

Book Review

Ervin Beck. *MennoFolk3: Puns, Riddles, Tales, Legends*. Goshen, IN: Painted Glass Press, 2022. 138 pp.

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Ervin Beck's third volume of collected Mennonite folk tales and stories, *MennoFolk3: Puns, Riddles, Tales, Legends*, provides more legends (and laughs) for readers. Building upon his previous compilations, *MennoFolk* and *MennoFolk2*, the third book in the series continues to chronicle the oral history traditions of Mennonites and associated Anabaptist groups. In his introduction, Beck writes, "The two intended audiences for *MennoFolk3* are insiders to Mennonite culture and outsiders who want to know more about Mennonites and Amish" (7). I believe that both audiences will enjoy this volume. The mixture of stories, jokes, puns, and dialect banter will have those who are well versed in Mennonite and Amish culture chuckling in recognition and gives those who are less familiar, but no less interested, an insight into the humor and values of these peculiar groups.

In *MennoFolk3*, as with the previous *MennoFolk* volumes, Beck connects Mennonite tales and legends with motifs found in stories from a variety of denominations and cultures. Many of these stories are not unique to Mennonites, but as the tales are adapted to Mennonite and Amish contexts, they are tweaked to emphasize their unique principles. With the stories Beck has selected and with his deft commentary, Beck demonstrates that which stories are told and how they are told convey deeper themes about what is valued in a particular culture or people group.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on stories by and about the Amish. Because these stories are mostly told by Mennonites or former Amish community members, they seem to say more about how the Amish are represented in the Mennonite imagination than how the Amish see themselves. Beck concedes that his ability to collect Amish tales from their source is limited by an inability to converse in Pennsylvania German, and he notes that any translation would lose a great deal of the meaning. Still, the collected stories portray a culture of common sense, good humor, and canniness. Though wider society has a tendency to lump Mennonites and Amish together, these stories illustrate the many things, subtle and overt, that differentiate the two.

Beck gives particular attention to personal legends and devotes a fascinating chapter to how these stories are shaped by each narrator that shares them. He traces the "folklore conduit" (95)



using a story of a time seminary professor June Alliman Yoder encountered actress Pearl Bailey at a rest stop on the way to Chicago. Details were added and omitted as the story passed through each telling and from one person to another, and Beck expertly identifies the function of each adaptation (96–102).

With Beck's three volumes in print, one might presume that he has collected most all the Mennonite stories there are to be told. However, I believe there are still more tales and legends waiting to be captured. I would have liked for Beck to explore the topic of Amish and Mennonite jokes that circulate online and discuss how the "new" frontier of social media is impacting storytelling and cultural transmission. As someone who grew up in the age of the internet and is a consumer of social media, I have been intrigued to see how Mennonites and Amish are represented online, both by those outside the groups and by those within it. Perhaps another volume is needed to tackle such a topic.

This volume is a welcome addition to the *MennoFolk* series, and as a historian, I am grateful to Beck for working to capture the oftentimes intangible history found in these stories, tales, jokes, and puns. This is an important heritage, rich with meaning and significance, and I think everyone will enjoy the humor, irreverence, and lore found in this volume.