeld demonstrates the connection between the land, his hope, and his faith upon arrival in his homeland. In describing his feelings, Neufeld, for the first time, employs an outrightly Christian analogy:

The sun rose but it was an entirely different sun. There was more than a hint of fresh promise in this red morning sky. A feeling of gratitude overcame us, as though we should be sinking to our knees in reverent awe inside a cathedral. (86)

The passage is essentially a reaffirmation of faith. The fulfillment of hope achieved by emigration, carries with it a new recognition of God's presence. Thus, new land symbolizes not only hope for life, but for faith as well.

V.

Dietrich Neufeld's account of the tragic downfall of the Mennonites in Russia and his escape to Germany contain several insights into the relation of land and faith for the Mennonites of that time. Moreover, the historical pattern of landedness to loss of the land is analagous to Brueggemann's assessment of the Israelites.

Both Israelites and Mennonites lose the land through political oppression; and for both, the experience signifies the end of history in the land. Also in both cases, some people respond to the event with sorrow and despair, under the weight of which faith seems to crumble.

Some Mennonites also resort to self-defense and the use of violence. Neufeld describes these actions as indicative of the Mennonites' loss of faith over greed for land. An examination of the nature of Mennonite society in landedness, and its resemblance to Israelite society in landedness, supports Neufeld's portrait. Greed for land seduces the people away from God and the principles of Mennonite religious life, and then, the land is lost. However, we cannot assume that these parallels point conclusively to a repetition of God's judgement upon his people. On the other hand, we can conclude that Neufeld's presentation of the situation portrays the response of self-defense as indicative of faithlessness. In either case, what is more central to our concern is the significance of having land and not having land for the Mennonites' life of faith.

As described in chapter one of this thesis, land was a key ingredient in the Russian Mennonites' life of faith. Generally, faith was lived by working the land and living in isolated, exclusively Mennonite colonies. According to the nature of Mennonite faith, religious values formed the basis of the social, economic, and political structures of society. Due to the pervading and

particular nature of their religion, along with the importance of farming, Mennonite faith became land dependent. Moreover, the fact that the Mennonites were able to live out their two kingdom theology so prosperously and for so long, only sanctioned land-dependence, and thereby, deepened the land/faith bond. As Neufeld presents it, landed existence eventually created a situation wherein the land predominated in Mennonite colonies instead of faith. Life in the land seduced the people to become greedy and selfish land owners. Then, when the land was lost, the people's faith did not sustain them and they fell to despair or violence. Only those, who like Neufeld, clung to the prospect of new land, maintained an enduring faith.

History itself testifies to the reality of the new land/faith connection. The Mennonites who chose to remain in Russia gradually became integrated into Soviet society:

The Mennonites, who are still living in Soviet Russia today, are not free people and independent farmers anymore. Their villages and communities have dissolved. They live scattered in the wide land among an alien race. They are labourers in collectives and factories. Their children attend communist schools, and if any adults seek admittance into a church, they have to join the Baptists or some other evangelical congregation. (87)

In a more up-to-date publication, C.H. Smith writes that a few Mennonite churches have survived in Soviet Russia, but he adds that their "future is not bright." (88)

On the other hand, those Mennonites who migrated to North and South America are described as

"pilgrims of faith."(89) Indeed, many Mennonites who migrated to these countries immediately began the work of re-establishing "landed" communities such as they had known in Russia prior to the Revolution. Emigration and settling in a new land, then, inspired hope not only for escape from the grave Russia had become to the Mennonites, but also represented the opportunity to rebuild the integrated society in which their faith had once flourished. New land meant a new opportunity to work, live, and worship according to the Mennonite traditions of peace and separation--and intrinsic to that, an agricultural vocation. Thus, faith is maintained or renewed on new soil.

This third response is representative of a trend in Anabaptist/Mennonite history. In terms of land, their history is essentially a number of histories--of beginnings and endings in various homelands. The history of Mennonite faith also corresponds to these histories of landedness and landlessness. Faith is tied to the land, but is sustained because of landlessness. In landedness, faith is seduced by the land. Only when the land is lost does renewal of faith become a reality. Thus, the pattern of repeated migration can be seen as the Mennonites' own way of protecting history and faith to ensure its continuation. As we shall see in the following chapters, the problems of complacency in landed existence, the testing of faith in landlessness, and the renewal of faith on new land recur as the story of the Mennonites

continues. Of central importance in all of these situations is that faith is always held in relation to the land.

NOTES

1. Dietrich Neufeld, Ein Tagebuch aus dem Reich des Totentanzes, Germany: Selbstverlag, 1921); Mennonitentum in der Ukraine: Schicksals Geschichte Sogradowkas (Germany: Selbstverlag, 1922); Zu Pferd 1000 km durch die Ukraina (Germany: Selbstverlag, 1922).

2. Dr. Al Reimer, professor of English, University of Winnipeg in conversation. Permission to quote granted.

3. Neufeld himself refers somewhat despairingly to this aspect of Mennonite society, pp. 56, 87, 88.

4. J. H. Janzen, "The Literature of the Russo-Canadian Mennonites," Mennonite Life 1:1 (January 1946): 22f. Arnold Dyck's novel Verloren in der Steppe poignantly captures the problems of a youth in coming to terms with such attitudes in his own family and Mennonite colony in Russia.

5. Harry Loewen, "Canadian Mennonite Literature: Longing for a Lost Homeland," in The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 76.

6. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 113.

7. Al Reimer, A Russian Dance of Death, Introduction (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), pp. 4-5.

8. Dietrich Neufeld, A Russian Dance of Death, trans. by Al Reimer, (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), p. 7.

9. Ibid., p. 9.

10. Al Reimer, Introduction, p. 5.

11. There are several indications in the text that this is the case. See for example p. 56, 69, 70, 79, 80, 87, 88.

12. Neufeld expresses his own dissatisfaction with this element of Mennonite life in Part II, "The Ordeal of Zagradowka."

13. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 7 & 9.

14. For a definition of "landed" see chapter one of this study.

15. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 9.
16. Ibid., p. 9 and Brueggemann, Land, p. 131.
17. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 9.
18. Ibid., p. 11.
19. Ibid.
20. For full details on the life and character of Makhno see Victor Peters, Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist (Winnipeg, 1970).
21. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 13.
22. Ibid., p.61.
23. Brueggemann, Land, p. 114.
24. The idea of "place" is essentially the same as "landed." See chapter one of this study.
25. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 26.
26. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 15-44.
27. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 63-64.
28. Ibid., p. 51.
29. Ibid., pp. 53, 54, 60.
30. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 131-132, Lamentations 1:1-22.
31. Lamentations 4:9.
32. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 33-34.
33. This is still a sensitive issue for some Mennonites. See Al Reimer, "Appendix B" in A Russian Dance of Death, pp. 133f.
34. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 67.
35. Ibid., pp. 68-73.
36. David Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review (October 1973, January 1974), p. 52.
37. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 68-73, 79-81.
38. Ibid., p. 80.

39. Ibid., p. 71.
40. Ibid., p. 79.
41. Ibid., p. 68.
42. Ibid., p. 71.
43. Ibid., pp. 75-78.
44. Ibid., p. 77.
45. Ibid., p. 79.
46. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 107-122, Jeremiah 3:1-5, 18:13-17, 21:7, 22:6-9, 24-27, 28:14-16, 29:21-23.
47. Brueggemann, Land, p. 119.
48. Ibid., pp. 90-106.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., pp. 121-122.
51. Ibid., p. 112.
52. Ibid., p. 101.
53. Ibid., pp. 10-11. Brueggemann also notes that Josiah and Hezekiah represent exceptions to this trend.
54. Ibid., p. 11.
55. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
56. Jeremiah 22:13-16, Brueggemann, Land, pp. 11, 89, 114-116. Again, Josiah and Hezekiah are excepted.
57. Brueggemann, Land, p. 121.
58. The term "knowing" here refers to the Biblical definition meaning "to acknowledge covenant loyalty and the accompanying demands," Ibid., p. 105.
59. Brueggemann, Land, p. 105.
60. One, of course, must also recognize that Israel's infidelity is expressed in the worship of other Gods, Ibid., pp. 105-106 and Hosea 2:1-13, Jeremiah 2:7-9, Isaiah 1:11-15.
61. C. J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), p. 133.

62. Rempel, "Commonwealth," p. 26.
63. Dyck, Mennonite History, p. 133.
64. Cornelius Krahn, "Some Social Attitudes of the Mennonites in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review 9 (October 1935): 167f.
65. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 78.
66. Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951): 17-33.
67. Dyck, Mennonite History, p. 133 and Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," p. 25. You will remember that Neufeld describes the same problem of the Mennonites toward their Russian neighbors, p. 71.
68. Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," p. 26.
69. Ibid., pp. 25-26 and Dyck, Mennonite History, pp. 133-134.
70. Krahn, "Social Attitudes," p. 172.
71. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 88.
72. Ibid., p. 87.
73. Krahn, "Social Attitudes," p. 172.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., pp. 172-173 and Kreider, "Anabaptist Conception," pp. 27-30.
76. Robert Friedmann, trans. and ed. "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered in a Treatise of 1833," Mennonite Quarterly Review 22 (April 1948): 89f.
77. Ibid., p. 90.
78. Brueggemann, Land, p. 114.
79. Neufeld, Russian Dance, pp. 51, 64.
80. Gerald Peters, review of A Russian Dance of Death, by Dietrich Neufeld, Mennonite Life (December 1979): 28.
81. Neufeld, Russian Dance, p. 107.

82. Ibid., p. 89.
83. Ibid., p. 103.
84. Ibid., p. 121.
85. Ibid., p. 126.
86. Ibid.
87. Aaron Klassen ed., In the Fullness of Time (Waterloo, Ont.: Reeve Bean Ltd., 1974), p. 11. One must, of course, recognize that the political oppression in Russia has had a great effect on the failure of the Mennonite churches in Russia. However, what is significant is that those Mennonites who suffered persecution and moved did not lose faith, while those who stayed in Russia amalgamated with larger society.
88. C. H. Smith, Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed. (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981), p. 341.
89. John B. Toews, Lost Fatherland (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), p. 120.

CHAPTER THREE

No Strangers in Exile

I.

No Strangers in Exile is an appropriate sequel to A Russian Dance of Death, for the political events out of which each book is born occurred in historical sequence. The setting of the novel is Russia, about ten years after the time of events chronicled by Neufeld. On the political scene during those years, the Czarist regime had been overthrown, and under the iron fist of Joseph Stalin, Russia was being collectivized. Those Mennonites who remained in Russia confronted a grim destiny. They were being assimilated into farm collectives or imprisoned or exiled to labor camps.

The story of No Strangers in Exile focuses on the lives of a remnant Mennonite community who are exiled from their ancestral home on the Volga steppes to the Vologda forest in the far north. They are Russia's sacrifice to Stalin's Five Year Plan; part of which included the deportation of all "kulaks"--otherwise known as anyone and their family who owned land, machinery, livestock, or a home, and all clergy.(1) On various

pretexts, these hard-working people were shot, or imprisoned, or exiled en masse.(2)

The novel is divided into four parts. Part one details the tortuous journey by train and horse-drawn sleds that transport the group from Moscow to the northern forest. Parts two to four depict the first year-and-a-half of the community's "barrack" existence in the taiga.

Hans Harder, assuming the pseudonym of Alexander Schwarz, first wrote the novel in German in the year 1934, under the title In Wologdas weissen Wäldern. He wrote the book with the specific intention of "awakening" Western societies to the brutality of Soviet activities in Russia.(3) As a result, the book contains some rather didactic and propagandist material. In 1979, Al Reimer translated the book into English. He both edited and expanded the original text with the dual aim of minimizing those elements which culturally and historically confine the story, while increasing "dramatic impact and readability."(4) Consequently, the style, plot, and characters of the two versions are somewhat varied. Places where the German text is stylistically abrupt or characters' motivations are ambiguous appear in the English version both embellished and deepened. Other scenes and characters have been deleted or replaced. Generally, the English translation tends to highlight the elements of the novel relating to the Mennonites' experience, while downplaying the specifically

propagandist or didactic material. The following analysis will refer primarily to the English text.

The analysis itself will examine Harder's presentation of the condition of exile as a state of landlessness, and explore how the faith of the exiles is affected by their new situation in the land. I shall continue to rely on Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Biblical experience of landedness and landlessness as a paradigm for comparison and illumination.

II.

The situation of exile is a peculiar type of landlessness. For the Israelites, it was unlike the condition of wilderness wandering wherein the people were fed by the hope of promised land. Rather, exile occurred because the land was held and improperly managed.(5) Consequently, the condition of exile is not simply landlessness, but is landlessness freighted with memories of the land and landed existence. Brueggeman describes exile as:

the sharpest point of discontinuity when none of the old traditions or conventional institutions any longer seemed valid or trustworthy. Exile without land or even the prospect of land was indeed Israel's null point when every promise seemed void.(6)

The landlessness of exile is characterized by radical discontinuity and insecurity. The history of life in the land comes to an end, without promise for the future. And because history has ended, the discontinuity between past and present is so extreme that all structures

of meaning and reality fall into confusing ambiguity; traditions are untrustworthy. As a result, life in exile is essentially life lived in a void of disorientation, which breeds insecurity.

The Mennonites' experience of exile, as we see it in Harder's novel, contains all of these elements of the Biblical paradigm. The idea that landed history has surely ended for the Mennonites is portrayed symbolically in the character of Liese, Harm's wife.(7) At seven months pregnant, she is raped by bandits with the result that her baby is stillborn, and then she herself dies.(8) The passage effectively captures the nature of the experience of land-loss for the whole Mennonite commonwealth. The belly of the "plump and rosy" woman, bearer of new life and promise of the continuation of history, is crushed like an "eggshell."(9)

The significance of the symbol of stillbirth increases if one considers the Biblical symbolic value of birth in reference to the promise of God to Abraham and Sarah. The aged and barren Sarah produces an heir, which is a sign from God of his promise of new history and new life in a land that will belong to their descendants.(10) Thus the symbol of birth is directly related to the procurement of land. By applying the value of the Biblical symbolism to the story of Liese, her stillborn infant, conversely, signifies the end of land and the end of promise.

The radical discontinuity between past and

present existence that is the consequence of the end of history is evident in the first pages of the novel. As the group sits huddled in the boxcar that is to carry them from Moscow to Kotlas in the far north, the narrator of the story, Alexander Harms, ruminates over the disparity between the past lives and present condition of each of the familiar faces in the boxcar.(11) Each character sketch emphasizes the alien nature of their present world over against the familiar and idyllic world that has been tragically lost. Harms concludes that the old way of life is truly gone: "Our idyllic old colony with its farms of up to two thousand acres and each farm's three dozen horses . . . We'll never see any of it again."(12) Moreover, their loss leaves them in a void of disorientation. The past has been wiped away and the future is unknown. At present, the perimeters of a boxcar define and contain their whole world. Thus, they exist in a void of timelessness and ambiguity.(13)

The depth of discontinuity between past and present is drawn in sharp relief when the exiles arrive at their destination. Contrasting Harder's descriptions of the place these people once knew as home over against the place in the north that is to become their home adds further support to the notion that history has truly ended. Harms recalls the Mennonite colonies as:

prosperous . . . with their large, solid farmhouses, abundant gardens, well-tilled fields and splendid stock, and energetic and devout farm families with their devotion to tradition and their German language and customs.(14)

Their new location, on the other hand, could not be more different:

Deep in the vast pine forest we arrive at a compound consisting of a dozen dilapidated wooden barracks, each measuring about six by twenty-five meters: a wall down the middle divides them into halves . . . There is no ceiling: the bare board roof is full of gaping cracks and is sagging in the middle where the weight of snow is heaviest. The long cracks have admitted snow into the interior which is furnished only with tiers of rough plank bunks warped and weathered in crazy angles of disrepair. . . . The window openings . . . have been nailed shut with boards. The floor consists of bare, well-trodden earth. In the center stands a large brick stove smeared over in a makeshift way with clay. (15)

The distinction between the two settings is essentially that of the Biblical sown and unsown land and exemplifies our descriptions of wilderness and landlessness discussed in chapter one of this study. That is, in the past, these Mennonites had lived in a paradise they had created in the wilderness of the Russian steppes. This wilderness was an Edenic place of refuge from the world in which its inhabitants had known the security and complacency of landed existence. Their new location is likewise in the wilderness. However, it is a land of hostility and alienation; it is a land that is no land.

Throughout the novel we are reminded of the malevolency of the world into which these Mennonites have been cast. In part one, as the train progresses northward, every narrated glimpse of life outside the boxcar presents a picture of decay, disease, and death. (16) "Fur Cap," the commander of the train and symbol of Soviet power in their midst, is violently

abusive of these people. As Harms attests: ". . . as usual the man doesn't spare even the women and children the grossest abuse and curses."(17) Even the natural environment, with its extreme cold and snow in winter and insects and bogs in summer, is hostile to all living things.

In this aspect, the Mennonites' place of exile closely resembles Brueggemann's description of the nature of unsown land: "To be placed in the wilderness is to be cast into the land of the enemy--cosmic, natural, historical--without any props or resources that give life order and meaning."(18)

In the context of sown and unsown land, the Mennonites are exiled from a flourishing garden to a hostile and barren "northern desert," or from landed paradise to landless wilderness. This reversal of environment type further illuminates the discontinuity between past and present worlds that indicates the radical end of history.

Such immense alteration of environment creates in the exiles a deep sense of alienation. In one way, the people suffer from a sense of dislocation, or of being aliens, due simply to the completely foreign nature of the new environment. But there is also a more deep-seated component which is rooted in the fact that exile is life after the end of history. Of the Israelites' experience, Brueggemann explains:

Exile was not simply displacement from the land

but it was the experience of the end of creation, the exhaustion of salvation history, the demise of king, temple, city, land, and all those supports which give structure and meaning to life. Put in current terminology it was the experience of the death of God.(19)

In like manner, through the voice of Ohm Peters, Harder characterizes the situation of exile for the Mennonites:

"Since we have lost God in Russia, we've also lost the true meaning of home. And so everything has come unravelled."(20)

So, inherent in the loss of land is the loss of all structures whereby the Word of God is known and understood. In Israel's case, the structures were king, temple, city, and land. In the Mennonites' case, they are colony, church, family, and land. In both cases, the structures are intimately connected to the land, for they involve all of the faith traditions that were developed in relation to having land. The absence of these structures causes feelings of alienation that, at bottom, are feelings of estrangement from God. Thus, with loss of land, the structures of faith are also lost and therefore God is lost. In the landlessness of exile, the voice of God is silent.(21)

In No Strangers in Exile, the people's sense of alienation from God is reflected in the community. Part of the historical faith tradition of the Mennonites is that community was regarded as equivalent to the brotherhood church, which was representative of the body of Christ.(22) Thus, in landedness, faith was expressed

through a unified community. Now, with the absence of the traditional structure of the old colony, the people in the boxcar feel the absence of its very center (God). Their feelings of alienation prevail over their increasingly feeble attempts to communicate. As the train rolls northward, Harms repeatedly observes that feelings of isolation and loneliness are invading the group.(23) The result is that the remnant brotherhood community becomes disjoined. At the end of part one, Harms describes the degenerated state of their community: "We have little to say to each other. . . It's as though we have become disembodied from each other, become separate atoms floating alone and silent and aimless in a void."(24) This disassociation reflects what is, at bottom, the people's sense of estrangement from God which is the consequence of exile.

The landlessness of exile for these Mennonites is more than dislocation. They are alienated from the land, which also means that they are alienated from the traditional structures of faith and alienated from the very center from which all meaning evolves. Hence, faith and all traditional perceptions of reality are cast into doubt.

Harder provides a striking example of the extent to which perceptions of reality have become unreliable for the exiles. As the group plods through the final stretch of forest leading to their destination, Harms describes his own state of being: "I am overcome by

a curious feeling of unreality, as though any moment now we will all, horses and people, stop moving and stand here like trees, frozen forever into weird shapes of arctic petrification.(25)

First of all, the above passage indicates the depth of Harms' feelings of alienation; i.e., he is overcome by a feeling of unreality.(26) That life is now unreal for Harms indicates that he has become so estranged from the present, his past, his God, and his brethren that nothing of what he knows as real or meaningful remains in his life. The form his imagination gives to those feelings of unreality is of life simply freezing solid.

As he continues along the trail, Harms confronts the very embodiment of his thought: ". . . the sight of a snow-covered rig which with horse and driver had been buried in this boundless graveyard of ice and snow."(27) So what Harms imagines as unreality is suddenly present before him as a startling actuality. By this device, Harder effectively indicates the extent to which meaning has become confused. That which Harms imagines as a portrayal of "unreality" is suddenly before him as reality. Thus, the parameters of his world view are proven untrustworthy.

Even after the group of exiles has settled in their new location and developed a daily routine, they find little consolation for their confusion and insecurity. The hostile and barren forest environment

continues to oppress them. Life is a daily struggle against cold, hunger, and exhaustion. Moreover, their style of life--now without the freedom and privacy they had come to take for granted in the old colony--fosters continued feelings of estrangement from reality.

Essentially, the Mennonites' life in the taiga is dominated by weariness. Harder repeatedly employs this and other synonymous terms when describing the state of existence for these people.(28) The term, I think, can be interpreted in two ways. In one context, the term refers to the purely physical fatigue the exiles suffer due to strenuous labor and insufficient nourishment. In another context, the term refers to a general state of the soul.

Brueggemann, in discussing the nature of exile for the Israelites, writes:

The context of exile suggests that weariness is an experience of the collapse of everything secure and precious, the jeopardizing of one's historical identity, submission to forces and powers which are hostile or at least indifferent and the absence of any support or assurance of rescue.(29)

This passage reiterates the insecurity inherent in life after the end of history, and is also an accurate assessment of the quality of existence for the exiles in Harder's novel.

As previously noted, the nature of land-loss necessarily involves the collapse of all things secure and precious. Land, material goods, community, church, and family were among those things that collapsed with

land-loss. Historical identity, based upon the traditions of faith and culture that comprise the parameters of reality/meaning in existence, is confused. Discontinuity between past and present worlds fractures the solidarity upon which historical identity depends. Furthermore, the Mennonites are prisoners, forced to submit to the hostile Soviet authority of Fur Cap and his guards. They are also so isolated from the larger world that whichever human powers might be in a position to assist the exiles, do not even know of their plight.(30) And lastly, the possibility of rescue is as unlikely as weekly rest days.(31)

Weariness as a state of the soul is the cumulative effect of all the factors mentioned above, which combine to create a condition of life that is radically insecure. Weariness defines the nature of existence in a place of chaos. Thus, for the Mennonites in exile, life is basically without meaning.

However, these people have not relinquished their desire to survive.(32) How, then, is life lived and faith maintained in the landlessness of exile? Where do the people turn to fill the void of meaningless existence?

In our exemplary story of the Bible, the Israelites in Babylon maintain a meaningful identity by clinging to the identity/reality of their past; i.e., by remembering:

It is in the context of exile that Israel told its best stories. . . . Israel went back into its memories, to the time when the history-making,

history-summoning words were spoken which gave Israel enduring identity. . . . Israel told stories of rootage and belonging. It recited genealogies. . . . The stories prevent Israel from accepting the identity Babylon would bestow . . . (33)

The Mennonites, too, turn to remembered reality to fill their present emptiness. Harms relates: "My memory is as full as my stomach is empty." (34) The form of their remembering is twofold. Harms and his friends often converse about their old way of life and in this way re-connect themselves to their history and historical identity. Secondly, in their struggle to avoid the apathy and despair of a life of total meaninglessness, the exiles reenact traditions. They rely on the traditions of landed existence to bolster faith now, as they had always done in the past, expecting that some outward continuity with the past would provide them with meaningful structures in the present.

Ohm Peters' worship services, for example, are a conscious attempt to provide spiritual nourishment by appeal to tradition. The content of the services follows a time-honoured pattern: a reading from the Bible, words from the leader, songs remembered from the old world, and prayer. The Christmas celebration, in particular, represents a classic example of meaning and identity derived from tradition. The familiar Christmas carol, Bible reading, and closing prayer, along with a decorated evergreen and gifts for everyone all reenact a ritual from their faith tradition that effectively rekindles community spirit and enlivens weary souls. (35)

Ohm Peters himself is a symbolic link to landed existence. Harms tells us: "More than anyone, he is our link with the world we once lived in, felt comfortable in."(36) Peters, together with the Orthodox priest, Father Nikolai, represent archetypal men of faith in the novel. They are representatives of a religious world once known, but that is now no longer in existence.(37) As such, these men are symbols of continuity and strength and are depended upon by the others for consolation and reassurance.(38)

The Mennonites' faith connection to an agricultural way of life is not forgotten either. Harms, Wolff, Tielmann, and Koehn regularly wander to nearby grain fields on their rest days.(39) On one occasion, Koehn whittles himself a walking stick, explaining: "'It's to help me recapture the feeling of being back in the village again on a lazy Sunday afternoon looking over the young crops.'"(40) For the other men as well, the presence of fields instead of forest revivifies memories of the past, thereby fortifying their own historical identity.

The community garden serves much the same purpose. As previously noted, working the land was considered by many Mennonites to be a sacred as well as a traditional vocation.(41) So the act of planting a garden reenacts both their agricultural tradition and their faith tradition which, in turn, reinforces their historical

identity and sense of rootage.

That the activity of growing a garden effects spiritual rejuvenation is obvious in the reactions of the exiles. The women sing as they plant and weed, and every day the forest workers walk by to check the garden's progress.(42) In these ways, the Mennonites of No Strangers in Exile seek to fill the void that is landlessness by turning to the land, the soil, for hope and meaning.

The depth of the people's continued identification with cultivating the land becomes particularly evident through Wolff's reaction to the idea of a garden. He comments: "'May one be permitted to ask for how long a period this model farm is to operate? In the end you may create a rustic paradise here you won't want to leave.'"(43) His statement is an ironic allusion to the Mennonites' historical success of creating paradise from wilderness, and also illuminates the people's desperation to build some structure of meaning/identity through continuity with the past.

The theme of hope derived from new life in the land recurs with the coming of spring. Harms is affected with ". . . a feeling of excitement, a singing in the blood . . . [as] frost-stunned nature begins to stir and stretch."(44) The activities of spring renewal in nature, like those of cultivating the land, reflect new life back into the weary souls of those who have survived the deadening winter. The spectacular drama of spring

break-up on the Mezen River, in particular, revitalizes spirits. Harms describes his response to the event: "We feel emotionally purged by this exuberant, reckless display of primitive power, by this extravagant promise of the coming of spring and of renewed life even in the midst of this wintry desolation."(45)

That strength and hope can come from activities in nature can be seen, in one respect, as an outgrowth of the people's historical, agricultural tie to the land. As farmers they would naturally develop a keen awareness of seasonal change. It is a reality of the past now evident in the present. But the cycle of the seasons also signifies the presence of a controlling power beyond human reach. Following the event of break-up on the river, Harms expresses this very thought: "We may be prisoners here, but even Fur Cap and the State cannot control the cyclical movement of the seasons. . . . we are all . . . equally helpless in the face of an everchanging world whose natural rhythms are controlled by a higher power than any that man can muster."(46) New life in nature signifies a presence of God in the land; He has not after all abandoned them to eternal winter. In this way, the arrival of spring acts as a kind of reassurance of life, and therefore as a source of support for hope and faith.

To briefly summarize the role of land in the lives of the exiles, we can see that it acts in two ways as a source for structuring meaning. Cultivated land

links the people to their agricultural tradition, while the power revealed in nature itself gives them reassurance of God's abiding presence in the world he has created. Both of these appeals to the land help to fill the void of meaninglessness for the exiles by effecting a sense of continuity amidst discontinuity.

In addition to religious services and the land, there are other appeals to tradition evident in No Strangers in Exile. The practice of writing "begging letters," besides being a bold attempt to prevent starvation, can be seen as yet another attempt of the people to link up with their past. Although most of the exiles have no family or relations in Germany, the fact that their historical roots lie in that country is sufficient reason for them to communicate.(47) In light of this fact, the letters represent an appeal to the consanguineous Mennonite brotherhood. The family was/is a central structure of Mennonite society, and like the church, is a symbol of the kingdom of God extending to include not only members of one's local church, but all Mennonite people.(48) In this context, the letter writing becomes an attempt to bolster historical identity through identification with the ecclesiastical family that is the Mennonite brotherhood.

Furthermore, Alexander Harms' escape attempt follows the Mennonite tradition of hope for new life on new land that we observed in A Russian Dance of Death; while Waldemar Wolff seeks strength in the more sedentary

tradition of marriage. Wolff's justification for the action accurately summarizes the reason behind all of the appeal to tradition heretofore presented. Wolff explains:

"I need . . . to soothe the weariness in my soul. . . . I cling to life and act as though it means something when I know it doesn't. I persuade myself we can follow a normal routine here - work for our daily bread, have social intercourse, and even maintain some semblance of spiritual life. It's all different from before, of course, but it's all here. The dying is here too, different from before. And if death why not marriage, different from before? That's part of the pattern too."(49)

The pattern Wolff refers to is the pattern of life known in landed existence. His marriage, along with the exiles' memories, the worship services the garden, the walks to the fields, the letters, and the escape attempt all represent the exiles' various attempts to structure the chaos of landless existence into the secure and meaningful order of their past lifestyle. Even the graveyard--place where the pattern ends--is located in a birch grove, just as it had been in the old colony of Mariental.(50)

Something else each of these attempts has in common is their failure to effectively sustain hope and faith. Appeal to outward consistency with the past brings only short-lived relief to the exiles. Memories haunt and torment as much as they comfort.(51) And regarding religious worship, Harms relates:

The utter meaninglessness of our daily routine has a deadening effect on our spiritual lives. The flashes of hope we derive from our primitive worship services are growing weaker and less frequent. More and more we are succumbing to the sin of apathy.(52)

The men's peace of mind, gleaned from walking in the grain fields, is abruptly shattered when they encounter the distressing sight of a small child lying dead amidst the stalks of grain.(53) Likewise, death prevails in the garden. The new shoots become frostbitten and lifeless, thus defeating the people's hope.(54) The exuberance of spring fever also dies: "Yes, our resilient spring mood of a month ago is gone. The bouyancy we felt then was based on the false assumption that we could share in nature's annual spring renewal."(55)

The "begging letters," although very successful for a time, suddenly come to a halt when the camp commander decides that they contain "counter-revolutionary reports."(56) Finally, Harms' escape attempt is a failure, and Wolff's bride dies shortly after the wedding ceremony.(57)

Every attempt by the exiles to make existence somehow meaningful is thwarted by the hostility of the environment. Such continual defeat has its own eventual effect on the souls of the exiles, i.e., moral depravity. Theresa Preuss trades her family honour for life in the Soviet Command Post as mistress and secretary to Fur Cap.(58)

A more striking example of defection is the suicide of Hans Neufeld, who is characterized in the novel after the Biblical figure of Judas.(59) First, Neufeld betrays his comrades for a sack of flour (60), and then outrightly forsakes his God. In a violent flair of

temper, he declares:

"What God? Where is he in this freezing hell?
Call yourselves Christians--you smug hypocrites? When
we still had our thousand acres we were all fine
Christians--at least on Sundays. That bull shit is
over now--for good! Bread, that's our Jesus
here!"(61)

Neufeld is another example of one whose faith depended too much on the outward structures of landed existence or the institutional aspect of Mennonite religious life. He has no inner strength. Now that he has lost the thousand acres, he also loses his faith. Moreover, in making bread the instrument of his salvation, he exists perpetually unfulfilled; for bread never satisfies an exile's hunger.(62) Ironically, Neufeld calls his neighbors hypocrites, but it is clear to everyone present that the real hypocrite is the one who is throwing stones. Neufeld's suicide by hanging, besides being the fulfillment of his role as a Judas figure, is the expression of a man whose soul is already dead. Neufeld's despair is total. Through the character of Neufeld, Harder also illuminates the dangers involved when faith becomes too closely integrated with the outward material world; and in this respect, Neufeld is, perhaps, a victim of his society.

As the story continues, the pervasive conditions of hunger, disease, and death increasingly breed feelings of futility and apathy among the survivors. Harms narrates: "The air of defeat in the barrack is almost palpable. I sense that these people have abandoned

hope, they are simply going through the motions of living as they await their inevitable end."(63)

The Word of God seems to remain a silent ambiguity, not speaking through the traditions of old. The struggle to nourish faith through the perpetuation of historical identity has failed. Life continues in a void of meaninglessness and hopelessness. Wolff's nighttime plea to God reveals the extent to which despair has overwhelmed hope. While still asleep, Wolff breaks forth in a feverish outburst of disjointed quotations from Revelations 6. Before falling back onto his bunk in anguished sobs, he quotes a final line: ". . . sacred . . . Lord . . . how long wilt . . . judge and not . . . avenge . . . our blood . . . against those . . . dwell on . . . earth . . . ?'"(64) Harms, similarly, expresses his feelings of utter futility about the reign of death in the community: "Our birch grove cemetery is becoming the central symbol of our experience here. No matter how hard we struggle, the birches will have us in the end."(65)

Despair and death appear to be the inevitable ends for the exiled Mennonites. However, at the end of the novel a theme of redemption emerges from what seems a hopeless situation. When the exiles are utterly disconsolate, three of the survivors--Harms, Koehn, and Wolff--experience a spiritual enlightenment. They discover, in "peace and resignation," a new voice of God.(66)

Although this change comes as somewhat of an

about face in the novel, it is not an inappropriate or contrived ending. Rather, it is the radical way of survival in the landlessness of exile. The Israelites in Babylon experience the same kind of reversal.

Brueggemann determines that it is to the lost and homeless in exile that God issues a new promise; i.e., a promise of the beginning of a new history that will culminate in restoration to the land.(67) Brueggemann refers to the new history as a "reversal of destiny."(68)

However, for the Israelites, the nature of this reversal is more than an inner change of spirit or renewed faith. Brueggemann writes: ". . . it is the radical transformation of an historical, political situation."(69) The words of the prophets promise a return to Jerusalem.(70) In this respect, Brueggemann's biblical analysis cannot inform us about the situation of the exiles in Harder's novel.(71) Harms, Koehn, and Wolff will never see their homeland again. Nevertheless, what is significantly relevant is the circumstance out of which the reversal of destiny is born. Writes Brueggemann: "Things which seem hopelessly lost, closed, and dead are the very region of God's new action."(72)

The above words clearly suggest resurrection imagery. Out of death, God inaugurates new life. Brueggemann himself associates the crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus Christ with the motif of resurrection in the new promise to Israel:

In the Old Testament the resurrection motif is

undoubtedly expressed as the call to exiles to leave exile and return to the land.

Thus crucifixion/resurrection echoes the dialectic of possessed land lost/exiles en route to the land of promise. (73)

The passage confirms the notion that the beginning of new history for the exiled Israelites is indeed a resurrection experience.

Now if one were to perceive the notion of new history as a reversal of destiny couched in resurrection imagery, the events at the conclusion of No Strangers in Exile also indicate the inauguration of new history. For, in effect, the spiritual enlightenment experienced by Harms, Koehn, and Wolff involves a reversal of destiny in terms of their self-perception and world view, and a resurrection in terms of the spiritual condition out of which those perceptions grow. As Harms concludes: ". . . true spiritual liberty could come only after we had become nothing." (74)

An interpretation of Harms' words, "become nothing," will explain how their experience is indeed a resurrection. Basically, the words must be understood in connection with the idea of spiritual resignation. In the characters of Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai, Harder portrays the nature of life lived in resignation. These men do not struggle with despondency like the other exiles. They live in the certainty that God has not abandoned the people of exile. Moreover, they are firm in their commitment that only God can provide the necessary food for survival in the extreme conditions of the labor

camp. For example, Ohm Peters responds to Hans Neufeld's defection with these words:

"None of us has the strength to stave off despair without God's help. Let us remember that. He is there, in spite of everything. In our situation here we have all been led to the far edge of suffering and desperation--to the point where we either give up in despair or give in to Him."(75)

Giving in to God is the way Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai live their lives, and it is this act to which the idea of resignation refers. On the occasion of the first funeral in the camp, Ohm Peters describes more explicitly what it means to become resigned:

"There is another form of dying, according to the Apostle, that is even more bitter than physical death. . . . And that is a death in which a man, of his own free will, renounces this life within himself. Doing that is to suffer an inner death very different from the one we all must suffer here below. . . . And this inner death in conjunction with Christ now becomes another life, a freshly granted life."(76)

The idea Ohm Peters expresses is not new or original. Harder is simply restating a principle that lies at the heart of Christian faith--the self dies to rise again in Christ.(77) Thus, "becoming nothing" refers to death of the self or self-will. Moreover, it is foremostly a resurrection experience; a symbolic participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

So the motif of crucifixion/resurrection is present in both the new promise to the exiled Israelites and the experience of becoming resigned for the exiled Mennonites. Therefore, in the context of resurrection imagery, the spiritual enlightenment of Harms, Koehn, and Wolff indicates the beginning of new history.

The death of the self, for Harms in particular, is a gradual process that runs as a theme throughout the novel. First, he exhausts all the possibilities of tradition and historical continuity before giving up. He clings to what was real/meaningful in the past. As we have seen, each of these archaic structures fail to bolster his weakened spirit. Simultaneously, Harms experiences a gradual reversal of his feelings of alienation. There is a progressive perception of the old world as unreality and the new as reality. The process becomes complete at the end of the novel when Wolff affirms that

Camp 513 is indeed a "real world"--that God is present and meaning exists, Camp 513 is home.(78)

One of the first indications of Harms' shifting perspective is the occasion of the Orthodox Easter celebration in the forest. He comes away from the event with these thoughts: "I feel exhausted, but cleansed and bouyant in my soul. A Mennonite celebrating an Orthodox Easter mass at night in the middle of the northern forest! And why not? This is my reality now; Mariental is a fading dream."(79)

As summer turns to fall, more and more of the historical continuities in his life fade like his memories of the old colony. For example, evening conversations are conducted in Russian instead of German. Harms concludes: "German seems less appropriate to our circumstances."(80) Furthermore, the Mennonites no longer communicate with

their brethren in Germany.(81) Harms even expresses a preference to not receive letters from his own family.(82) That Wolff, too, is breaking with the past is clearly evident on the occasion when Harms offers to Wolff a recently received letter from Mariental. Wolff responds by waving it off and focusing his attention instead on a copy of the Russian newspaper "Pravda."(83) The action clearly indicates that his focus of reality is not the Mennonite past but the Russian present.

Lastly, the survivors lose their spiritual leaders. Ohm Peters, symbolic link to the old Mennonite world, returns to Mariental; and shortly thereafter, Father Nikolai dies from an axeblow to the head.(84) The departure of these men, as archetypal men of faith and symbols of a religious world of the past, signifies the loss of the religious element of historical continuity in the community.

Significantly, Ohm Peters' last gesture before leaving the camp is to pass his tattered Bible on to Harms with these words:

"Alexander, we've gone beyond pious talk in this place. We need more than bread here. Only God can be our staff of life in this horrid camp. . . . You saw how it [Bible] was torn apart once, but it's still a living whole, as God is a living whole."(85)

In the end, then, the three men, Harms, Koehn, and Wolff, are left with themselves and the "living Word." All traces of their historical identity have been wiped away--including the faith of the fathers. Alone with the Word of God, they have become nothing. And it is

in this condition that their despair becomes resignation. As we shall see, from nothingness the three men experience resurrection into a new life. I quote Harms at length:

Time no longer seems to matter much to any of us. We survive, but we feel neither hope nor despair. On a gentle day in August we go for a long walk and sit in the sun on the edge of the forest. . . . Wolff suddenly stops humming. He gets up and takes a few stiff steps forward. He is like a man in a trance.

"In case somebody should ever . . . after us," he mutters and points to the west, his dark eyes still searching beyond the trees. "God in his mercy grant that our world beyond the frozen Mezen be remembered as a real world with ordinary, decent, suffering, and praying people in it. Let them know there was a Camp Number 513 here, and a Barrack Number seven containing people who lived and loved and hoped in the midst of despair--as long as they could.

"It was all so senseless. Many of us fell from despair to apathy to nothing. But there were those--Waldemar Wolff of Saratov for one, and Peter Koehn of Mariental for another, and Alexander Harms for a third--who in spite of bitter afflictions, in the end found in the brutal forests of Archangel peace and resignation. . . ."

Peace and resignation! Wolff is right, of course. If our suffering here has any meaning at all it is that we have gone beyond hatred and love to a spiritual condition that surpasses all understanding. In spite of everything we are at peace here amidst God's immortal, unspeaking green sentinels of the taiga. . . . For nothingness triumphant, let us pray in peace to God. (86)

So the new life these men attain to is characterized by the recognition of Camp 513 as a real world, their home, and a new spiritual strength to be at peace in that world.

Harry Loewen describes the home Harms comes to recognize, as a spiritual home. (87) One can, I think, interpret the meaning of "spiritual home" in two ways. First, it can refer strictly to the spiritual enlightenment Harms experiences. Through spiritual

liberty he has attained peace of mind, which in itself is a kind of home of the soul. Second, the term could refer to the idea of home as spiritual in the sense that Harms has a new understanding of home not identified with the history of landed existence or of the land itself. Harder himself foreshadows this conclusion early in the novel.

While suspended in the void of train motion, Alexander Harms recalls his own introduction to the term "homeland." He is a small boy standing over the graves of his ancestors, his tiny hand grasping the huge forefinger of his grandfather:

"Russia is our way . . . our long way," Grandfather says loudly. "That is what my father used to say, and his father before him. By the 'way' they meant the Anabaptist way of life handed down to us by our forefathers and by God's Word in the New Testament. Never forget that Sasha. Our people came here a long time ago--over a hundred years ago. And still we are only guests in this land. This is our home for now, but it can never be our homeland."(88)

Then later, as Alexander Harms, now a grown man, plods through the deep snow towards the yet unknown destination of his exile, he thinks to himself:

Russia will cease to be a 'way' for us and will become our 'home' at last--our final home here on earth.(89)

By these passages, Harder effectively illuminates the discontinuity of faith and history that eventually occurs at the end of the novel. The grandfather's statement expresses the self-understanding of the Mennonite people during the time of landed history. Basically, they regarded themselves as pilgrims as opposed to citizens of Russia. The "Anabaptist way" refers to

their religious commitment to live a way of non-conformity to the world. As a result of this commitment, the Mennonites lived in isolated, agricultural Mennonite colonies, uncommunicative with Russia's people and untouched by their culture. Thus, "home" denoted ethnically separated colonies of Mennonites living according to traditions that encouraged exclusivity and close ties to the land--but never Russia herself.

In contrast, as Harms predicts, Russia at last becomes home. His new perception of Camp 513 as home, however, is one in which ethnicity and land play no part. There is no hope of returning to the land that was his boyhood home, and both ethnicity and the traditions of ethnic identity have been dissolved in oppression. Russians and Mennonites together form a brotherhood of exiles with the Word of God to feed their mutual hunger. It is to this principle that the title of the book alludes--there are no strangers in exile. The idea stands in sharp contrast to the Mennonites' historical practice of isolation from the larger world.(90)

Understood in this way, the idea of spiritual home conforms with the spiritual nature of the exiles' resurrection experience. Through the spiritual transformation from despair to resignation, Harms, Koehn, and Wolff are born into a new life with a new historical identity and a new faith. Their perception of reality (God, self, world) has made a complete reversal. In this respect, destiny has been reversed and new history born.

III.

We have seen that for both the Mennonites in No Strangers in Exile and the Israelites in Brueggemann's analysis, the experience of exile is the experience of the end of landed history followed by a history of landlessness that culminates in resurrection into a new history. The end of history in the land is characterized by a complete discontinuity of environment that fosters feelings of alienation and meaninglessness, unreality and weariness.

Furthermore, both Mennonites and Israelites respond to the void created by landlessness by attempting to transpose the structures of meaning from their past world into the present. They rely on the traditions that once formed their reality to bridge the discontinuity between the past and present. In so doing, they seek to reaffirm their historical identity and so gain some sense of meaning in their existence.

As we have seen in No Strangers in Exile, all of these attempts fail. Only after the old world is relinquished does meaning re-emerge in the lives of the exiles. Harms, Wolff, and Koehn surrender their historical Mennonite identity and, out of that death, are resurrected into new life. Their new life involves a new self-understanding, a new faith, and a new world view not identified with the land or the ethnic traditions of

landed existence. In this respect, the three men discover a spiritual home which concurrently signifies the birth of new history.

Thus in the condition of landlessness we witness a complete break with identification with the land. Throughout the novel, there is a progressive movement away from the outward traditional realities of the old colony toward a new spiritual reality. "Home" becomes a place with God where Mennonites and Russians together find rest. To conclude, then, the problems of alienation and unreality caused by loss of land are overcome by accepting that loss in resignation to God in faith; from that self-surrender comes resurrection into new life with a new understanding of home.

In light of this conclusion, Harder's novel, aside from presenting the horrors of labor camp existence, contains a message about Mennonite Christianity. In the characters of Ohm Peters and Father Nikolai, Harder presents his ideal of Christian faith and life. These men live in faithful self-surrender to God. At the conclusion of the novel, the three survivors discover this same kind of peaceful resignation; while, the suicide of Hans Neufeld represents the opposite extreme. Through these characters and events, Harder presents a view of Christian faith that is more existential than the ethnic, insitutional faith of traditional Russian Mennonitism. For Harder, living a Christian life does not require the stuff of historical identity such as land, material

wealth, community traditions, or isolated ethnic colonies. Rather, a Christian needs only the living Word of God. Moreover, the Word of God is available to all people; God does not make ethnic distinctions.

Herein lies the element of universality in Harder's novel. Speaking generally, the human condition is never without suffering and meaninglessness. These problems are overcome by resignation in faith. The true Christian life of faith is lived in personal confrontation with the Word of God, and in surrender of the self to that Word. Faith is a matter of inner change in the individual spirit. In this sense, Harder calls for a radical departure from the communally held religious values evident in the landed Mennonite colonies of Pre-Revolution times.

It must be noted here that Harder's essential message about Christian faith is contrary to Brueggemann's. Whereas Harder advocates an individualistic, spirit-centered view of Christianity, Brueggemann maintains that Christian faith is lived embedded in history, community, and place in the land.(91) Now, although further discussion of this seeming incongruity occurs in subsequent chapters of this thesis, to determine the validity or accuracy of each of these theories is not within the scope of this study.(92) Rather, our attention should focus on the correlation of histories in relation to the land and its effect on the faith of the Mennonites.

Walter Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites' experience serves as a pattern by which to identify the Mennonites' situation in relation to the land. Since the pattern of historical circumstances in Harder's novel corresponds with Brueggemann's analysis of the Israelites, we can view the Mennonites' experience of exile in terms of Brueggemann's pattern of historical movement regarding the land. The Mennonites experience landlessness after the end of history in the land. And then, through an act of resurrection, new history is inaugurated. What this points to regarding the relation of land and faith for the Mennonites in Harder's novel is that with the end of land and no promise of return, their traditionally land-oriented faith also suffers demise. When faith is restored, it is a new faith unconnected to the land.

NOTES

1. For a complete story of this period of Mennonite history see John B. Toews, Czars, Soviets and Mennonites (Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982).
2. For more information see Ibid. and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956, 4 vols., trans. by Thomas Whitney (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973-1975).
3. Al Reimer, introduction to No Strangers in Exile (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1979), p.1.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 90-129.
6. Ibid., p. 9.
7. The character of Liese is the creative addition of Al Reimer.
8. Hans Harder, No Strangers in Exile, trans. Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1979), p. 14.
9. Ibid.
10. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 17-20.
11. Harder, Strangers, pp. 5-10.
12. Ibid., p. 9.
13. Ibid., p. 11.
14. Ibid., p. 13.
15. Ibid., p. 32.
16. Ibid., pp. 10-11, 12, 14-15, 25.
17. Ibid., p. 25.
18. Brueggemann, Land, p. 29.
19. Walter Brueggemann, "Weariness, Exile, Chaos," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34 (1972): 33, 34.

20. Harder, Strangers, p. 117.
21. Brueggemann, Land, p. 130.
22. Robert Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1979), pp. 119-130.
23. Harder, Strangers, pp. 15, 16, 25, 27, 29.
24. Ibid., p. 29.
25. Ibid., p. 28.
26. Recalling Eliade's distinction between chaos and cosmos--it is cosmos, the place where God is present and meaning exists that is "real"--reality and meaning are co-terminous. See chapter one of this thesis.
27. Harder, Strangers, p. 29.
28. Ibid., pp. 15, 29, 37, 44, 83, 89, 92, 98, 100, 103.
29. Brueggemann, "Weariness, Exile, Chaos," p. 33.
30. Harder, Strangers, p. 39.
31. Ibid., p. 48.
32. Ibid., pp. 29, 83.
33. Brueggemann, Land, pp. 144-145.
34. Harder, Strangers, p. 15.
35. Ibid., pp. 42, 44-46.
36. Ibid., p. 10.
37. Ibid., pp. 65, 109.
38. Ibid., pp. 10, 51-54, 64-65.
39. Ibid., pp. 60-61, 65-66, 122.
40. Ibid., p. 61.
41. See chapter one of this study.
42. Harder, Strangers, pp. 58, 64.
43. Ibid., p. 57.
44. Ibid., p. 55.