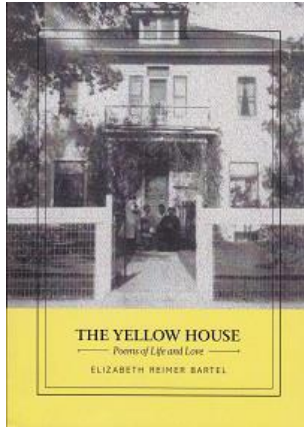


Elizabeth Reimer Bartel. *The Yellow House: Poems of Life and Love*. Self-published. 2015. 155 pp.

Book review by Robert Martens



Elizabeth Reimer Bartel has already published a novel, a memoir, a poetry anthology (co-published with a group of women), and now a book of poetry all her own, but she might be described as a “late bloomer.” Born in 1925, she only started writing when she felt it was time. “Reading has been my greatest joy all my life,” she says. “I had to read enough before I was ready to write” (Author Event). *The Yellow House*, written in advanced age, is in a sense a nostalgic memoir of a long life lived among treasured family and friends.

The yellow house in which Reimer Bartel was born was situated at the corner of Main Street and Reimer Avenue in Steinbach, Manitoba and was built by “the eccentric Reimers” (press release) who helped found the town in 1874. This book of poetry ends with a story: the death of her grandmother in the yellow house and the Mennonite funeral rituals that follow. *The Yellow House* frequently speaks of death, doubt, and loss; the poems are written from the perspective of a woman who has indeed lost much and is facing her own mortality. The book is not dark, though. It is imbued with humour, whimsy, and an abiding faith. These poems are stories in poetic form, written simply and accessibly, and with a vividness of detail that is remarkable.

The second of the following two poems speak to old age and death; the first, to the wonder of life’s renewal.

#### Sources

“Author Event: Elizabeth Reimer Bartel, ‘By Whatever Name.’” *Vancouver Island Regional Library*. 2012.

[www.virl.bc.ca](http://www.virl.bc.ca)

Press release. Hardcopy sent to reviewer. 2015.

#### *There Is No Weight*

She springs into my arms  
A magnet fixed between us  
A bond which will never break  
Instinctively my arm bends  
To make a seat for her  
So I can hold her close.  
The sweetness of infant flesh  
Encircles us.

I stroke a tear-stained cheek  
smooth dampened hair  
murmur comfort  
my lips against her ear.  
Our breathing slows

she hiccups once or twice  
sighs, slumps down half-asleep  
a heaviness against my shoulder.

There is no weight like it in all the world. (143)

*We're the Old Ones Now*

I watch my sister, determined  
as a hungry leghorn, chin forward  
as she prepares to cross the street  
among the ghosts of generations past  
our forebears that begat children here  
sang and prayed  
dealt in the goods of this world  
and the next.

My sister steps off the curb  
where the cottonwoods  
once bowed  
in an ordered row before the house  
and my maiden aunt  
hair centre-parted, smooth  
cheeks flushed with mercantile blood  
her shapely feet passing cheerful geraniums  
bordering the walk.  
Daily she crossed the wide street  
fine shoes picking their way  
through the mud  
and ruts of spring, the dust of summer  
all of her drawn  
to her first real love: the store.

At the end my aunt became confused  
asked every time we met  
which one of her brother Johnny's girls I was  
while across the street the big windows  
of the store glittered.

My maiden aunt is gone.  
The store and family home dismantled  
oak banisters and brass door knobs  
auctioned off  
the stout beams and boards  
hailed away in truckloads by the Hutterites  
to build their chicken barns.

Now there's the polished granite of the bank  
here on this street  
hard-edged concrete planters trailing vines  
ornamental trees  
historical plaques commemorating pioneers.

But we're the old ones now,  
my sister crossing the street  
and I'm the one who trembles and sees  
how much she looks like our long dead aunt.

*The Yellow House* is available at the MHSBC library or can be purchased by emailing the author at [deliztel@shaw.ca](mailto:deliztel@shaw.ca).