

Culture



Royden K. LOEWEN, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. 371 pages, \$24.95 (paper), \$55.00 (cloth)

Ian Dyck

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Dans « L'amour au dernier regard » qu'elle décrit comme les « évocations d'une expérience banale de séduction urbaine—une vague inattendue d'émotion à la vue d'un inconnu dans la rue »—elle nous offre une discussion sur la photographie, Freud, le fantasme et plus encore. A noter que Francette Pacteau n'est pas nécessairement facile à lire mais qu'elle est toujours intéressante.

Son dernier chapitre, « Mirror, Mirror » traite du « regard des femmes » : une comtesse italienne du dix-neuvième siècle engage son propre photographe afin de la photographier dans divers déguisements et diverses poses. Est-elle complice de sa propre objectivation? Est-elle victime de patriarcat? S'agit-il d'infantilisme ou de narcissisme? (Et le débat s'éternise.) Mais si la dame ne faisait que s'amuser, hein? Y avez-vous pensé...

Il s'agit d'un ouvrage très bien documenté qui vagabonde joyeusement entre Platon et Lacan, et traite adroitement de philosophie, d'art, de films, de romans, de poésie, d'histoire et d'un très grand nombre de sujets apparemment sans rapport entre eux. L'auteur a inclus un certain nombre de photographies qui illustrent très efficacement le processus « d'attribution »; son style est à la mode : elliptique, ou peut-être pointilliste, à tendance post-moderne.

The Symptom of Beauty est la parution la plus récente sur le « regard omniprésent des hommes », et constitue une contribution extrêmement originale, non seulement à la littérature de plus en plus abondante sur le sujet, mais aussi en tant qu'étude sur la construction sociale de la beauté. Il ne s'agit pas d'un ouvrage historique ou ethnographique, insiste l'auteur, mais plutôt de l'exploration personnelle d'un « montage d'attractions ».

Mais bien que j'ai énormément apprécié ce livre fort intéressant, je tiens à souligner que je ne suis pas entièrement d'accord avec les théories qui y sont avancées. L'approche méthodologique freudienne adoptée par Pacteau pour expliquer le rôle du fantasme dans la conceptualisation de la beauté, soit l'angoisse de castration, le refoulement et les complexes préœdipiens, ne me semble pas particulièrement appropriée ou utile. Et plus discutables encore sont les hypothèses voulant que la beauté soit absolument un « problème » (p. 15), que les femmes soient « prisonnières » de la beauté (p. 183) et que le regard des hommes soit toujours oppressif.

Ces hypothèses m'agacent sérieusement. Nous savons tous que la mystique de la beauté pose parfois

des problèmes aux femmes—mais aux hommes aussi! Par conséquent il faudrait se poser les questions suivantes : quand la beauté est-elle problématique et quand ne l'est-elle pas? Quels en sont les avantages et les inconvénients, pour les femmes et pour les hommes? Et au lieu de parler du regard oppressif des hommes, ne pourrions-nous plutôt demander quand il l'est et quand il ne l'est pas? F. Pacteau écrit que la beauté « est un problème quotidien pour moi en tant que femme ». Mais quel genre de problème? Comment y fait-elle face? Y a-t-il une solution? Enfin bref, vous me comprenez.

L'hypothèse que je préfère et qui, selon moi, se rapproche davantage de la réalité, est que la beauté attire et la laideur repousse, et que la recherche de la beauté a fait partie intégrale de la nature humaine à travers les siècles. St-Thomas définissait la beauté comme étant ce qui plaît; Hume écrivait que la beauté engendre le plaisir et la difformité la souffrance. Il n'y a aucun doute que la beauté est merveilleuse : en soi, elle n'est ni une prison ni un piège, mais plutôt une source de joie qui vaut la peine qu'on y consacre un peu de temps et d'efforts. Et le fait que dans ce livre le seul rôle dévolu à l'homme soit celui de fantasmer, de se livrer au voyeurisme et d'oppresser par son regard est tout à fait désolant. Pacteau oublie également de mentionner que les hommes aussi bien que les femmes veulent plaire : afin de séduire, de charmer leur partenaire, d'être admiré... est-ce aussi un problème?

Trop d'idéologies nous cachent parfois la réalité et le bon sens.

Mais malgré le fait que la relation homme beauté n'ait pas été traitée et malgré son approche négative, *The Symptom of Beauty* est un livre plein de beauté...

Royden K. LOEWEN, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. 371 pages, \$24.95 (paper), \$55.00 (cloth).

By Ian Dyck

Canadian Museum of Civilization

The transition from pre-industrial to industrial economies brought sweeping changes to all whom it encompassed - changes in production, transportation, settlement patterns, population size, and world view. For many, these were calamitous times, caus-

ing privation and social upheaval, often ending in desperate migrations. Some groups, however, were able to make the transition at a more controlled pace, all the while hoping that they could deflect the ideological impact away from their most cherished beliefs and institutions. One example was a group of German-speaking Mennonites who left South Russia in the 1870s, at the invitation of Canadian and American governments, to repeople the North American Great Plains.

In attempting to understand the strategies used by Mennonites to preserve their ascetic agrarian communities, Royden Loewen has undertaken a detailed three-generation (1850-1930) study of a small conservative subgroup known as the *Kleine Gemeinde*. His first generation corresponds to the last years in Russia and the great migration of the 1870s, the second to the first 25 years in North America during which Old World Mennonite society was replicated, and the third to a second 25 year period during which substantial numbers of *Kleine Gemeinde* began to defect to urban occupations and lifestyles.

Describing his approach as holistic, eclectic and phenomenological, Loewen focuses on social units at three levels: the mother-led family, the church-led community, and the market. He claims that, in comparison to most previous Mennonite histories, his stresses everyday lives and values over central ecclesiastical developments or cultural distinctions such as pacifism and use of the Low German dialect. The fact that the *Kleine Gemeinde* split into two factions during migration to North America, with 110 families settling in Manitoba and 56 in Nebraska, also provides for a comparison of the effects of differing economic, political and climatic realities in the two countries.

Three themes run throughout the book. The first is that "New World" had two distinct meanings for Mennonites. One referred to industrialization with its emphases on individualism, pluralism, and consumerism. The other referred to geography. The message I get from Loewen's work is that industrialized society posed by far the greatest problem. Indeed, Mennonites were already well adapted to group migration as a means for dealing with land shortages and socio-political or religious problems. Moreover, the lands they moved to in North America were remarkably similar to those left behind in Russia.

A second theme is that the central organizing and production unit was an extended form of the

nuclear family for which wives took most of the management responsibility. A close look at everyday matters, as opposed to the usual focus on male-dominated ecclesiastical matters, clearly reveals the important leadership roles played by Mennonite women.

The third theme is that Mennonites did not wish to be entirely separate from the marketplace. Rather, they preferred to live as household commodity producers on the fringe of the market. They saw land as a commodity, set up internal credit systems to promote economic activity and acquire more land, used seasonal labour pools or mechanization as local conditions dictated, and acquired certain goods and services from the marketplace on a regular basis. Indeed, to sustain community and accommodate growth they geared much of their production toward surpluses for an export market.

Loewen's depictions of family, community and market for each generation are engaging and insightful. One point that was especially striking for me was the contrast between high levels of literacy and egalitarianism on the one hand, and interminable intra-denominational fractiousness on the other. In spite of Loewen's intention to avoid ecclesiastical issues and icons of Mennonite separation, those matters actually receive considerable attention. True, debates over German language retention and reactions to public schooling have been almost ignored, but deep religious concerns with Godly living, humility, community, and strict separation are very prominent, as they were in many aspects of everyday Mennonite life.

The actual strategies employed by *Kleine Gemeinde* to preserve their way of life while adapting to changing conditions seem to be buried within the study. This makes systematic comparison, between one generation and another or between *Kleine Gemeinde* in different countries, a difficult exercise - one which Loewen glosses over. Thus, at the end of the study, following a summary of American and Canadian differences, his final conclusion is that these were parallel opportunities and restrictions; that neither Canadian nor American *Kleine Gemeinde* were able to remain distinct from outside society; and that some *Kleine Gemeinde* in both countries formulated new strategies to ensure continuity. This does not make sense to me. Rather, it seems like the ending for an interim report.

Formal structure aside, there is much in this microanalytical study which seems fresh and ap-

pealing. In spite of my criticism the study has a cohesiveness, historical worth, and analytical spark which students of Mennonite history, social boundaries, industrialization and New World migrations will find rewarding. I think that there is potential here for generalizations about special interest group/pluralistic adaptive strategies which will be instructive far beyond Mennonite experience. I applaud Loewen's work to date and hope that he continues.