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„Gender roles in Amish literature:  
An analysis of how gender roles are portrayed by  
non-Amish and Amish writers in Amish romance novels “

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## 1. Introduction

Within the last decades the Amish people in the United States have been moved into the focus of American media. They continue to be the topic of Hollywood movies such as *Witness* (1985), *For Richer or Poorer* (1997), *Plain Truth* (2004), *Saving Sarah Cain* (2007), *Amish Grace* (2010), and *Pee-wee's Big Holiday* (2016). Furthermore, they are repeatedly the subject of TV shows like *For Weddings* (2009), *Breaking Amish* (2012-2014), and *Return to Amish* (2014) and – especially since the late 1990s – romantic fictional novels (Igou 12).

The typical elements that can be found in contemporary Amish romances are the concepts of *Rumspringa*<sup>1</sup>, *shunning*<sup>1</sup>, and evangelical piety (Weaver-Zercher 27). The internal struggle of the Amish heroine – or sometimes hero – between following her or his tradition and leaving the Amish church seems to be a never-ending storyline that continues to attract readers throughout the United States, especially those of Christian faith. A further element of Amish fictional novels is the withdrawal from the world that is offered to the reader, especially because the stories take place in a contemporary and real setting (Shelley 2).

No matter how fascinating these novels might seem to their readers, the question arises whether these representations of Amish men and women, if portrayed by non-Amish authors, are similar to those described by Amish writers or simply correspond to wishful thinking. Due to the fact that the Amish do not hold publishing in high esteem, most of the fictional literature of the last decades stems from non-Amish writers. Fortunately, this situation has changed within the last ten years, when Amish writers such as Linda Byler and Lena Yoder started writing Amish biographies or novels. Apart from these Amish writers, there are also those authors who have grown up within the Amish church but left their community in later years. Their inside experience offers a less stereotypical view of Amish men and women.

Before insight is given into the way Amish gender roles are represented by non-Amish as well as Amish writers, a short account of the Amish people's history will be provided in order to understand their tradition and way of life more clearly.

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 2.2

## 2. The Amish

### 2.1. A brief history of the Amish

The origin of the Amish people, also called Plain People, lies in the Christian Reformation movement that took place in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Huldrych Zwingli, one of the two famous Swiss reformers, was joined by a man named Felix Manz. Because of the fact that Zwingli continued to baptize babies, “Felix and some others broke away and founded a church in which only adults were baptized” (Igou 25). Similar movements took place in the Netherlands and in German-speaking central Europe. They argued that baptism “should be a mark of voluntary commitment and therefore fitting only for those who understood the implications of a disciplined life” (Nolt 13-14). As these believers, who had already been baptized as babies before the Reformation movement started, now supported the baptism of adults, they were called *Anabaptists*, meaning re-baptizers (Nolt 14). The Amish consider these Anabaptists as their ancestors and a collection of stories of these martyrs can be found in the *Ausbund*, a hymnal that was first printed in 1564 and is still in use in Amish worship services (Igou 25).

The Reformation did not only affect Germany and Switzerland, but also spread throughout other parts of Europe. Menno Simmons, who converted to Anabaptism in 1536, became another well-known leader and writer (Cooper 141). The believers following his teachings were called the Mennonites and during the 1600s, they mainly lived in Switzerland, Alsace, northern Germany, southern Germany, and Holland (Igou 28).

The name *Amish* stems from Jacob Ammann, who was one of the elders of the Mennonites in Alsace at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, a conflict arose between him and Hans Reist, the elder of the Swiss Mennonites, concerning certain issues regarding the church. Among those was the frequency of communion in church services, the question of shunning and banning, as well as the issue of clothing. The people in Alsace were strict in this respect, promoting plain and uniform dress, whereas the Swiss Mennonites were more liberal. Finally, in the fall of 1693, this conflict resulted in a separation of the Swiss and the Alsace believers, and in the course of time, Jacob Ammann’s followers became known as the Amish Mennonites, shortened to “Amish” (Igou 30-31).



In essence, there were nine points in which the Amish differed from the other Mennonites at that time. To be able to understand their lifestyle and culture as it is described in the literature that will be discussed in this thesis, some of these nine points are quoted here as they are listed in Igou's book (Igou 33).

1. Ammann believed in the literal shunning of those who are excommunicated.
2. Ammann did not believe the true-hearted (those who gave food and shelter to the Anabaptists) should be considered as Christians.
3. Ammann felt the need for stronger discipline in dress and everyday living.
4. He felt that men should cut their hair fairly short and let their beards grow; the others followed the prevailing fashions of letting their hair grow very long and shaving their beard.

Several attempts were made to unite these groups again, but none of these succeeded at that time. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, two waves of Amish immigration to the United States took place, with most of them settling in Pennsylvania at first. Now they live in more than 400 settlements in thirty states, as well as in one Canadian province (Weaver-Zercher 63).

For more than a century, the Amish in America lived in unity. But around 1850, various tensions arose as new inventions such as photography and new styles in clothing developed. Some Amish settlements were more progressive and in order to keep the unity among the various groups, a ministers' meeting was held in June of 1862 and another one in 1878. However, these meetings only resulted in unity among the progressive bishops, who consequently formed a new group, the "Amish-Mennonites" (Igou 46-48). Those groups who decided to keep to the old rules were henceforth called the "Old Order Amish". In the first half of the twentieth century, another separation occurred, initiated by Moses M. Beachy. He allowed modernity to enter his community, favored a less strict discipline, and separated from the Old Order Amish. These groups were later called the "Beachy Amish" (Johnson-Weiner 248). In the following illustration, an overview on Amish roots is given:

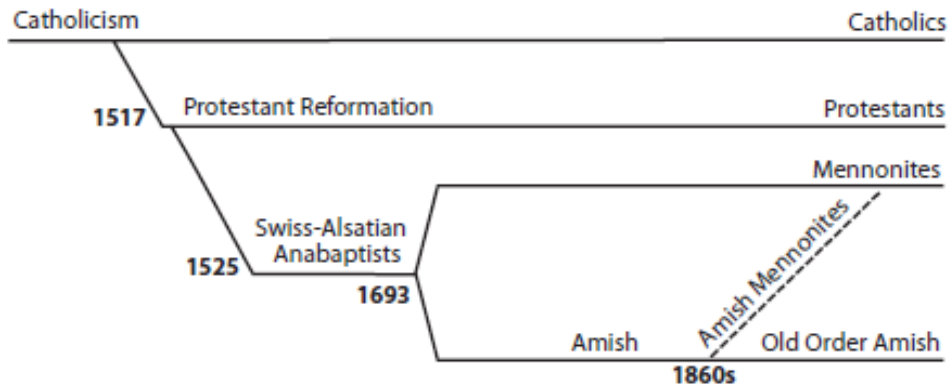


Fig. 1. Anabaptist-Amish Timeline (Nolt 19)

It is the Old Order Amish who are at the center of the growing number of Amish novels with their horse-and-buggies, their plain and sober clothing, and long beards. According to the Amish, each tradition, restriction, or rule is based on the Bible and often the result of some controversial issue the church faced in the past. As one Amishman once explained, “if we see or experience something that is not good for us spiritually, we will discipline ourselves to do without” (Igou 62). To hold up their standard of nonconformity, the Amish put a lot of emphasis on discipline (Igou 61).

Concerning the media, only print media such as books, magazines and newspapers are accepted among the Old Order Amish. They have their own publications about community news such as *The Budget* and *The Message*, which differ from outside publications insofar as they put a focus on reporting news that convey the normal rather than writing about events which disrupt the normal (Cooper 144). Other well-known publications that are popular among the Amish are *Family Life*, *Young Companion*, and *Blackboard Bulletin*. These magazines focus on literature concerning their own values and are plain, black and white, without photos or fancy graphics, simply containing text and line drawings (Igou 9).

## 2.2. A short overview of Amish concepts and customs

### *Rumspringa*

Rumspringa is the Pennsylvania Dutch word for “running around” and it is used to describe the time when Amish teenagers are sixteen or seventeen and are sent out into the world. This time is a sort of ritual, where parents expect their children to test

their own faith before they come back to the community and get baptized or married. In contrast to popular belief, the teenagers are not sent out by their parents to try out all kind of deviant behavior. Also the way the parents handle their teenage offspring during that time varies from family to family. Furthermore, the youngsters still continue to live with their families, but are simply allowed more independence than before. Nevertheless, they are expected to help full time on the family farm or in the household – either in their own family or at a relative’s home. They often spend their weekends not at home but meet with Amish friends of their own age (Nolt 54-56). These cliques are also known as *Die Youngie* (young folks). It should be mentioned that during this period the Amish teenagers are not at risk of being shunned, because they have not been baptized yet and are therefore not members of the Amish church (Nolt 55).

### *Shunning*

The practice of shunning is another part of the Amish church that is a common theme in Amish fiction. However interesting it might be to readers, it does not happen very often within an Amish community. Now what does shunning actually mean?

The Amish, as believers in the Bible, have certain rules and customs that members – those who have been baptized – have to obey and follow. If someone falls short and disobeys, the opportunity for confession is given. Only if individuals do not show any remorse, do not want to confess, or show through their actions that they want to leave the church, they are excommunicated. The reason why excommunication or shunning, as it is called, does not happen that often, is that those people who really want to leave the Amish usually do not get baptized in the first place (Nolt 50).

When shunning happens, “members will avoid the person in certain symbolic ways, such as not sharing a meal together and not entering into business contracts with them” (Nolt 50). Depending on the situation that leads to shunning, shunned people might feel betrayed and get bitter. Therefore, the consequences are of a more severe nature than in those communities where a positive relationship with other Amish people is maintained. From an Amish viewpoint, shunning “punishes the evildoer not in the spirit of revenge, but to bring him to repentance” (Igou 211), meaning that it is possible that the so-called *Bann* (shunning) can be reversed.

## *Ordnung*

The term *Ordnung* describes a moral road map of an Amish community and offers a guideline as to how the community members should lead their lives. These guidelines are meant to be a helpful resource in areas of contemporary life where the Bible, that the Amish see as their highest authority, offers no clear instructions. *Ordnung* directs as well as limits what a person should do, including for example the means of transportation, the style of clothing, or types of technology used at home (Nolt 34). In contrast to other religious regulations, such as the Jewish Mishnah or the Islamic Hadith, *Ordnung* is not written down but passed on orally to the next generation (35). Furthermore, it is not a fixed set of rules but responds both to developments in the real world and to the particular circumstances a person might find her- or himself in. For example, lay people enjoy a bit more flexibility than a bishop of an Amish community, who has more responsibility and should serve as a role model to other members (35).

One or more of these three concepts – *Rumspringa*, *Shunning*, and *Ordnung* – are usually used as tensions in Amish literature, as they are often a source of conflicts and developments among the protagonists of a story. For example, there might be the Amish teenager questioning the ways of his upbringing, or a shunned family member struggling with the distance to his family and friends, or a young girl feeling limited in her personal development due to community rules. Therefore, these three customs also create tension in one way or another in the three serial novels discussed in this paper.

### **2.3. The History of Amish Literature**

As already mentioned, print media is the only form of media that is accepted among Old Order communities. Besides the Bible, they have their own magazines such as *Die Botschaft* and *Family Life* (Cooper 144), publications that inform their readers about local news, every-day issues that concern their daily lives and problems, and sometimes short fictional stories that try to represent their way of life. *Die Botschaft*, for example, “employs dialect and description of outsiders as ‘strangers’ and ‘English’, which reinforces the solidarity of readers” (Cooper 147). A non-Amish

reader would probably describe its articles as boring. Apart from these internal newspapers that are well-known and respected among the Amish communities, not much other literary effort has been made throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the first time the Amish received a greater audience in print media was when Helen Reimensnyder Martin wrote the novel *Sabina: A Story of the Amish* in 1905. Her book includes the typical elements of a rural surrounding, *Rumspringa* and romance for the first time (Weaver-Zercher 27). This combination of themes proved to be quite successful in Amish literature decades later. The story revolves around the Amish protagonist Sabina, who is supposed to marry a dull Amish farmer, because this is what her despotic father has planned. As time goes by, Sabina meets Augustus, who is not Amish, and they fall in love with each other. However, the heroine and the hero do not end up together, but Sabina marries the Amish farmer. Although the lives, customs and the appearance of the Plain People are vividly described in the book, the Amish are not put on a pedestal; rather, they are portrayed as people of bad manners, primitive, and lacking sophistication (Stekovic 22).

Three years later, Cora Gottschalk Welty took up the Amish topic again with her novel *The Masquerading of Margaret*. This time the female and male protagonists are both outsiders, but they meet while staying in an Amish community. Margaret Habecker, a wealthy New Yorker, visits her Amish relatives and decides to dress like them during her stay. At the same time, Robert Jackson, also English, resides at Margaret's relatives' home. Both are positively impressed by the simple lifestyle and experience a transformation in their own lives. Finally, they become a couple, marry, and although they return to the city, their encounter with the Old Order community has changed their attitudes forever (Weaver-Zercher 33). In contrast to *Sabina*, Welty's novel portrays the Amish in a positive way, and it again includes the elements of rurality and romance. Just like Martin's book, it offers the readers an inside glimpse into a different life, but at the end, the protagonists can return to their normal surroundings and do not really have to interfere with the unknown (Weaver-Zercher 34).

Furthermore, these two novels are a good example of the dialectic manner how the Amish are represented: they are either portrayed as "American saints" or "denigrated as a fallen people" (Weaver-Zercher 28). This pattern can repeatedly be observed in

works of fictional literature that have been written about the Plain People until the present day.

In 1937, the third notable Amish novel, Ruth Lininger Dobson's *Straw in the Wind*, was published. The story is set in a Northern Indiana Amish community and portrays an egoistic and authoritarian Amish bishop called Moses Bontrager, who forces his will on his wife and daughters. In the end, his wife dies from overwork, one daughter is forced to marry someone she does not love, and the other one is prohibited from marrying the man she loves. The book was a success and was even awarded the Hopwood Prize from the University of Michigan (Weaver-Zercher 35). The Mennonite and Amish communities, however, were shocked about this negative description of Amish leaders and one of them decided to take action and protest against it in a literary way. This man was Joseph W. Yoder. In 1938, he wrote: "Being Amish born, raised Amish and still belong [sic] to the Amish Church, I wish to protest against the many misrepresentations of [sic] that novel" (qtd. in Weaver-Zercher 35). Consequently, he started writing the story of his mother, *Rosanna of the Amish*. It is about the life of his mother Rosanna, who was born into an Irish family living in America but was adopted by an Amish woman after her mother died in childbirth. In his book, Yoder includes lengthy illustrations of Amish culture and family life to positively portray his community and, unlike other writings, covers the whole span of his mother's life.

In the midst of the twentieth century, another element was added to Amish novels by Clara Bernice Miller. She was the first author to include evangelicalism into her stories. From now on, most novels do not only describe rural life and the protagonists' struggle with Amish tradition, but also focus on a personal experience with Christ, including born-again salvation as well as evangelism (Weaver-Zercher 37). For example, in *Katie*, which was published in 1966, the heroine starts questioning her image of God. By reading Christian romance novels, something her family frowns upon, "Katie learns the evangelical message of personal salvation" (37). Miller, who was raised Amish and later joined a more liberal Mennonite church, hoped that her books would be read by the Old Order people. Her idea was that her books would motivate the Amish to base their Christianity not on their traditions alone but to search for a more personal experience of God. This Amish "mission movement" started in the 1960s and continues until today.

At the end of the twentieth century, Beverly Lewis followed in Miller's footsteps when writing Amish romance novels, the most popular among them being *The Shunning* (1997). About three years later, Wanda Brunstetter followed suit and used Amish fictional novels to portray an Amish protagonist so that he or she would set an example on how to become a better Christian (Stekovic 24). Both Lewis and Brunstetter are not Amish themselves, but by referencing research about the Amish, they "position themselves as credible insiders, thus seeking to mitigate the charge of factual errors and to gain authenticity – and hence popularity and sales" (Graybill, *Chasing 2*). Nevertheless, Stekovic (23) claims that striking differences can be noticed between novels depending on the author's knowledge of Amish culture and traditions.

Apart from these authors who try to add authenticity to their work by either doing research on the Amish themselves or by referring to existing research, there is a small group of Amish writers who have published their own books. Among these is Joseph W. Yoder, who has been mentioned before, as well as Emma King, who, in 1992, wrote about a tragic event that unsettled her family. In 1999, Brad Igou, despite being non-Amish, undertook the task of collecting several years' worth of texts by Amish that had been published in their magazine *Family Life*. He sorted the various contributions by topic and gave the book the appropriate title *The Amish in Their Own Words*.

In the course of the last decade, however, two remarkable new and truly Amish releases have conquered Amish literature. The first one was written by Linda Byler, who started writing Amish novels in 2003 and has published more than twenty of them until today. As Graybill (*Chasing 2*) reports, "Byler still composes by hand, writing thoughts by pencil in composition books. Her writing is candid, humorous and true to her life as an Old Order Amish woman in more isolated Pennsylvania communities." The second notable author is Lena Yoder, whose first book was a diary called *My Life as an Amish Wife* (2015).

Apart from these two distinct groups of writers – those who are either truly Amish or total outsiders – another branch of authors has joined the market in recent years. They are in a certain way a subgroup of Amish writers, because they were either raised in Amish families but later in life left the community such as Jerry Eicher (2013), Ira Wagner (2012), Emma Gingerich (2014) and Misty Griffin (2014) or joined

the Amish faith like Marlene Miller (2015). These books are all autobiographies and allow the reader an inside glimpse into Amish life.

As different as the background and motives of all these authors might be, they have one thing in common: in one way or another, they write about a community where gender difference is at least obvious in the members' outward appearance. Consequently, the question arises whether these outward differences are also reflected in the character and behavior of males and females in Amish literature. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on the following research question: How are gender roles described by various novelists writing about the Amish and does the writer's background influence these descriptions? In order to answer these questions, three recent serial novels have been chosen. Two of them were written by non-Amish authors: *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013) by Wanda Brunstetter and *Healing Grace* (2015) by Adina Senft. The third one, *Lancaster Burning* (2014), was written by the Amish writer Linda Byler.



### 3. Theoretical Background

#### 3.1. The literary genre of Amish romance novels

The three works discussed in this paper all belong to the subgenre of Amish romance novels. As the term romance novel suggests, this genre comprises elements of a novel and a romance. But what exactly is the difference between these two genres, or, on the other hand, what do these two have in common? Although it is not easy to define these two terms clearly, one attempt has been made by Richard Chase, who asserts that “[t]he main difference between the novel and the romance is the way in which they view reality” (qtd. in Post 370). According to him, the events in a novel will usually be more plausible and closer to reality than in a romance, which often describes astonishing events that serve a more symbolic cause. Furthermore, the characters in a romance tend to be ideal and somehow abstract, whereas in novels they are more important and more closely observed and depicted (371). A similar explanation has been given by Clara Reeve in 1785, when “[s]he defined the novel as ‘a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it was written,’ whereas the romance ‘in lofty and elevated language, describes what has never happened nor is likely to’” (qtd. in Regis 21).

When *romance* and *novel* are now combined, one could basically define this genre as a “prose fiction love story”, which includes the themes “love”, “a happy ending”, and the importance of the heroine (Regis 22). These themes are then translated into narrative events, which are “courtship” and “betrothal”, which Regis explained like this:

Heroines and heroes in love conduct a courtship—that is the action in the novel that expresses the love noted by all of the critics. Courting couples become betrothed—that is the action that leads to the universally endorsed happy ending. The wedding itself is often omitted, but it is always promised in a betrothal. (22)

Regis continues to expand this basic definition of a romance novel by stating eight essential narrative elements that are usually included in this genre:

In one or more scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the

means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. These elements are essential. (30)

Sometimes, additional elements such as a bad character, who is converted to goodness, a scapegoat, who does not really appear in the actual events, or a wedding might occur in the romance novel, but they remain optional (30).

Turning now to the subgenre of Amish romance novel, further elements can be identified. One predominant feature is religion, thereby putting the Amish romance novel in the category of inspirational fiction. Faith and culture always play an important part in the protagonists' lives and influence their thoughts, feelings and actions. The recurring literary element of a rural setting for the storyline shows traces of regional fiction, too (Weaver-Zercher 29). Furthermore, the heroine usually struggles in one way or another for self-fulfillment and finding herself (31). Overall, the Amish romance novel is "the province of purity culture" (67), not containing sexual elements, refraining from modernity on various levels and thereby, it "becomes for its readers a tripartite literature of chastity: chaste texts about chaste protagonists living within a chaste subculture" (13).

In her book "The Thrill of the Chaste", Diane Weaver-Zercher quotes from an article about Amish fiction in *Publishers Weekly* the following "Recipe for an Amish novel":

Take

One young woman (Sarah, Katie, or Rebecca),

One young man (Jacob, Daniel, Samuel).

Add one, or more, problems:

Someone is 21 and unmarried.

Someone has a family secret.

Someone is tempted by life outside the Amish community.

Someone's heart has been broken.

Mix together with one Daed, one Mamm, assorted siblings.

(Optional: add grossdawdi and/or grossmammi).

Bake together for 352 pages till resolved.

Garnish with Pennsylvania Dutch glossary or recipes or quilt pattern.  
(qtd. in Weaver-Zercher 73-74)

Although written in a rather cynical way, this recipe nevertheless includes core elements that can be found in most Amish romance novels: the occurrence of Pennsylvania Dutch dialect in the dialogues, a love story, a character questioning and finally finding faith in God, and the importance of relationships and family.

In addition to these themes that usually appreciate Amish community values and tradition, Sigrid Cordell also observes that “Gothic tropes of confinement and escape” (Cordell 2) are often part of the storyline. As the Amish reject modern technology, these novels are somehow set in an earlier time period, which is a common element in Gothic romance (10), and as the *Ordnung* emphasizes rules and regulations, an atmosphere of confinement is created (11).

## **3.2. Gender**

### **3.2.1. The concept of gender**

The term gender originates from social studies and can be generally defined as describing female or male characteristics of a person within a society or culture. It has to be distinguished from the term sex, which mainly defines humans by their biological features, namely their reproductive organs and structures.

Within the study of gender, however, there have been various viewpoints on this issue ever since this subject area has been researched. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the underlying idea was “that male-female psychological differences were natural, deep-seated, and of profound personal and social consequence” (Shields and Diccico 491). In the 1930s, researchers tried to establish a measurement scale for masculine and feminine characteristics to reveal differences between males and females, which did not prove very reliable (492). In fact, studies conducted at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “revealed the multidimensionality of gender – that is, ‘gender’ encompasses distinct factors that cannot be used to predict or make generalizations about gender-related attitudes or behaviors” (Shields and Diccico 492).

### **3.2.2. Gender stereotypes**

The *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender* (2001) defines gender stereotypes as “organized, consensual beliefs and opinions about the characteristics of women and men and about the purported qualities of masculinity and femininity” (561). These

beliefs do not only describe the traits of women and men, but also prescribe certain ways of behavior, telling them who they are expected to be (562).

The traditional gender roles that most of us are aware of, follow a patriarchal model, where men are the privileged gender. They are considered as “rational, strong, protective, and decisive”, whereas women are seen as “emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive” (Tyson 85). Even though these traditional views are constantly being challenged in our Western culture, they are still in effect today, excluding women from leadership positions and careers in engineering, and often paying them lower wages for doing the same job (85).

The concept of patriarchy is based upon the belief that the biological difference between the sexes implies gender difference, stating that “women are innately inferior to men” and therefore not capable of the same tasks as men or lack certain abilities such as logical thinking (85). Feminists do not negate the biological differences, but object the view that women thus have an inferior status. They draw a clear line between the terms sex and gender (86).

Apart from the fact that stereotypical gender roles discriminate women, also men are negatively influenced by this patriarchal ideal. For example, they are expected to be strong and emotionally stable, and are not supposed to show any weaknesses such as crying or being afraid. Furthermore, the failure to economically support his family can have a humiliating effect on a man, because it implies that he cannot fulfill his role as provider (87).

Even though the patriarchal model has been challenged in our world today by women acquiring leadership positions and pursuing careers outside their homes, the underlying patriarchal gender roles are still in effect, as Tyson explains with this example:

In upwardly mobile, middle-class American culture today, the woman on the pedestal is the woman who successfully juggles a career and a family, which means she looks great at the office and over the breakfast table, and she’s never too tired after work to fix dinner, clean house, attend to all her children’s needs, and please her husband in bed. (91)

As it can be seen, the stereotypical gender roles are not a concept of the past, but still persist in our modern society.

### 3.2.3. Gender roles among the Amish

As the Amish reject technology and modernity, their social life and culture remain traditional, too. At first sight, they follow a patriarchal form of society, and gender roles throughout the various communities are generally clearly defined.

Broadly speaking, Amish men are the ones who carry the main responsibility for the financial support of the family. Their role is to be the head of the family and its spiritual leader. Women are expected to support their husbands and to take care of the household and the children. The idea behind these gender roles is rooted in the Bible, which talks about a divine hierarchy (Johnson-Weiner 235). This hierarchy “places the man at the head of the household just as Christ is the head of the church” (235). However, the Bible also states that the church is seen as the body of Christ and “that in Christ there is no male or female” (235), thereby giving men and women equal importance. The equality women share with men as Christians has even a higher status than her subordination to men in the communal hierarchy (238).

As a result, men and women in Old Order Amish communities are connected to and influence each other by sharing responsibilities in daily activities. In fact, there are “patterns of social interaction that give women power and responsibility equal to that of men in ensuring the survival of the church community” (Johnson-Weiner 237). Both, men and women take part in informal discussions concerning the church community. Within a family, men and women have different tasks – the Amish wife takes care of the children and the household while the husband is in charge of farming and other economic dealings. In reality, however, they often share their tasks, helping each other with their responsibilities (238).

As Igou (1999) quotes from a *Family Life* (December 1978), the Amish have defined the roles like this:

Woman was not taken from man’s head for him to lord over her. She was not taken from his feet so that he could trample on her or kick her around. But she was taken from his side, close to his heart, thus being a loving partner to help him with life’s responsibilities [Gen. 2:18-23]. Among [her duties] are allowing the husband to be the head of the house, converting a house into a home, and assuming the responsibilities of motherhood. Certainly the submission of the wife does not mean slavish subjection, but a joyful working together for a common cause. (97)

It can be seen, that Amish women do not consider their role as housekeeper as inferior, but rather as complementary to their husband's role as bread-winner. Even though husband and wife seem to follow traditional gender roles concerning their tasks, the underlying assumption that the social status of man and woman is not equal does thus not stand up to scrutiny.

Another Amish woman describes her marriage in *Family Life* (February 1975) like this: "[...] I began to realize we can complement each other. In many areas we compromise. It is essential to give in to each other, but it is not necessary to lose one's individual identity." (Igou 105) As it can be noted, women in Amish society are not subject to an inferior status but see men and women's gender roles as complementary to each other.

This division of roles while working together and sharing equal importance is an inherent characteristic of the Old Order Amish communities., However, as some communities adapted to modernity over time and also some Old Order men started getting engaged in working off the farm, the relationship between men and women changed. On the one hand, women's work stayed relatively constant, but the husbands could not help as much at home anymore. This resulted in a higher formal hierarchy with males becoming more dominant (Johnson-Weiner 244). To deal with this new situation accordingly, a minister writing in *Family Life* admonishes community members to bear in mind what the scriptures say:

Whereas wives are counseled to 'submit yourselves unto your own husbands,' husbands are reminded to be 'patient, forgiving, tender, appreciative, and sympathetic ... reasonable, considerate, compassionate, courteous, and gentlemanly.' (Johnson-Weiner 245)

Through allowing modernization to enter some Amish communities, these groups separated from the Old Order Amish, forming the Beachy Amish and Fellowship churches. Johnson-Weiner observes that within these new-found churches the belief that man should dominate woman has grown stronger. Consequently, women do no longer have as much influence on church decisions as before: they are only allowed to discuss issues with their husbands at home, but in church, the husband speaks for his wife and additionally, as a couple they only have one vote together – women do not vote at all (248-249). Furthermore, the Beachy and Fellowship doctrine holds that God created men and women "as different types of beings, with specific and

distinctive roles” (251). Therefore, the gender roles in these communities are far more fixed and more clearly defined than in Old Order communities.

Observing this development, it is interesting to note that women of more traditional Amish communities have a higher social status and more rights than those in more progressive ones. It seems as if the more intimate interaction with modern American society has challenged Amish men to emphasize their role as head of the household.

### Dress codes

One important feature that reflects particular gender roles is the strict dress code in Amish communities. Through their clothing the members distinguish themselves from the surrounding culture (Graybill, *Meanings* 53). The regulation concerning their outfit are far more restrictive for women than for men, “allowing men to ‘pass’ more easily in the outside world” (55). Women have to wear plain dresses as well as a head covering. Those long-sleeve dresses come in ordinary colors, include full skirts and are covered by an apron. The dress should reflect womanly virtues such as “submission, gentleness, motherliness, patience, and meekness” (64). As Amish themselves describe, wearing this outfit makes them feel “less susceptible to harm” (64) and it also “provides [them with] internal motivation for upright, virtuous living” (65). Their hair is never cut, but they wear it in a bun under their head covering.

Men, on the other hand, wear dark-colored suits, straight-cut coats, broad trousers with suspenders and solid-colored shirts. Another part of their attire are black or straw broad-brimmed hats and after marriage, they grow beards.

Despite their clothing, women engage in activities such as playing softball or working in the garden. Compared to men’s clothing, which emphasizes agility and physical effectiveness, women are obviously restricted in their body movements by their dresses, which according to Kaiser should emphasize stability and, to a certain extent, attractiveness (Graybill, *Meanings* 68).

Summarizing these Amish traditions and Old Order customs, the following gender roles and attributes can be observed: women are expected to be family-oriented, patient, modest, upright, traditional, and hard-working. If married, they should support their husband and take care of the children. Even though they should have a

submissive attitude, they share an equal status with their husband, when decisions need to be made.

Amish men, on the other hand, are supposed to be the financial providers of the family. Therefore, they should be hard-working, strong, responsible, and traditional. Nevertheless, they are also described as family-oriented, respectful and gentlemanly, taking care of their wives' and children's needs as well.

In the following literature analysis, the gender roles in three Amish serial novels will be closely studied in order to answer the following questions: How are female and male roles defined in the novels? Do the characters follow a patriarchal gender role model or do they rather support the complementary model of Amish communities? Do characters reflect traits from opposite genders and how do others react to them? How is the relationship between women and men portrayed? And finally, is there a difference in gender role representation between the two non-Amish authors, Wanda Brunstetter and Adina Senft, and the Amish writer Linda Byler?



## **4. Gender roles in Amish serial novels**

### **4.1. *A Lancaster County Saga* by Wanda Brunstetter (2013)**

Wanda Brunstetter started writing Amish fiction a few years after Beverly Lewis. Her husband, Richard, grew up in a Mennonite church and has Amish ancestors. They spent a lot of time among Amish communities and befriended members of the Old Order people. To gain credibility in her writing, Brunstetter took time to research the Amish communities and claims that “many of her books are well-read and trusted by the Amish” (Wanda E. Brunstetter).

The six-part series *A Lancaster County Saga* was released in 2013 and revolves around a young Amish couple in Lancaster County, Meredith and Luke Stoltzfus. Struggling financially, Luke agrees to learn a new trade at a relative’s business in Indiana in order to take it over in the future. On his way to his relative, he has to change bus in Philadelphia. At a diner close to the bus stop, a homeless man watches Luke as he takes out his wallet to pay for his meal. The vagabond notices that Luke has many bills in his wallet and plans to rob him. Back at the bus stop he takes his chance when Luke enters the restroom and beats him senseless. As he also discovers Luke’s bus ticket, he exchanges his clothes with Luke’s and continues the bus travel with Luke’s documents. The bus has a deadly accident and burns down completely. While Luke’s family believes that Luke is dead, Luke himself ends up in hospital with no memories of his name and his past. After his physical recovery, an older Christian couple with two young granddaughters offers him a new home until he can remember his past life. Meanwhile, Meredith, who believes that Luke has died, gives birth to their first child and is courted by another young Amish man. At the same time, Luke is about to fall in love with one of his host’s granddaughters. Finally, in the sixth part of the series, Luke’s memory returns and he travels back home – just in time before Meredith marries Jonah Miller, her new suitor.

#### 4.1.1. Main female and male characters and their gender roles

##### Luke Stoltzfus

Right at the beginning of the story, the reader is confronted with the couple's financial struggle that obviously has a direct effect on their marriage. Luke does not seem as attentive towards Meredith as he had been before, and he tries to keep to himself (Brunstetter, *Goodbye* 8). Luke feels it is his duty to provide for his young family as is described in the first chapter: "On more than one occasion, Meredith had suggested that she look for a job, but Luke wouldn't hear of that. He insisted that it was his job to provide for them." (9). By using the phrases "on more than one occasion" and "he insisted", the tension between the couple is highlighted, and a vivid picture of a tight financial situation is created. Furthermore, the image of Luke as a patriarch, who is not willing to admit his failure in his role as breadwinner, is reinforced: "Luke's folks had offered to help out financially, but Luke had turned them down" (9). His responsibility weighs heavily on him and he seems unwilling to thoroughly discuss the situation with his wife, but insists on being the head of the household:

"[...] Until we get on our feet again, we should leave well enough alone."  
"But Luke, if you knew —"  
"Mir sin immer am disch bediere iwwer eppes." He frowned. „And I'm gettin' tired of it."  
"It does seem like we're always arguing about something," she agreed, "and I don't like it, either."  
"Then let's stop arguing and talk about something else." Irritation edged Luke's voice.  
"You can be so *eegesinnich* sometimes," she muttered, looking away.  
"I'm not being stubborn; I'm being practical. And as far as I'm concerned, this discussion is over!" (9)

This lively description of their dialogue shows Luke's dominance: he frowns, speaks with irritation in his voice and finally ends the discussion, ignoring his wife's criticism. Meredith, however, does not speak clearly, but is "muttering" and "looking away". With these phrases, Brunstetter paints a picture of an inferior woman, who simply gives up on stating her opinion equal.

Although the male protagonist is described as dominant, in a short flashback the reader understands that the situation was different before: "[...] until recently they'd always discussed things and made important decisions together" (13). This indicates

that as long as everyday life is without any challenges, Luke treats his wife as an equal counterpart. But as soon as his male role as provider is attacked, equality does not count any more.

However, as the financial situation grows worse and Luke realizes that something needs to be done, he remembers that such an important decision as investing all their finances into a new trade cannot be made by him alone – it has to be in agreement with his wife:

How would she take the news that he wanted to withdraw money from their dwindling bank account to learn a new trade he wasn't even sure he'd be any good at? Not only that, but would Meredith be okay with him being gone for a few weeks until he learned this new skill? (25-26)

[Luke:] "I shouldn't be gone more than a few weeks, and I'd really like your blessing on this new venture." (30)

As Brunstetter writes the story from a third-person omniscient perspective, the reader cannot only observe Luke's actions and conversation, but also his thoughts. These convey that he really cares about his wife's opinion on his enterprise. He does not only want to reach an agreement with his wife, but is also not ashamed of admitting a wrong and apologizes to his wife when he says: "I know I've been kinda hard to live with lately, and ...' He paused and reached for her hand. 'Es dutt mir leed.'" (32). Through using Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, a feeling of intimacy is created.

Moreover, the reader can also observe that Luke really wants to please his wife and fulfill her wishes as well. Although at first he denies her wishes for a new paint inside the house because of financial restrictions, he plans to reconsider this decision on his way to his uncle: "I'm gonna tell her" and "I'm sure she'll be pleased" (83). This shows an inner struggle between feeling responsible as a bread-winner and his desire to be a considerate and respectful husband, who wants to show respect towards his wife, accepting her as a partner in their marriage.

One – for Amish male characters – rather unusual characteristic, at least as their culture prescribes, is Luke's desire to know about the world:

The bus he'd be transferring to in Philadelphia wouldn't be leaving the station until 12:20 a.m., which meant he had plenty of time to get a bite to eat and buy a newspaper, so he'd have something to read. Luke was always interested to see what was going on in the rest of the world and wanted to check for any articles on the weather to see if the storm had reached the areas where he'd be traveling. (106)

But he does not only want to know about the news in the world, but is also interested in modern inventions, showing that he has an innate desire to explore new things:

Luke was also captivated seeing airplanes whiz across the sky. If he was looking in the right spot, occasionally he'd see a satellite move silently across the night sky. *I can't even imagine what it's like to be up in the sky like that, looking down at the earth*, he thought. (67)

During the period of his amnesia, he even goes as far as riding in a hot-air balloon, suggesting that the Amish culture and their traditional beliefs suppress the explorative nature of men – which the male protagonist easily gives up when he finally returns to his Amish family and community.

Apart from this unusual attribute, Brunstetter describes her male protagonist as the paramount example of a young male Amish. Luke is hard-working, considerate, always friendly, helpful and respectful:

Luke had become a friend to many in the community. He'd exuded confidence, and even to strangers, he had seemed comfortable talking about most any subject. He'd been open minded and straightforward, and it was those qualities that people had liked about him. He'd had an infectious personality and had made many friends over the years because of it. Folks just gravitated toward him, [...] (*Silence* 80)

He had respected his parents and been a good son to them. Meredith had never heard him say an unkind word about either one of his folks. (82)

Even during the period of his amnesia, his character remains that of a responsible and sensible young man who treats his surroundings carefully and respectfully, not wanting to owe anything to anybody (“It didn't seem right for him not to pay,” Brunstetter, *Pieces* 31). He is still described as someone caring for the world around him, even for the little things:

Susan smiled. It was refreshing to meet a man with such a tender spirit. She wondered if he'd ever had any pets of his own. If he had, he'd probably treated them with the same gentleness he was using on this kitten right now, as it purred and rubbed its small head against Eddie's [i.e. Luke's] hand. The kitten was definitely content lying there in his lap. (*Pieces* 37)

Luke's attending to the kitten could be regarded as a metaphor to his “tender spirit”: his gentleness is reflected in the kitten – a small fragile being – purring and rubbing its head against his hand, reinforcing the picture of Luke as a sensible, considerate man.

“He and your grandpa are outside, shoveling snow off the driveway so you and Anne can get your cars out of the garage. It’s a good thing you both have afternoon shifts, because the roads should be cleared by then.”

Susan smiled. “Luke’s thoughtful, isn’t he, Grandma?” (Vows 25)

Again, Luke’s helpfulness and gentlemanly behavior is shown – he does not only aid the old man but offers his help to make life easier for the young women. To sum it up, Luke Stoltzfus is portrayed in a very positive way. Only at the beginning he shows signs of dominance and patriarchy, but as the story unfolds, only his good traits are focused on – as if he had learned a lesson after the tragic accident that happened to him.

### Meredith Stoltzfus

Turning to the female protagonist of the novel series, the reader can detect the expected Amish female attributes right from the beginning. Meredith is portrayed as being modest, submissive and responsible, not given to emotional outbursts.

[...] Luke felled blessed. She wasn’t the type to ask for much, and buying some paint was really no big expense – that is, until now. (*Goodbye* 22)

He also knew she kept herself extra busy around the house so she wouldn’t fret so much about him being out of a job. (22)

Meredith hesitated. Then she gave a slow nod. “All right, Luke, if that’s what you think is best.” *Although I’m really not sure it’s the right decision for us*, she silently added. (31)

“I’d like to [travel with you, Luke], but I don’t think we should spend the money for an extra bus ticket. Besides, Luke will be busy learning his new trade, so I think it’ll be better for both of us if I stay home.” (40)

These four quotations illustrate the hierarchical nature of the relationship between Meredith and Luke: Luke feels blessed, because Meredith is modest, stays busy in order to not think about his unemployment, and supports his decision to take their money and learn a new trade at his uncle’s place, although she is skeptical about his move.

Apart from these expected feminine attributes, there is one feature in Meredith that stands out – her stubbornness and willingness to do and manage things on her own. After Luke has left to learn a new trade at his uncle’s place the female protagonist is

determined to manage life on her own, even though it is a typical Amish feature that family members take care of and depend on each other:

Just then, Dad entered the room. "Are you comin' home with us?" he asked, looking at Meredith.

She shook her head. "I appreciate the offer, but I'd prefer to stay here." Dad looked over at Mom and said, "This daughter of ours is an eegesinnisch one, jah?" (*Goodbye* 95)

[Meredith's father:] "[...] My daughter can be stubborn sometimes, and I know she wants to make it on her own." (*Hope* 12)

"You don't have to worry about any of those things, because I'm ready to go home," Meredith blurted out. "It's quieter there, and since I'm feeling better now, I'm sure I can manage fine on my own." (37)

"I'm glad he [Jonah] was there, but if I had been alone when the pains got bad, I would have somehow made my way out to the phone shack and called for help," Meredith said in her own defense. (38)

Meredith jaw clenched. She didn't want anyone babysitting her, but if she didn't agree, Mom would insist that she stay with the family. (39)

Brunstetter paints a vivid picture of how the rather timid and submissive female from the beginning of the story suddenly rises up and stands her ground: she "blurts out", her "jaw clenches" as she feels being compared to a little girl, who needs a babysitter.

Her eagerness to manage life on her own brings out her hard-working attitude. As Johnson-Weiner described the role of women in Amish communities, the female protagonist is an example for the women's tendency to not be idle but hard-working to provide for the family. For Meredith, work does not only support her financially but also psychologically after she receives the news of her husband's presumed death. She tries to be strong by not giving in to grief and depression.

Every night Meredith made a mental note of what she wanted to accomplish the next day. As long as she did that, she felt like she had a reason to get out of bed each morning. (*Silence* 107)

Forcing herself to think about something else, Meredith began to fret because she couldn't be at home doing the things she'd planned in preparation for the baby. [...] She'd always been the type to keep her hands busy, and doing nothing was so frustrating. (*Hope* 15)

Her culture and religious background, however, put her in an emotional conflict. On the one hand, she wants to be independent, supporting herself as a widow; on the

other hand, she is afraid that this self-reliance might be interpreted as pride and feels sorry for it. In this way, she is experiencing an inner struggle between the desire to be independent as a woman and to conform to traditions and fulfilling her expected female role – one that is dependent on other people. And it is one of the older women – her grandmother – who reminds her of the community’s values:

“I guess I’m full of *hochmut*, or I would have asked for help painting the baby’s room.”

“You should never be too proud to ask. That’s what families are for, you know.” Grandma took a sip of tea and winked at Meredith. (*Hope* 16)

On the outward, she often complies with the expectations that are imposed on her, but when the author writes about Meredith’s thoughts, the reader becomes aware that inwardly, she is not the submissive and obedient woman she seemed at first sight. She has a deep-seated desire to make decisions on her own:

“That’s right, and I’m happy to say that I’m doing much better now and was more than ready to come home.”

“I’m glad to hear that, but you need to take it easy and not try to do too much,” he [Jonah] warned.

Meredith stiffened. First Mom, then Laurie, and now Jonah? Why did everyone think they needed to tell her what to do? (59)

Through the enumeration “first Mom, then Laurie, and now Jonah” followed by “everyone”, the reader can take a hold of Meredith’s anger at being told what to do. By using this narrative device of a climactic enumeration, the author succeeds in portraying, the character’s aggravation can easily be felt.

This kind of feeling and behavior is rather characteristic of a modern woman than an Amish traditional one. As the story evolves, Meredith starts thinking it might be good to start doing new things and not remain where she has always been. One reason is her sister Laurie, who is about to marry a Mennonite man and leave the Amish community with him. The other reason is an excursion to a county fair where people can take a short ride in a hot air balloon. Meredith does not actually venture to take a ride in it, a fact which she regrets it later on.

Meredith wished now that she’d taken a ride in the balloon, just to see what it was like way up there. She’d never been an adventurous person, but maybe it was time to step out of her comfort zone and start taking some chances. (*Revelation*, ch. 6)

These desires are reflected in Neriya-Ben Shahar's study (2017) that describes Amish women as "gatekeepers", people who protect traditions and values by taking care what influences are allowed to enter the community, as well as "agents-of-change", people who carefully explore new things and practice self-control in the use of it. On the one hand, Meredith is fascinated by the thought of flying, but at the same time, she knows she should not do it and keep to her traditions instead. She continues to prove her responsible and considerate character when she and Jonah decide to start courting. Assuming that her parents-in-law might not accept this easily, she wants to inform them first.

[Meredith:] "No, not yet. It'll be hard telling Luke's folks that Jonah and I will be courting, but I know I have to. I wouldn't want them to hear about it from someone else. It would hurt them deeply." (*Revelation*, ch. 8)

Meredith loved Sadie and Elam and wanted their approval. (*Vows* 11)

As the story unfolds, one can observe how the female protagonist changes her behavior. While she is described as modest, gentle and submissive as long as her husband is at home, her attitudes change as she believes herself to be a widow and therefore responsible for her own and her child's life. This moment in the romance, which Regis calls "point of ritual death" (30), offers Meredith the chance to break out of her tradition and aim at self-fulfillment. However, this phase of her life only lasts until a new suitor wins her heart and she turns back to her traditional roots. Due to the omniscient narrative perspective, the reader, however, knows that her first husband is still alive and feels the need to detain the female from marrying another, supporting her desire for independence. But in the end, the tension is released by Luke himself, who appears on Meredith's doorstep in the very last moment. With his return, Meredith also returns to her appropriate Amish gender role.

### Jonah Miller

Jonah Miller is the third main Amish character in the novel and makes his debut in the second volume of the series. He is about the same age as Meredith and Luke and still single. For some years, he has been living in another state and now comes back to his hometown to work in his father's business. It becomes evident that he shares a close relationship with his parents, nevertheless he desires a family of his own – as is expected of him as a young Amish male.



It would be great working alongside Dad again – just like he'd done since he was a teenager, when Dad first taught him how to make and repair Amish and other types of buggies. Jonah and his dad not only had a close father-son relationship, but they were linked in a working relationship, too, and both took their work seriously.

[...] He sure couldn't stay living with Mom and Dad forever, and he didn't wish to remain single indefinitely. (*Silence* 117)

Another typical attribute can be seen in his expectations concerning his future wife. Jonah imagines her as being the one taking care of the home to turn it into a comfortable place, just as he saw his mother doing it during his childhood. He obviously appreciates the traditional Amish gender roles, where the women are responsible for the household and the children:

He dreamed of a spouse who would fill their home with love – a place where Jonah knew he belonged as soon as he walked through the door. His mom had a way of putting her heart into every room in her house, and anyone entering could actually feel the welcome. (*Silence* 118)

In this paragraph, Brunstetter describes Jonah's attitudes toward his future wife: she should be the one making the house a home; none of his thoughts touch the idea that he might have a part in this as well: in his imagination, it's solely the woman who is responsible for the emotional well-being of family members, just as his mother did when he grew up. To emphasize this image, the author uses phrases such as "fill with love", and "put one's heart into it" to talk about the woman's tasks, in order that the man can "belong" and "feel welcome".

However, Jonah does not appear to be a dominant male character. He is rather caring and helpful and wants the best for the people close to him. Even though he was interested in Meredith years before, he accepted the fact that she married someone else because he cared more for her happiness than his own. Being jealous, angry or depressed was no option for him, because his Christian belief taught him to accept this situation as God's will.

Ever since Jonah was a boy, he'd been sensitive to others, especially when they needed help in any way. (*Silence* 119)

"[...] Jonah seems like a caring young man. I'm sure he'll fit in well with our community." (*Hope* 8)

Jonah had been disappointed at first but consoled himself with the thought that Meredith deserved to be happy. He'd been hoping she might be the girl for him

but had learned to accept it as God's will when she'd fallen in love with someone else. (*Silence* 120)

As the story unfolds and Jonah hears about Luke's death, his sacrifice of giving up Meredith seems to be quickly forgotten. Knowing that he cannot rush things because she is still mourning, he still uses every opportunity of being of help to her. Once again, his caring and helpful attitude can be observed, at the same time, however, he does not really worry about what others in the community might think. Even when his parents remind him of it, he chooses to follow his own desires instead of submitting to his parents' advice. This kind of stubbornness and individualistic behavior can be observed in the following conversations:

Jonah tapped his foot impatiently. This inquisition was getting worse. "If you must know, I'm planning to stop by the Kings' place to see how Meredith is doing."

Deep wrinkles formed across Mom's forehead. "Do you think that's a good idea?"

"Why wouldn't it be?" Jonah asked. He had an inkling of what she was going to say next but hoped she wouldn't.

"Well, some folks might get the wrong idea." (*Hope* 42)

"I know what the Bible says," Mom flapped her hand. "But Meredith is the friend you had an interest in after you came back from Sarasota with stars in your eyes."

"Well, you two enjoy your day," Jonah said, giving no reply to Mom's last comment. (*Hope* 48)

Dad tapped his foot as he stared at Jonah. "You've been goin' over there a lot lately. Aren't ya worried about what others will say?"

Jonah tipped his head. "What is it you think they might say?"

Dad cleared his throat real loud. "Do I need to remind you that Meredith's a young widow, and she's expecting a boppli besides?"

A rush of heat spread across Jonah's face. "Exactly what are you saying, Dad?" he asked.

"I just feel you oughta be concerned about what others may think. Some folks could get the idea that you have it in mind to make Meredith your wife."

*Oh, great,* Jonah thought. *Now I'm in for one of Dad's long lectures. I'd better put an end to this before it gets started.* (*Hope* 83)

The way Brunstetter describes Jonah's conversations with his parents leaves the impression of a teenager who is reprimanded by his parents. The use of the hyperbole – "inquisition" – creates tension between Jonah and his parents, as do his seemingly naïve answers: "Why wouldn't it be?" and "Exactly what are you saying?",

which are not really answers but counter questions that indicate his unwillingness to agree to his parents' point of view.

Interestingly, Jonah does not admit his feelings for Meredith to his parents – he behaves as if their concerns about his motives were completely unfounded. Amish communities and especially families are usually described to be very close, and important matters such as courting and marriage are commonly discussed within the family. In Jonah's case, he keeps his feelings to himself and is not ready to discuss them with his parents or even to seek their counsel. As can be noted, he follows a rather individualistic attitude instead of the traditional Amish one. Finally, when Meredith's appropriate time of mourning has passed, he openly states his intentions – first to Meredith and then to others.

“What do you think, Meredith?” Jonah questioned. “Are you comfortable with me courting you right now, or would you rather wait a few more months?”

Meredith shook her head. “I don't want to wait. I think once Sadie sees how good you are with Levi and realizes you're not trying to take Luke's place she'll accept the idea.”

Jonah's eyebrows pulled together. “Maybe I should have a talk with her—try to make her see how much I care about you and Levi and that I only want what's best for you. I'd like to assure her that even though we'll be courting, I have no intention of changing how often they can see their grandson. I would never come between them and Levi.” (Vows 9)

Being accepted by Meredith, Jonah's sensitive character comes into play again. He does not want Luke's parents to object to him, therefore he strives for their approval. His good intentions are revealed in more than one expression. By a certain climax in his speech he shows himself as a considerate young man: he wants to “try to make her see”, he would “like to assure her”, has “no intention of changing” and “would never come between them and Levi”. Again, the close ties within the Amish community have an influence on this male character, his individualistic way of thinking and behavior are set aside as all circumstances seem to have turned out to his favor.

Although the reader is aware that Meredith's husband is not dead, the character of Jonah is described in such a way that – just like Meredith – one starts to sympathize with him. Due to his constant gentlemanly and helpful attitude, one cannot but like this young Amish man. When, however, Luke suddenly returns, the reader, on the one hand, is relieved and glad about the happy ending of Meredith and Luke, but, on the other hand, feels sorry for Jonah. The author, however, takes care of this

situation as well and mentions in the epilogue that Jonah, who moves to Illinois, finds a girlfriend as well (Vows 51).

#### **4.1.2. Other female/male gender roles**

In addition to the three main characters in Brunstetter's *Lancaster County Saga*, there are three older Amish couples and their relationships that will be analyzed. These are the parents of Luke, Meredith, and Jonah, and they all try to influence the decisions of the main protagonists on different levels. They all live in the same Amish community and are about the same age; their characters, their interaction as husband and wife, and their involvement in Meredith's and Jonah's lives, however, are rather diverse.

##### Sadie and Elam Stoltzfus (Luke's parents)

At the beginning of the novel series, Sadie Stoltzfus is described as a happy Amish mother, who loves her nurturing role and only has the best interest of her children in mind. She is welcoming, everyone loves being around her, thus she represents the perfect Amish female model.

Luke's mother was always so cheerful. In fact, Sadie's radiant smile was contagious, and at the age of sixty-seven, she still had the cutest little dimples. Just being around her made Meredith feel at ease. (*Goodbye* 61)

Brunstetter paints a harmonious picture of Sadie by consistently using positive adjectives such as "cheerful", "radiant" and "cute". And when she states that despite her age, "she still had the cutest little dimples" the impression is given that she has always been a very happy woman.

Furthermore, Sadie is portrayed as very creative, because she writes little poems about her feelings, her faith, and her role as a mother. Obviously being a mother is very important to her and she is aware of the responsibility that comes with it. She considers it her duty to be a role model to others.

Sadie had written a poem about being a mother, which she'd shared with Meredith this morning before the service. It had almost been Meredith's

undoing as she'd listened to Sadie read the poem in a quavering voice: "A mother wants her faith to give hope to her child; stability and trust in a world gone wild. A mother's faith should be handed down; in the next generation it will be found. A mother's faith must be steadfast and sure; so her children will desire to be like her." (*Silence* 81)

The repetition of "a mother" in Sadie's poem underlines the significance this role has for her. Reciting these lines, she feels emotion, probably because the weight of a mother's responsibility dawns on her.

When tragedy strikes and her son Luke is pronounced dead, her character surprisingly changes. As long as Sadie thinks that Meredith will stay single after the delivery of her and Luke's baby, she can cope with the death of her son, comforting herself in the knowledge that she will play an important part in her grandchild's future. However, when she realizes that Meredith has a new suitor, she becomes jealous, thereby losing all the good character traits such as friendliness, responsibility and a welcoming attribute as described before:

A few seconds later, Luke's mother, Sadie, stepped down from the buggy and secured her horse at the hitching rail. A frown creased her brow as she approached the garden. Was she upset about something? Had she come with bad news?

"*Wie geht's?*" Meredith asked.

"I'm fine," Sadie said curtly. "I just came by to see how you're doing." She glanced at Jonah, frowned slightly, and then quickly looked away.

Meredith thought Sadie's behavior was a bit strange; she was usually quite warm and friendly. (*Pieces* 17-18)

Her whole countenance changes, instead of cute dimples and a smile, she "frowns" and talks "curtly" – a complete contrast to the description at the beginning of the story. Thereby a change in her character can be noted.

Sadie discusses her feeling with her husband Elam, hoping that he will agree with her point of view. However, she does not really seek his advice as would be expected in an Amish couple's discussion, but she rather tries to force her point of view on him. Elam, however, does not give in, but clearly states his point of view. Outwardly, she reminds him of his role as the head of the household by laying a hand on his shoulder, encouraging him to do something, but when he is not willing to follow her advice, she draws back to herself and decides to do what she wants without his consent.

“Jah, and I don’t think it’s right that he’s been hanging around there so much. I’m afraid he’s trying to take Luke’s place, and it’s way too soon for Meredith to be seeing another man.” She placed her hand on Elam’s shoulder. “I think you should do something about it, and the sooner the better.”

“What do you want me to do, Sadie?” Elam asked, shrugging his shoulders. “Am I supposed to barge into the buggy shop and demand that Jonah stay away from Meredith?”

“That might not be a bad idea,” she said with a nod.

Elam looked at her and frowned as he slowly shook his head. “If Jonah and Meredith are meant to be together, there’s nothing either one of us can do about it.”

Sadie’s lips compressed while she tapped her foot. “We’ll just have to see about that.” (*Pieces* 19)

Elam realizes Sadie’s feelings of jealousy and is aware that he has to interfere. He tries to stop her plans with ironic statements. In this way he is portrayed as a good-natured and humorous man. But nevertheless, he openly states his opinion when he realizes that his wife’s attitude will probably cause problems and hurt not only Meredith but also their future relationship with their grandchild.

Elam grunted warily. „You [Sadie] need to mind your own business. We’ve been over this before, and it’s time you realized that Meredith has her own life to live. If her future includes Jonah someday, then you’ll just have to accept it.” (*Revelation* ch.3)

By observing this couple throughout the novel, it is interesting to note that Elam fits well into the typical Amish male role – head of the household, responsible and family-oriented -, whereas Sadie follows the Amish feminine attributes of being gentle, family-oriented, motherly and submissive only as long as there are no troubles. As soon as she experiences the fear of losing influence on her family, her submission to her husband becomes less important than her own will and her feelings. Honesty and uprightness are of no significance anymore and she acts against her husband’s advice. Thereby, she does not follow the ideal of an Amish couple that complements each other and discusses important issues together.

*I’m glad Elam’s visiting his friend Joe today, Sadie thought as she hitched her horse, Daisy, to the buggy. If he knew I was going over to confront Jonah about seeing Meredith, he’d probably tell me I shouldn’t go and that it’s none of my business what Jonah does. (Pieces 22)*

Through the narrator’s omniscient perspective, the reader becomes aware of Sadie’s emotions and plans. She knows her actions are not approved of by her husband, but her feelings of anger and jealousy seem to overcome her. Although in the end, she

finally admits her wrong behavior, it is interesting to notice that in an emotionally strenuous situation, Sadie does not confide in her husband in order to seek advice; rather, she only seeks approval of her point of view. Elam, however, does not really know how to cope with the situation and attempts to get to the root of the problem, leaving the impression that this couple is not used to talking things over thoroughly.

#### Luann and Philip King (Meredith's parents)

In his physical appearance, Philip King represents the typical hard-working Amish male: “[...] her dad was in tip-top health. His arms were still muscular from all the farmwork he'd done over the years, and Meredith found comfort in his warm embrace.” (*Goodbye* 96). Just as his physical stature offers comfort, he is also described as a loving father who has an open ear for his children's problems (*Silence* 59). Spending time with his family plays an important role in his life and although he knows that he has to take care of the financial situation of the family, he would never neglect his family.

She was glad Dad hadn't taken on another stand at the Crossroads market, like he'd talked about doing a few months ago. He worked hard enough as it was, and it was difficult for the family to have him gone so much. It was important for a father to spend time with his wife and children, not only for the family's sake but for his own, as well. (*Pieces* 20)

The burden of financial responsibility weighs hard on him, and his friendly nature only then turns into a more dominant one when his wife Luann mentions their tight budget. He does not start an argument, but nevertheless clearly states that this criticism hurts his feelings and shows doubt in his abilities as the breadwinner of the family. This behavior is different than that of Sadie and Elam. Philip King openly talks about his feeling, whereas Sadie Stoltzfus only tells her husband what she wants to be done and not how she feels about a situation:

“First off, we don't need another horse, and second, I don't need the reminder of how bad off we are financially.” Dad rubbed the side of his slightly crooked nose and frowned. “When you say things like that, Luann, it makes me feel like a failure – like I can't provide well enough for our family.” (*Hope* 18)

Luann' and Philip's relationship is obviously a very affectionate one. After more than three decades of marriage, they are still fond of each other and enjoy having fun and

joking around when the family gets together. This short dialogue creates the mood of a caring and affectionate home:

Luann's sixteen-year-old daughter, Kendra, wrinkled her nose and glared at Arlene. "It's not polite to lick your fingers, Sister."

"Maybe not," Luann's husband, Philip, put in, "but this chicken is finger lickin' good." He swiped his tongue over his fingers and grinned at Luann's mother, who gave him a wide smile in return. (*Hope* 95-96)

Meredith's mother Luann is described as the ideal Amish wife and mother. She is friendly, has a welcoming spirit (*Revelation* ch.2), is motherly and taking care of her children well (*Silence* 69). In contrast to Luke's mother Sadie, she keeps her opinion about Meredith decision to marry Jonah to herself, even though she does not feel comfortable with the idea. In this respect, she shows self-control and does not allow her feelings to control her actions.

#### Sarah and Raymond Miller (Jonah's parents)

Jonah's parents Sarah and Raymond are also described as a happy older couple. Raymond is a hard worker and has taught his son Jonah his trade of making and repairing buggies (*Silence* 117). While Jonah lives with his parents, father and son work together, helping each other. Sarah shares a close relationship with her son, too, and is eager to see him getting married. If necessary, she is ready to help him achieve this goal, as can be read when she meets Luann: "Luann didn't voice her opinion, but it sounded to her like Sarah might be trying to plan her son's future, which she didn't think was a good thing at all" (*Silence* 98). In Sarah's mind, women are better off if they are married, especially when they have children as it is in Meredith's case. A woman raising her child alone does not seem to be right to her – love between the husband and wife is not as important as the mere fact that a man is there for the child as well.

"That's wunderbar. Maybe after a suitable time, she'll get married again, like our daughter did," Sarah's emerald-green eyes shimmered as she smiled.

Luann slowly shook her head. "Meredith loved her husband very much, and she's taken his death quite hard, so I doubt she would ever marry again."

"But don't you suppose after some time has passed, if the right man came along, she might get married – for the sake of the boppli, if for no other reason?" Sarah asked. (*Silence* 96-97)



In this short dialogue she proposes a new marriage for Meredith twice, as if this were the only achievable goal for Meredith. In this conversation, Sarah is portrayed as an excited matchmaker, her excitement made visible when her “emerald-green eyes shimmered as she smiled.”

However, Sarah as well as Raymond place value on what others in the community think about them and their son. Therefore, they are both sceptical when Jonah starts spending quite a lot of time helping Meredith. Sarah does not directly address this topic, but desires to find out what is going on. Similar to Sadie, she beats around the bush instead of directly discussing the issue at hand.

“Ja, and we’re glad he’s here with us. Oh, by the way, Jonah, where all are you going today?” Mom asked as Jonah’s hand touched the doorknob.

“For one thing, I’ll be stopping by the Shoe and Boot store,” Jonah replied. He wished he didn’t have to answer to Mom, it made him feel like a schoolboy.

“That shouldn’t take all day,” she said. “Are there some other places you’ll be stopping, as well?”

“Stop badgering the boy, Sarah,” Dad said, flapping the end of his newspaper at Mom. “It shouldn’t matter where he’s going.” (*Hope* 46)

She appears rather annoyed und curious as she keeps asking her son what he plans to do. However, her eager curiosity is directly addressed and stopped by her husband Raymond. Thus, he fulfills his role as the head of the household and puts his wife in her place. Furthermore, he directly addresses his son to remind him what kind of behavior is expected of him concerning Meredith’s circumstances and his family’s reputation in the Amish community. Similar to Luann and Philip, this couple talks openly with each other. However, just as with Sadie and Elam, the wife is the more active partner, wishing to influence her son’s future, just as Sadie wants to intervene in Meredith’s life. Both husbands, Elam as well as Raymond, are rather annoyed be their wives’ behavior.

#### 4.2. *Healing Grace Series by Adina Senft (2015)*

Adina Shelley writes Amish women's fiction under the name of Adina Senft. She grew up in a plain house church – but not an Amish one – in Canada and moved to California in her twenties. (Stories with spirit) Even though she did not grow up Amish, she has a lot of friends among the Amish who read and help her with writing her novels. Furthermore, she spends one week in Lancaster County each year to talk with Amish women and to listen to their conversations in order to do research for her Amish novels. (Destination Amish)

The *Healing Grace* serial novel contains three volumes, *Herb of Grace*, *Keys of Heaven* and *Balm of Gilead*. The story revolves around Amish widow Sarah Yoder who raises her two teenage sons – stepson Simon and son Caleb – alone and tries to provide a home for them in the village of Willow Creek. Recently, Henry Byler, an ex-Amish who grew up in the Amish community of Willow Creek but never joined the church, decides to move there again after inheriting his aunt's farm. He starts his pottery business on the old farm and soon becomes friends with Sarah's younger son Caleb.

Simon, together with his friend Joe Byler, decides to move out west to look for work and to get to know life from a different perspective. In the meantime, Sarah is encouraged by Ruth Lehman, an Amish *Dokterfraa*, to learn from her to become a herbal healer, because she has a gift for growing plants. As time goes by, Sarah's relatives try to encourage a relationship between her and Silas, a visiting Amish man. Their attempts are not successful, because Sarah becomes emotionally attached to Henry although she does not want to admit it, knowing that he left the Amish church.

Henry's pottery business turns out successful and he gets to know Ginny, an *English* inn-owner in Willow Creek, and falls in love with her. They plan to get married, but that changes when the company who commissions his work wants to market him as Amish. Henry struggles with his Amish roots, his respect for the Amish community, and the chance to leave his past behind forever by binding himself to an *English* woman. In the end, he realizes his strong ties to his background and his love for Sarah and returns to his community again.

Simon and Joe also return from their working journey to Colorado. Joe already courted Priscilla, a young Amish girl, before they left – although Priscilla was

interested in Simon at first. When they return, these two young men start competing for Priscilla, but she holds fast to her decision to be courted by Joe.

#### 4.2.1. Main female and male characters and their gender roles

##### Sarah Yoder

The main protagonist of the novel trilogy is Sarah Yoder, an Amish widow in her mid-thirties, who raises her seventeen-year-old stepson Simon and her fourteen-year-old son Caleb alone. Although she is supported by her and her husband's family, she is determined to provide for her small family on her own. As she is quite successful in planting and cultivating herbs, Ruth, an older Amish woman who has great knowledge in herbs, teas and salves, offers to pass on this knowledge to her, thus enabling her to make a living and be a help to the community.

Her outward appearance is described as modest and as being a woman who follows the Amish dress code. She carefully observes it, especially when meeting outsiders like Henry.

She leaped to her feet and smoothed down her dress with one hand while she pulled her *Duchly* up with the other. She tried to tie the knot more tightly, because she certainly couldn't talk to an *Englisch* man bareheaded. (*Herb* 144)

From the beginning, it is obvious that Sarah wants to be a respectful woman and often restrains herself from speaking in an unruly matter. In her conversation with Ruth, for example, Senft writes: "Ruth was older, and enjoyed a position of respect in several communities – both very good reasons for Sarah to school her tongue to a soft answer." (*Herb* 5) Even when she feels attacked, she is aware of her surroundings and the respect that is due to others:

It was all Sarah could do not to dash in there and give Oran Yost a piece of her mind for talking to her son like that. But she could not. It was not her place to upbraid a man in his own shop, in front of the other men – especially not a man in a position of authority over Simon. It would shame Simon and show her to be an interfering busybody who didn't know how to submit – which was not the case. (*Herb* 33)

As one can see, she is well aware of her position as a woman in a patriarchal society and of the fact that a woman should be ready to yield and to be submissive in order to follow the beliefs of the Amish community (*Herb* 44). Nevertheless, Sarah continues to struggle with this attribute of restraint as can be seen from the narrator's omniscient perspective: inwardly, Sarah wants to "dash in", "give a piece of her mind" and "upbraid a man", creating the image of a very emotional female who does not want to accept a wrong. In more than one situation, Sarah is quick to speak her mind, only to regret it moments later, knowing that this is not the becoming behavior of an Amish woman. The reason for her frank speaking is often care for other people and not to appear as a know-it-all.

"Shouldn't his boys be helping, too?" The question shot out of Sarah's mouth before she could stop it. "I'm sorry. It's none of my business how he and Ella bring up their family." (*Keys* 55)

"You're not having dinner with Ginny?" came out of her mouth before she even realized the thought was lurking in her mind, ready to spring like a kitten upon any wisp of passing common sense. (*Keys* 192)

Here, Senft makes use of a metaphor to describe Sarah's forward attitude. In her vivid description, Sarah is portrayed as someone outspoken, who has a lot of thoughts going through her mind.

"You were thinking out loud one day?" Corinne's forehead was furrowed with concern. "You were talking with Linda and advising her to leave her home with Ella and Arlon? Oh, Sarah."

Sarah wilted under the pain in her mother-in-law's face. "She couldn't conceive. I thought it would be for the best – that if she had calm and quiet and her own home, she might be able to."

"Who says we ain't calm and quiet?" Benny burst out. "We have prayer time same as anybody else."

"I'm sorry, Benny. I judged your family," Sarah whispered. "It was prideful of me and presumptuous and I beg you to forgive me." (*Keys* 274-275)

Feeling compelled to help others by speaking out causes Sarah to struggle against pride, an attitude that is undesirable among the Amish. Therefore, she often finds herself in the conflict between acting on what seems to be right in her eyes and showing humility despite her feelings. Consequently, she struggles with her bad conscience and the expected traditional behavior when she says: "I did not show Oran Yost the humility I should have, and because of it, you've lost your apprenticeship." (*Herb* 142). She herself judges her outspoken attribute as

stubbornness and only sees humility as a way out of the conflict (*Herb* 143). In Sarah's eyes, the others can hardly ever be blamed for troubles in her life, and she is quick to put the blame and guilt on herself (*Herb* 141).

Her role as a mother is one that she does not take lightly, and she is eager to teach her sons the obedience that is expected. Obviously, her sons are well trained by her, because they readily obey knowing that there will be consequences if they refuse to.

“Caleb Yoder, it is only one thirty in the afternoon. You disobeyed me earlier, and this is the price you must pay. [...]”

He knew better than to argue any more, because she could think of an endless series of jobs that would keep him working late into the evening, [...] (*Herb* 83)

This hyperbole of “an endless series of jobs” highlights Sarah's strictness as a mother. The task of disciplining Simon and Caleb is not always easy for her, but she knows and exercises this responsibility, having the result in mind and not the situation at hand. However, she does not always correct and control them, being fully aware that teenagers sometimes need to have the chance to experience things on their own.

Sarah grasped at her common sense, which was being flooded by the maternal urge to hold him close. “You're seventeen – I suppose it's time for you to get out and see a little of the world.” (*Herb* 41)

Again, Senft uses the literary device of hyperbole “flooded by the maternal urge” to stress Sarah's motherly nature. Sarah enjoys spending time with her boys and loves to see them happy. She is aware that a mother's task includes both – love and discipline. Sarah herself says, “We mothers don't stop loving our sons just because they're disobedient.” (*Balm* 168). Her sons are also used to help at home, although both also have jobs somewhere else.

Her boys were busy every day and some evenings, too, so Sarah hoarded Saturday nights like a miser, hugging them close to her heart and savoring them before she let the minutes fall through her fingers. (*Balm* 128)

Spending family time with her sons is precious to her, as is exemplified by the comparison of “hoarding Saturday nights like a miser”. In figurative language, Senft describes the intimate and affectionate relationship between Sarah and her sons.

Her sons' willingness to work is not of their own making but can clearly be traced back to the way Sarah and her husband educated them. When Sarah realizes that

Simon becomes lazy after returning from his journey to Colorado, she quickly makes up her mind to intervene and talk with him about it:

Even if all he did was walk over to milk his grandfather's cows morning and evening, she'd be satisfied, but he had to keep his hands busy somehow, or the devil would. (*Balm* 202)

Again, her determined stance to see her son working is expressed by the metaphor "or the devil would", showing that she is aware how important work is for a young man. Even though Simon is only Sarah's stepson she takes her responsibility in educating him seriously. On the one hand, she values him as a man in her household, even as the man of the house, now that he is of age and her husband dead for five years. But on the other hand, she is still aware of her role as mother to him. Therefore, when Simon openly criticizes her friendship with Henry, she puts him in his proper place.

She knew very well what Simon was thinking. But it wasn't his place to bring it up – he might be the man of the house, but she was still his mother, and there were certain things that respect taught a young man not to say. But she had a thing or two to say to him, and this seemed like a God given opportunity. (*Balm* 240).

Although Sarah sometimes regrets her tendency to be outspoken towards other people and is determined to be humbler and more restrained, she is nevertheless an independent and self-reliant woman. Being a single mother is not always easy for her, but she is determined to manage her family and household on her own. Therefore, when her relatives come up with the idea to set her up with Silas Lapp in order to provide her with a husband again, she does not welcome the idea at all.

When Sarah glanced at her mother-in-law to see if she wanted to begin clearing, there was a look on Corinne's face that she had never seen before. She was gazing at Silas Lapp as though that new idea had occurred to her in the last minute or so.

Sarah did not want to know anything about it.

She stood and began to clear the dishes herself. (*Keys* 42)

The narrative style of these short last two sentences indicates Sarah's anger about her mother-in-law's matchmaking ideas. She wants to distance herself from being driven into a relationship she is not in favor of. Even when other relatives try to steer her in the direction of courting Silas using religious argumentation, Sarah remains determined at not allowing herself to be set up but to decide on her own about her

future. This attitude contradicts the ideal of an Amish woman who strives to get married and have a husband by her side instead of staying single and independent.

“But these things aren’t up to us, are they?” Fannie said. “If God has revealed to us His choice of mate, it’s up to us to be willing, isn’t that so?”

“Yes, but we must have a conviction, too,” Sarah countered. “The only conviction I’ve had is that I need to learn more about the healing path He has set me on, and that is taking all my time and thought. There is none to spare for – for men.”

Zeke chuckled. “I never met a woman who couldn’t make a little time for a man. Or a lot. It’s funny how many things can be put aside when there’s courting to be done.” (*Keys* 105)

It is interesting to note that the female protagonist is not easily convinced to give up her single status merely because there is a possible marriage candidate. The simple fact that her sons need a father is not sufficient to think about a new husband. Since Sarah’s first marriage was based on a relationship of love, she wants nothing less for a new one. And as her feelings for Silas are not more than amicable, she is determined to keep their relationship on that level. Therefore, she tries her best to convince him about that in a respectful, polite, but distinct manner.

[Silas:] “What I see more than that is a heart with a care for the people of God, and that’s more difficult to teach. I like that about you, Sarah. It tells me that you have a big capacity to love.”

Oh, no. That word could not come into the conversation under any circumstances.

“I love my family, certainly. My sons. And my husband, still.”

“Your husband?” he said gently. “Corinne tells me it has been five years.”

“Ja. Six, in the fall.”

“He was a good man.”

“The best.”

“But your youngest boy, I would think he needs a father.”

Oh, now, this really was forward. “He is close to his Daed, and he has several uncles close by to stand in that place for him.” (*Keys* 97)

The author uses the omniscient perspective to allow a glimpse into Sarah’s thoughts. She obviously is not interested in Silas, when her thoughts are “oh, no”, and she tries to put him off with short, simple, but clear answers.

As the Amish are also called the “plain people”, it is customary for them to keep things simple and plain. Their dresses are of a plain color and also within their home things are kept simple and practical (*Graybill, Meanings* 64). Concerning her dress, Sarah complies with these regulations. However, as she starts her herb planting, a

sudden urge of creativity takes hold of her and she plans her garden in an untypical manner. “She would probably regret not being able to hoe a straight line, but my goodness, she’d been hoeing straight lines all her life. Maybe it was time for a little creativity – a little fun.” (*Herb* 84) By doing so, she is fully aware that her Amish community might not understand her touch of creativity, but “that Henry might be the only person in the settlement who would appreciate her craziness” (*Herb* 85).

The relationship between Sarah and Henry throughout the three volumes of the serial novel proves to be a constant struggle for the female character between her Amish beliefs and traditions and her feelings as a woman being interested in a man. At the beginning, the situation seems to be unambiguous for Sarah: “Henry Byler was not Amish, and therefore a single woman couldn’t cast her eyes in his direction.” (*Herb* 40). By foreshadowing, “a single woman couldn’t cast her eyes in his direction”, Senft already provides a hint into the direction the storyline is going.

However, as her son Caleb quickly befriends Henry, Sarah is forced to act against her beliefs and finds herself more than once involved with him: “And somehow, despite all her good intentions, she found herself sitting in an *Englisch* restaurant opposite an *Englisch* man with her disobedient son beside her, feeling *verhuddelt* and ... and hungry” (*Herb* 72).

Following her Amish belief, she continually reminds herself that he is a “worldly man, a man who had turned his back on God” (*Herb* 81), being well aware that others in the community will talk negatively about her if she enters any kind of relationship – be it professional or personal – with him. Nevertheless, being a woman who cares – especially about her patients – she casts her anxieties and social norms away and approaches him.

“[...] I hope that you might do something. For me.” Oh goodness, she sounded like a fifteen-year-old talking to a boy for the first time. Worse, a blush was rising in her face and she could do absolutely nothing about it. (*Herb* 235)

Half of her wanted to run away down the path and take refuge in her own house. But the other half – the half that concerned itself for her patients – made her follow him out of the barn. (*Herb* 237)

The way her thoughts are described lets Sarah appear like a young girl who has fallen in love. The colloquialism of her thoughts – “oh goodness” – allows the reader to anticipate that Sarah’s feelings towards Henry are more than general friendliness.



Sooner or later, Sarah realizes that she is becoming emotionally attached to Henry – a feeling that probably seems decent and comprehensible to any other woman. But for her, it is not that uncomplicated because the social construct of Amish religion and regulations breathes down her neck. The mere fact that Henry left the Amish before being baptized has formed a “wide gulf” between them:

An Amish woman could be neighborly with an *Englisch* man. The Amish were friendly to everyone. But Henry was more than *Englisch*. [...] He and Sarah might share a fence line, but between them there was a great gulf fixed ... and any feelings that might have gone beyond friendship could never cross that gulf. (*Keys* 7)

The author uses Genette’s zero focalization to create tension between the two main characters. In Sarah’s mind, a love relationship with Henry is absolutely impossible due to her cultural confinement. These restrictions lead to an emotional struggle in her life, and she is forced to make a decision between her feelings and her traditional surroundings. Therefore, true to her role as an Amish widow, she turns to her God to receive help overcoming her feelings. Instead of enjoying a new relationship, her traditions force her to overcome any emotional attachment:

“*Ach*, what have I done? I can’t afford these feelings, Lord. I can’t have any feelings at all for a man who does not choose You. Help me. Please help me to overcome this craziness and set my heart on You, where it should be.” (*Herb* 287)

The repetition of her pleading reinforces the struggle that she is in. Her resolution not to see him or think about him anymore does not work out because Henry visits her again, needing help. In her mindset, Henry turns into “her greatest temptation” (*Balm* 88) and a test from God to prove her strength (89). The idea to leave her community and lifestyle behind to follow the feelings of her heart are completely unimaginable for her.

She tried to imagine living right here in this house, so close to her family, and not being Amish. Not going to church every other Sunday, not having the deep fellowship, love, and acceptance that came with each one submitting him- or herself to God’s will. Her imagination shuddered away from the picture. (*Balm* 279)

Her thoughts gain momentum by the anaphora “not going” and “not having” and show how deeply Sarah is involved in her faith and her tradition. She maintains her position until the end of the novel and tells Henry directly that their relationship can

only be successful if he turns back to God and to the Amish community: “But Henry we can’t. It’s wrong. You must give your heart to God before you share it with me – you know it and I know it . . . and God knows it.” (*Balm* 285). Again, Senft uses an anaphora – “know it” – to add intensity to Sarah’s determination to stay Amish. Again, her faith plays a key role in their situation and finally prevails, allowing Sarah to remain a faithful plain woman and being rewarded with Henry as her husband who is won over by her determined mindset.

To sum it up, this female character is portrayed as a responsible and traditional Amish woman, who nevertheless has a strong will and does not allow others – neither family or a man – to dictate the decisions she has to make. She is also the one who sets the conditions on which she is ready to enter a new relationship, which might be rather unusual for an Amish woman.

### Henry Byler

The male protagonist of the story, Henry Byler, is a character that enters the novel as an English man with Amish roots. The reason why he left the Amish faith behind was the overwhelming amount of rules and regulations his community taught him and the accompanying image of a God who was a “watchful, frightening being who cared so deeply about the widths of hat brims and the shapes of buggies and the truth of every thought that flitted through a boy’s mind” (*Keys* 212-213). Senft uses these exaggerations of dress codes and thought control to enhance Henry’s distaste of Amish rules. Nevertheless, he does not only carry bad memories within himself, but also positive ones, like the one of his aunt, who appointed him as an heir of her farm:

He didn’t think he could handle going through an old lady’s things. Not because of male diffidence, but because outside of Mamm, she [Aunt Sadie] was the only one of his relatives he had loved – and been loved by in return. (*Herb* 23)

When Henry arrives at the farm he has not yet decided about his next steps, and by this metaphor of “a man caught between two worlds, like a guy with a foot in two canoes, both moving apart and a huge splash inevitable” (*Herb* 24) one can sense the character’s inner turmoil. In contrast to the typical Amish male who is hard-

working, strong, and responsible, he appears at first insecure, indecisive and led by feelings he cannot classify himself.

Nor would it [change] until he made up his mind as to what he was going to do. Had he really given up his Denver apartment, loaded up his things, and come blasting across the country for ... what? Nostalgia? The prospect of a home that had been welcoming and warm in memory, but in cold reality was ... Amish? (*Herb* 56)

Rhetorical questions show his insecurity about his decision to move into an Amish neighborhood, and the juxtaposition of warm memory and cold reality emphasizes his mixed emotions.

On the other hand, he shows a lot of other characteristics that are expected of an Amish man, such as helpfulness, politeness and gentleness. He is quick to help Sarah carrying heavy things (*Herb* 157), willing to give a ride, when the need is there (*Herb* 163), opening the car door for a woman (*Herb* 242) and is quick to offer comfort when he realizes that Sarah is in distress: “Sarah,’ he breathed, and she realized that he had reached across the table to take both her hands in his big, warm ones. ‘If you need to cry, don’t be brave. Just let it go.’” (*Herb* 263). And even though Henry does not know at the beginning what his next steps should be, he knows that he alone is responsible for making a living and that hard work is the way to achieve this goal:

That was his goal, wasn’t it? To sell his mugs, his plates, his bowls, into the homes and kitchens of folks in this township. That was it. Ubiquity had a bad rap. From where he stood, it looked pretty good. It looked like a living. (*Herb* 208)

Before his move to the Amish community, his dream was to become an artist. But circumstances require plain, unexciting work to earn money, made clear by the enumeration of “his mugs, his plates, his bowl”. As he starts being successful in his pottery business, he faces the challenge to reach a higher level of publicity for his work. At first, Henry embraces the opportunity, but when it is revealed that this success can only be achieved by bringing discredit on the Amish community, his upright character prevails: “I told you how I want the story slanted. I want it to be about art – with the Amish focus on community over individuals being the reason I left the church. About how my art has its roots in a focus on the land.” (*Balm* 250).

Although he deliberately left the Amish faith and traditions behind, he still shows character and a clear value system. He is not willing to be successful and earn his living at any price, even though he knows that this decision will have a negative effect on his fiancée Ginny, who could increase her income at her bed and breakfast through the media coverage about Henry. Again, he is faced with a decision between two worlds: either following the upright attitude he still believes in or neglecting this value system in order to gain a higher profit. But his past attitudes prevail – no matter the costs. His family and neighbors are more important to him than a boost of his career (*Balm* 259).

Henry glared at him in a way that made the smile falter. “Either you change the focus of this episode or you find yourselves another subject,” he said with deliberate emphasis. “I’m not a man who issues ultimatums, but I’m at my limit here. This goes against everything I believe in.” (*Balm* 253)

Despite the fact that Henry Byler cares about his Amish family and neighbors, he continues being a maverick as far as his personal life is concerned. He is afraid to let others know what is going on inside of him, though he still seems to be touched by the compassionate approach of the plain people around him. However, he is afraid of their asking him questions and judging the decision he made as a youth, when he decided to leave the Amish traditions.

“I was engaged some years ago, but it didn’t work out.” He clamped his lips shut on a subject that was so private that the very own words hurt in his mouth. (*Herb* 65)

But her [Barbara Byler’s] voice was gentle, the voice of a deeply compassionate woman, and Henry found his throat closing up. (*Herb* 66)

He had no intention of joining them [at the Amish Sunday service], blast it. But his relatives and neighbors would probably rejoice if they knew he felt the pull, like the one the moon exerted on the tides – the combination of guilt and memory and social expectation that demanded he knuckle under and submit to God’s will. (*Herb* 181)

By way of the metaphor of the moon and tides, the author describes how strong the old ties are. Just as the influence of the moon cannot be separated from the tides, so Henry’s past as an Amish cannot be separated from his life. Nevertheless, he continues to fight against the past without showing to anyone. Even towards Sarah, with whom he shares an understanding and a common tendency to creativity, he conducts himself in a distant way as soon as his private and personal affairs are

concerned. He enjoys friendship with her as long as the Amish beliefs and culture do not come into the picture.

“Sarah, I like and respect you. But I have to lay down some boundaries here. My personal life is off-limits, if all you’re going to do is lecture me about an *Ordnung* that means nothing to me anymore. It will only cause offense between us, and I don’t want that. We’re neighbors and friends, and I’d like to keep it that way.” (*Herb* 247)

In this speech, Henry uses I-messages to openly state his feelings about his relation to the Amish faith. It is the first time he states his position clearly. But as soon as he speaks his mind bluntly, he regrets it. “Henry had never silenced a woman before. He found he didn’t like it much.” (*Herb* 248). In this instance, Henry’s respect towards women can be noticed. It is not in his nature to treat women as inferior beings or to feel dominant towards them. On the contrary, he desires to receive advice from Sarah, more than from his fiancée Ginny. That indicates that he esteems the close companionship and exchange of opinions between Amish couples.

“You don’t need my opinion, Henry,” she said softly, [...]

“I wouldn’t have asked for it if I didn’t.” His eyes were haunted, his face drawn, as though he hadn’t slept the night before – or the one before that. “You always tell me the truth, even when it might not be strictly in accordance with the *Ordnung*.” Her lips tipped up in a smile of acknowledgment. “I need to hear what you think.” (*Balm* 255)

[Henry talking with Ginny] “Are you saying I’m not qualified to talk this over with?” Well, maybe he wasn’t – not on that level. But he did his taxes every year, just like everyone else. “The only qualification I really have is that I’m going to be your husband, and wives and husbands talk over big decisions.” She sighed. “Right. Like you talked over the show with me before you told them once and for all you wouldn’t do it.”

She had him there. And who had he talked it over with? Really talked?

Sarah, that was who. The one name he couldn’t bring into this conversation at any cost. (*Balm* 266)

Another role that Henry takes on is to be a defender of the youth. He is quick to understand and to find an excuse for their behavior, remembering how he struggled with keeping all the rules when he was their age. However, he does not thoughtlessly defend their actions when an accident happens, because he is aware that they had no bad intentions and even assumed responsibility for their wrongdoing. In this way he wants to demonstrate that sometimes Amish parents’ punishment is exaggerated. For example, when Sarah starts to get angry at Caleb, he “did his best to head it off at the pass. After all, he had been complicit in the plan. It wasn’t fair that poor Caleb

should take all the heat.” (*Herb* 62). And some time later, when he takes Caleb out for lunch – without Caleb informing his mother – and Sarah starts scolding her son, “Henry put out a placating hand. ‘Don’t be too hard on him, Sarah. I told him I’d take him to lunch. It only seemed fair, after he gave up his morning for me.’” (*Herb* 72).

Nevertheless, he encourages young people to be honest with their parents, thereby revealing a fatherly disciplining role without being harsh. Just like a parent, he suddenly shows a strong character by admonishing young people to be truthful and willing to apologize when they had done something wrong.

“I’ll remember that. But what I’d really like to know is how you’re going to explain this to your mother, Simon.”

He hunched over his plate defensively. “I’ll think of something.”

“Like maybe the truth?” he suggested. (*Herb* 124)

When a group of teenagers is involved in a secret hoedown on his fields, they accidentally start a fire. Some of the young Amish people are quick enough to quench it. Nevertheless, the police arrive together with Henry as the owner of the field. Since no harm is done, Henry does not want to press charges against them (*Herb* 212), and later on he goes as far as to take a stand for them in front of their families.

Finally, Henry spoke up. “It seems there was a hoedown, with the band playing up on a flatbed trailer. From what the firemen tell me, the generator’s exhaust manifold failed and a spark caught the grass. These kids here put it out with ice and water from the drink coolers.”

“Is that true?” Paul asked his son.

“Ja,” Joe said. “Me and Simon were trying to beat it out with our coats but it wasn’t working. It was Pris, who thought of the ice.”

[...] “But since no real damage was done, and they came and got their tractor just before I left to come here, I let the matter rest with an apology.” (*Herb* 217-218)

As insecure as he might be concerning his own life and future, he feels a certain need to interfere when injustice might be done. According to him, the Amish young people that were caught in the field put the fire out and were not the ones causing it, therefore they should not be punished (*Herb* 220).

Another interesting situation arises when a family from New York spends their holidays in Lancaster County. The two boys of the family are obviously not very well-educated, but over time Eric, the younger one, shows a real interest in Henry’s pottery business. Without his parents’ knowledge, he asks Henry to teach him pottery

and as Henry discovers Eric's talent, he helps him to finish a project to be admitted to an art school. Eric even goes as far as putting the blame for some stolen item on someone else, simply so that his family will stay in Lancaster County for some more days. When Henry finds out about this, he openly confronts Eric, just like any responsible father would do with his child.

Rather than answer, Henry cocked an eyebrow at Eric. "Want to let your dad in on what's been going on?"

Eric shook his head.

"I think you're going to have to, if this is how you planned to stall them long enough for the clay to dry. Bad plan, Son. You owe Priscilla here an apology." (Keys 120)

The decision that Eric can stay at Sarah's place to finish his project for art school, forces Henry and Sarah to work together. Through this cooperation, Henry's fatherly role is awakened to a greater extent. Now, his disciplinary actions are not his solitary decision any longer, but they demand to be based on their common agreement. Sarah follows the pattern of an Amish wife who allows the man to deal with the child if the situation asks for it. And Henry readily takes this place, just like an Amish father would.

Sarah Yoder was nothing more than a friend – despite that odd moment the other night when she had done a very Amish thing and yielded the man's place to him in dealing with Eric. It had been a very long time since he'd experienced that very feminine submission – and since he'd left church at nineteen, he hadn't had a chance to experience it much to begin with. (Keys 209).

As the author phrases it, a woman's submission to him is odd for Henry, and he can't remember experiencing it in the non-Amish world. What surprises him even more is his instinctive reaction to it by "taking the lead in teaching a boy" (Keys 209). This behavior follows the typical male role of an Amish husband and father. As the story unfolds, this is not an isolated incident, but Henry's parental instinct is aroused again, when Amish run-away Jesse gets stranded at his place. As Jesse is sick, Sarah comes to nurse him back to health. Again, Henry steps in and assumes responsibility.

She could have handled Jesse, even if it had meant wedging his jaws open with the spoon and pouring the tea down his throat. She was not the mother of two teenage boys for nothing. But not for the first time, she was grateful that Henry's first instinct was to back her up – to demand obedience on her behalf when hers was the place of authority. (Balm 209)

In summary, it can be stated that the character of Henry Byler follows the example of an Amish man in more than one respect. He is gentlemanly, respectful, hard-working, and family-oriented when handling young people. Arriving in Lancaster County, he appears to be career-oriented, a characteristic that dissolves in the course of the story, retransforming him into a traditional member of the Amish community. Only his insecurity at the beginning and his creativity do not fit into the stereotypical male gender role of the Plain People.

### Priscilla Mast

Priscilla Mast is a sixteen-year-old Amish girl in the middle of exploring the courting and dating business. At first, she is interested in Sarah's stepson Simon, but as he does not reciprocate her feelings, her affection is won by Joe Byler. At the beginning of the novel, she behaves like probably a lot of teenage girls, whether Amish or not. She likes to withdraw from her bustling family – “[Her room] contained the things she valued most – privacy and a place to dream.” (*Herb* 20) –, tends to be driven by her emotions, and dreams about entering a relationship with Simon who has not shown any interest in her yet. But she keeps on daydreaming and uses situations to her advantage to get closer to him, even though this behavior is not becoming for an Amish girl.

Too late, she remembered that she should be trying to look as if she were waiting for someone else, or pulling up her socks in her gumboots, or anything but standing there like a grinning fool, waiting for him. Mamm said that when it came to boys, only a forward girl walked up to them and started a conversation, [...] (*Herb* 15)

Using the omniscient narrator's perspective, the author portrays Priscilla as a love-struck teenage girl who is aware of her foolish actions. In her own thoughts she compares herself to a “grinning fool”, but simply cannot help herself behaving like she does. Furthermore, she even shows some male characteristics by desiring to be adventurous – “The fact that *interesting* and *exciting* were not words you'd use to describe the lives of the *Youngie* in Willow Creek didn't mean she wouldn't be ready for them.” (*Herb* 91), and by her stubbornness to prove her parents that she is not a little girl anymore: “[...] she could still go to a band hop. If she did, they'd have to see that she wasn't twelve anymore, that she could make her own decisions.” (*Herb* 179).



On the surface, Priscilla follows the plain Amish dress code, inwardly however, she is rather concerned about her outward appearance. The feminine Amish attribute of modesty does not truly apply to her, although her influence on her looks is restricted to the cultural regulations.

A couple of hours later, the dresses were finished. Priscilla put hers on and turned this way and that in front of the glass doors of der *Echschank*, the corner cabinet, where Mamm kept her wedding china. It was the only surface in the house large enough that you could see most of your reflection at once, since the bathroom mirror was only big enough to see your face and hair. The dress fit nicely and she liked the smooth touch of the fabric on her shins. (*Keys* 110)

With this detailed description of the place where Priscilla can admire her outfit, the reader is able to feel the limitations this teenager faces as well as the simple joy about her clothing.

As far as her handling of young men is concerned, she is neither patient nor upright at the beginning. She makes use of tricks and even of another young man to arouse jealousy in Simon. Her conscience, however, convicts her of her wrongdoing, indicating that Priscilla is still in a state of developing her character – a character that will eventually be more conform with the Amish expectation.

She'd been a complete idiot to agree to let Joe Byler take her home, when all she wanted to do was be with Simon. Had he even seen her leave with Joe? And had she really sunk so low that she wanted that – wanted to make him jealous? (*Herb* 176)

Turning to Priscilla's traits that are more in line with typical Amish females, there is her appreciation of friendships and community with other girls or women. Just like her mother, she enjoys the exchange with her female friends and does not plan to neglect these relationships even when she is courting or when she will be married some time later (*Balm* 139-140). Additionally, she is very family-oriented, and it is relevant to her to let her family take part in her life. The thought of not staying in touch with them over a longer period of time is unthinkable for her.

For instance, if she had been planning to travel a long distance to return to people who cared about her, she would have found out train schedules and bus schedules, decided on them, bought a ticket, and been able to write and tell her family that she would be arriving on this day at this time in this place. [...] But boys? Could they really be as oblivious as this to the simple pleasure of looking forward to something? (*Balm* 17)

As far as a serious relationship to a young man is concerned, she finally outgrows her teenage attitudes, and blames them on pride and greed – “She had walked into a trap she had set for herself out of pride and greed – why be satisfied with one boy courting you when you could have two with a wave of your hand?” (*Balm* 117). Priscilla then assumes responsibility and confesses to Joe that she allowed Simon to kiss her. When Joe wants to take revenge on Simon for it, Priscilla stops him and says: ““I’m the one who’s in the wrong, so I’m the one to talk to him.” (*Balm* 180) – again showing that she has outgrown her childish ways and become a responsible young woman. Furthermore, her attitudes towards a prospective husband have changed:

This whole subject of courtship was a puzzle, for certain. At least she was feeling fairly settled about Joe. [...] Joe didn’t make her heart leap – or only a little anyway. It was his steadiness she appreciated. [...] It was nice to be liked just for being yourself. (*Keys* 223)

The way her feelings toward Joe are expressed here, is in stark contrast to her earlier attitudes. While she was looking for excitement and adventure before, she now feels “fairly settled about Joe” and he “makes her heart leap only a little”. Nevertheless, the author creates the image that her stance is now more desirable, because she enjoys being “liked just for being herself” as if she has now reached a safe haven.

As it is customary among Amish that couples discuss things and make decisions together, Priscilla starts to desire and enjoy that intimacy with Joe. It provides her with a sense of importance – as expressed in the comparison “second only to his father” – and appreciation:

Pris had never felt this sense of humility and gladness before – being a young man’s confidante (second only to his father) on a matter as important as how he would make his living was a completely new experience. It made her feel like a grown-up. (*Balm* 112)

The character of Priscilla Mast is a vivid description of an Amish girl who develops from an emotional, adventurous girl into a responsible, traditional, but still amiable young woman, who appreciates her female role in her community.

#### 4.2.2. Other female/male gender roles

##### Silas Lapp

Silas Lapp, a male Amish character that appears for the first time in the second part of the series, comes from a different Amish community and is about the same age as Sarah. He is described as the embodiment of a typical Amish man, as one character in the book says, “I’m glad to see it, too. He’s not a man to put himself forward, is Silas. He’s modest, good to his parents, and works hard, just as a man should.” (Keys 103). As Sarah’s relatives plan to set her up with Silas, they continue to praise his virtues.

“That’s the kind of man he is,” Fannie said with satisfaction. “As I said – considerate, thoughtful, and on the lookout for chances to help, especially with a young widow who is also thoughtful and looking for ways to help.” (Keys 104)

“Apparently. He has a tender, faithful heart, and it has taken him a long time to recover.” (Keys 106)

With these rather exaggerated statements about Silas – “especially with a young widow” and “a long time to recover” – the author emphasizes the intentions of Sarah’s relatives to set her up with this Amish man.

By looking at Silas’s actions, the reader notices that he is helpful, indeed, even ready to choose women’s work over men’s – “To her surprise, instead of heading out to the barn as well, Silas took a dish towel out of the drawer and leaned on the counter next to the drain rack.” (Keys 158). But as the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that his motive behind his actions is a desire to win Sarah and to use every possible chance to spend time with her. And although his relatives claim that “He’s not a man to put himself forward” (Keys 103), this does not hold true when he approaches Sarah very directly:

“But your youngest boy, I would think he needs a father.”  
Oh, now, this really was forward. “He is close to his Daed, and he has several uncles close by to stand in that place for him.” (Keys 97)

Silas is not only very direct, but he also turns out to be the kind of man who thinks that women must have a husband to be able to raise their children. His words might be polite – “I would think” –, but their content is very direct. In Sarah’s eyes, this is a quite provoking attitude and she quickly counters his argument. His forwardness can

also be seen when he asks herself out just a short time after they have met, a characteristic that does not go in line with Amish men's humbleness and modesty.

"I'll be here for a few days," he said. "Perhaps we might go for a drive and I can tell you more."

Sarah swallowed her surprise at his forwardness; he hadn't seemed like that kind of man. (*Keys* 40)

His forwardness is depicted in his speech: rather than asking her, he suggests what they could do and what he wants to do. He only speaks from his perspective and does not ask for her opinion at all.

Within the plot of the romance novel, the character of Silas Lapp serves the purpose of being the rival in love. However, the danger he presents is not substantial as the author describes him in a rather unsympathetic and dominant way.

### Simon Yoder

Simon is the son of Sarah's deceased husband whom she raised as if he was her own son. He is seventeen at the beginning of the story and in the middle of his *Rumspringa* years. Nevertheless, he is thoughtful and hardworking (*Balm* 5), and "a passionate young man who thought and felt much more than he ever said" (*Balm* 6). One Amish male attitude he has a problem with is humbleness. His stepmother Sarah observes more than once that Simon has a problem with pride.

"The trouble is, much as I love my boy, he has his faults. And one of them is pride. I'm not talking behind his back – he knows it as well as I do. He thinks that all he has to do to win Priscilla's heart is crook his finger and smile at her." (*Balm* 187)

[Sarah:] "[...] It's not the size of the sin that matters, it's the attitude and unwillingness behind it. And Simon, you and I both know that you have a little struggle with pride. [...]" (*Balm* 241)

His weakness of being proud goes hand in hand with his dominant attitude. This trait is partly due to the mere fact that his father died five years before and he feels responsible for the family now. The older he gets the more does he adopt the role of man of the house, even though he is still insecure about his own future. Furthermore, he cannot discern when he should take responsibility and when to obey his mother.

Her boy straightened, his face flushing even as his hands came out of his pockets. “Someone has to stand in Dat’s place, and you’ve told me often enough that it’s me.”

“That is true for many things, but not this one.” (*Herb* 164)

She knew very well what Simon was thinking. But it wasn’t his place to bring it up – he might be the man of the house, but she was still his mother, and there were certain things that respect taught a young man not to say. (*Balm* 240)

In spite of his juvenile restlessness and some rebellious moments, Simon is a family-oriented young man. He does not only respect his stepmother but cherishes her. He does not want to leave for his working journey to Colorado without her blessing (*Herb* 266), and he shows his affection to her openly – “And to her surprise, he wrapped his strong young arms around her and gave her a bear hug – something he hadn’t done since he was Caleb’s age.” (*Herb* 266). However, he only does so privately and not in public since such a behavior would not be appropriate for a young man (*Herb* 34).

Furthermore, he has a strong sense of belonging to his family and his community. When he writes a letter from Colorado, he mentions his desire to be at home and be part of the Amish community more than once:

And while they’re real nice here and treating me like I’m actually doing the job they hired me to do, it’s not home. I don’t know what Joe’s got in his mind, but I’m thinking that when the snow flies in October, I’ll get back on that train and come home. I miss you and Caleb and Grandma and Grandpa and the family. [...] It feels funny not going to church. Guess I’m not cut out for Rumspringing and the English life the way some people are. (*Keys* 237)

In summary, it can be stated that the author portrays Simon as an Amish young man who still needs to find his purpose in life, and therefore mainly serves as an example for an Amish teenager in his phase of *Rumspringa*. He is strong willed and adventurous, explores the world outside his home town but realizes in the end that he belongs to his community.

### Jacob Yoder

The last notable character to be discussed is Jacob Yoder, Sarah’s father-in-law. Although he does not appear in the novel frequently, he nevertheless serves as a stereotypical example for an older Amish man and thereby supports the Amish setting of the story. By introducing this character, the author creates some comic

relief in the story, especially when she describes his outward appearance as seen through the eyes of a young English boy:

From what Caleb said, Eric thought that Jacob Yoder was some human incarnation of an Old Testament prophet, and hardly had the courage to speak at all in the same room in case he got zapped by lightning. (*Keys* 207)

By this rather humorous hyperbole she portrays Jacob Yoder as an example of an Amish patriarch whose sheer presence seems to be awe-inspiring. This is partly due to his size and the typical long beard:

Yesterday morning, her father-in-law had set the *Englisch* boy to simple tasks in the milking parlor, and sheer awe of his size and his beard and the way his kindly gaze still managed to pin you down had apparently made Eric decide that obedience was the only way he'd survive the experience. (*Keys* 199)

The amusing juxtaposition of Jacob's kindly gaze that still demands total obedience already indicates that Jacob Yoder is not a dominant and overly austere person. He definitely expects respect, but he has a kind heart and is ready to help when help is needed: "She had been lucky that Michael was such a good father – and that his father had stepped in to fill that place when Michael had been taken from her" (*Keys* 200).

This character fulfills the role as a representative of the Amish community, and while other characters have their weaknesses and flaws, he seems to stand out as a person of respect and credibility:

Jacob was here to preside at the table in Michael's place. His humility was his greatest strength. No one could be offended – not even Trent Parker – when Jacob explained their customs in such a gentle but firm way. (*Keys* 264).

By focusing on his humility and his gentle but firm manner, no place is left for criticism. Even though he is hardly involved in the plot, this figure serves as an anchor for Amish faith, values, and traditions.

#### **4.3. Lancaster Burning Series by Linda Byler (2014)**

Linda Byler grew up in an Amish community and still is an active member of the Amish church in her hometown in central Pennsylvania. She started writing Amish novels in 2003 and continues publishing books. She lives with her husband, children, and grandchildren and besides writing novels, she is also a columnist for a weekly newspaper in the Amish community (Book Series in Order). In a short introductory video about herself, she states that she gets the ideas for her characters from people she has met throughout her life, and that it is her goal to depict Amish life “as it really is” in contrast to the ideal that people have about the Amish (Meet Linda Byler).

*The Lancaster Burning Series* consists of three books: *Fire in the Night* (2013), *Davey’s Daughter* (2013) and *The Witness* (2014), and is set in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The heroine of the story is Sarah Byler, a young Amish woman and the daughter of David and Malinda Byler. Since her childhood, Sarah has been drawn to Matthew Stoltzfus and now, as a young woman, she is desperately in love with him. Matthew, however, has started dating Rose, Sarah’s friend. The framework plot of the novel is barn fires that break out on various properties at an interval of several months, beginning at the Byler’s home. Right from the beginning, it is clear that these fires must have been caused by an arsonist and did not happen by accident. While the community discusses if and what should be done to stop the arsonist, Sarah struggles with her love life. When Rose breaks up with Matthew, she believes her dreams to come true, as Matthew focuses his attention on her. However, as he himself is unsatisfied with Amish life, he wants to leave the community and his family’s faith.

At the same time, another young Amish man, Lee Glick, is drawn to Sarah, but knows about her attachment to Matthew. Matthew finally decides to leave and to join a missionary group that works in Haiti. He asks Sarah to come with him, and while she ponders the possibility of leaving everything behind, she is suddenly informed that Matthew has married one young woman of the missionary group and gone to Haiti with her. In the midst of her emotional struggles, Sarah is asked to take over the local Amish school as a teacher. She accepts this job, and there she also meets Lee again, because his young nephews attend the school.

As they grow closer, Lee and Sarah finally decide to start dating, but right at that time, news spread about Matthew that his wife has died and that he is probably coming back home. Again, Sarah hopes for Matthew's attention. Then, another barn fire breaks out and Sarah, who is close by, tries to rescue the horses from the barn. While doing so, a beam explodes over her and knocks her to the ground. She is rescued but suffers severe burns in her face from the flames, and it seems that her career as a teacher as well as a prospective wife and mother is over. However, it turns out, that Lee, in contrast to Matthew, does not care as much about her looks as about her as a person, and she finally realizes that he is the love of her life. In the end, the arsonist is caught, and peace is restored in the community.

#### **4.3.1. Main female and male characters and their gender roles**

##### Sarah Byler

Sarah, the nineteen-year-old daughter of David and Malinda Byler is the heroine of the novel. She is portrayed as strong, hard-working young woman as can be seen in this passage:

She was a farm girl, her arms rounded, strong, and muscular. So the fifty-pound bags of flour and sugar were no problem, the endless rolling of pie crusts no big deal. She smiled easily and was always friendly and helpful to the other workers. (*Lancaster Burning* 229)

Whatever she does, she does with all of her heart, and by using words like “truly” and “devotion” the writer reinforces this trait: “Sarah truly loved her job now, and her devotion showed in her willingness to take on any task” (285). Concerning her outward appearance, she seems to be rather pretty, especially seen through the eyes of Lee, one of her suitors:

The grace with which she moved! Not very many girls could carry off this unconsciousness of themselves, an innocence born of a good upbringing. She was like a calm pool of water in a hidden corner of a forest – ethereal, transparent, cool, and untouched. (300)

In this passage, Linda Byler makes use of metaphors and hyperboles to describe the good traits of Sarah. Lee perceives her as calm, cool, and innocent, and in his eyes, she is rather a supernatural being, indicating that she is unreachable for him. This



exaggerated image creates some humor for the reader, because the inner emotional turmoil of Sarah concerning her love life has been vividly portrayed before:

They [Rose and Matthew] were the perfect match, and Sarah was happy for Matthew. So happy, in fact, that she cried great tears of happiness that puddled into a rushing river of misery. (26)

The juxtaposition of “tears of happiness” and “river of misery” reflects Sarah’s emotions. On the one hand, she desires to be a loyal friend to Rose and Matthew, on the other hand, her own feelings are hurt. Because of her Amish belief she tries to fight jealousy but is not very successful. She earnestly desires to find the love of her life, the narrator creating a very intense image by depicting her thoughts like this: “So she yearned, said nothing, spoke of a love only to herself, and hoped someday, somewhere, God would have mercy and fulfill the want she harbored” (53). In this respect, Sarah is portrayed in the way of a stereotypical woman whose main goal in life is to be married and have a family:

Motherhood was an eagerly awaited event for Sarah. She looked forward to cozily sitting together with other young mothers, comparing experiences about births and babies, raising children, the various ways of canning and freezing, cooking and baking. It was an objective for every young girl, and Sarah was no different. (782)

All the verbs used in this passage deal with the tasks of an Amish woman and generate the impression of a welcoming, comfortable home. To emphasize the importance of this woman’s goal, the author makes use of the following alliteration: “Marriage, managing a home, and motherhood was the only route, chosen for her by her parents’ wishes” (751). Sarah, however, keeps on struggling with her unrequited love for Matthew. She has a very close relationship to her mother and they repeatedly talk about this issue, but to no avail: “Mam had stood by her side. They’d talked, reasoned, shared their feelings, and grew close. But at the end of the day, she still had to sit on the slippery banks of the muddy river called misery – and simply deal with it” (104). Again, the metaphor of the “river called misery” creates the impression of hopelessness.

However, the heroine is not willing to let outsiders know about her misery, or to allow them to pity her for being still single; rather, she shows a certain sense of humor by making ironic remarks as can be seen in this encounter with an older Amish woman:

She decided to stand her ground [when asked why she doesn’t date yet].

“I have dreams of becoming an old maid and having my own dry goods store.” Her words carried well, reaching Mam’s ears as she ducked behind a washer to conceal her wide grin and jiggling shoulders. (73)

When she finally has private moment with Matthew, where he behaves as if he were interested in her – although he is still courting Rose – she cannot really enjoy it, because she is quickly overcome by guilt:

Sarah looked up, the sting clouding her vision, as he [Matthew] looked down into her pain-filled eyes. It wasn’t her fault that he didn’t look away, she chided herself later when she felt so guilty and brash and so bold and so . . . well, stupid.

It wasn’t her fault that as he had laid the burdock leaf across her hand, his hands were shaking more than a little. [...] When she stood up, he was much too close, and she wished he’d move away. (59)

By this anaphora “it wasn’t her fault” her inner struggle is intensified, she does not want to appear as a brash young woman. It is obvious that she still knows what the appropriate behavior of an Amish female should be, and even though her feelings for Matthew are very intense, she is not willing to give up her attitudes completely. That proves her to be a strong-willed young woman. When she finally comes to her senses, – after she heard about Matthew marrying someone else although shortly before he had asked her to start dating – she is outspoken and direct as can be seen in this dialogue with Matthew’s mother:

Clearly, Sarah spoke, her words precise, well placed, ringing.

“Hannah, in your opinion, nothing has ever been Matthew’s fault. His whole life has been spent atop the pedestal you provided for him.”

“Sarah! Don’t be so . . . Why, Sarah, I hardly know you like this!”

“Well, you can get to know me if you want. If not, that’s fine with me. I have been dragged through the muck by Matthew for the last time, Hannah. And you, too.” (481)

In figurative language the author describes the heroine’s feelings about Matthew’s behavior towards her. Nevertheless, that period in her life has led her to question her background and her culture. For a short time, she thinks about leaving her family and community and she ponders the advantages and disadvantages of doing so: “The inner conflict was an unbearable thing. She could never leave Dat” (455). Obviously, family relations are more important to her, especially the one with her parents: “She couldn’t make a choice of such magnitude in a few hours. It would break her parents’ heart. The church would eventually cast her away, shun her.” (457) Furthermore, the thought of being shunned seems unimaginable to her. But it is not fear that makes

her decide to stay, but rather the realization that she simply feels at home where she is right now:

Well, I'm just too Amish. Home canned pumpkin, bean soup, white cape and apron pinned to her dress, the uniform of the unmarried woman. She had still not fully recovered from the wonder of the possibility of leaving, the excitement of actually being able [to] go and do something out of the ordinary. [...] No, she would not want to leave, truly. (492)

Nevertheless, this incident shows her that she is free to choose, that she is an independent woman, able to make her own choices. Sarah chooses the traditional, esteeming its values and security:

It was an appreciation of heritage, a rich experience of lives lived before theirs – the stories, the respect for birth, life, and death, for marriage and raising children. It was continuing to live upright humble lives and existing in harmony amid a world filling with more and more confusing and unwanted technology. (208)

The author chooses the omniscient narrator's perspective to stress the positive traits of Amish living. In this juxtaposition she compares Amish life to appreciation, respect, uprightness and harmony, whereas the world outside is described as confusing and unwanted. Thus, Sarah decides to remain within her tradition, as it offers her stability and harmony.

Due to the fact that Sarah rejects Lee twice because of Matthew, she has to take the initiative in order to experience a happy ending: "If God gave her one last chance before tomorrow, she'd take it" (813). As she does take initiative, she does not care what others might think of her, being very spontaneous, expressed in short rhetorical questions: "Then, a wild thought. What did it matter? Who would care? They were two mature adults, no longer silly teenagers shamelessly flirting" (816). Because of all that occurred within the last year, Sarah sees herself as matured, as a woman who knows what she wants.

Her relationship to Lee perfectly fits Sarah's choice: "[...] this was slow, easy, secure. It was bliss borne of knowledge, knowing the wait was all a part of God's plan" (776). Nevertheless, there are strong feelings between them, indicating that Sarah's choice of Lee is one of love and not one of reason: "Sarah watched Lee emerge from the door of the diesel shed and experienced a strange thrill, an intuition, or was it only her imagination? Would he feel it, seeing her there [...]" (815).

Linda Byler portrays her heroine as an Amish young woman, who develops her character in the course of events. From being a teenager being hopelessly in love with the wrong man, she develops into a strong, young woman who embraces her role as an Amish female on purpose. She does not feel inferior to men but enjoys what she is doing and finds stability and security in the Amish tradition and culture.

### Matthew Stoltzfus

Mathew Stoltzfus is the villain in this romance novel. He is a few years older than Sarah and grew up in the same Amish community. The author describes him as “tall, dark, and built like a wrestler” (25), this simile already indicating that he does not really fit into the Amish culture. He is well aware of his good looks and knows that a lot of girls admire him. Sarah’s sister Priscilla sees him as “arrogant, a flirt, and not even worth her time” (213) and Sarah’s mother remarks, “Matthew is less than ambitious. He flirts with any girl who will look at him, and there are plenty of them. I’m not convinced he loves Sarah at all” (419). More than once, someone states that Matthew is a flirt, who just loves to be loved by the girls. Not only that, he does not follow any rules of propriety, as can be seen in this scene:

Matthew’s arm went out, for only a second, a half circle about her waist. Blushing furiously, Priscilla yanked at the cake, grasped it, and pivoted out of his way.

Matthew laughed and looked down at Sarah. “Boy, your little sister is growing up!”

He whistled, watching her retreating form. (161)

This behavior does not fit into the stereotypical role of an Amish man, so the reader can easily imagine that he will probably leave the community. To him, women are inferior and if he could, he would exclude them wherever they seem to be a danger for him. For example, when Sarah defeats him in a game of ping-pong, he reacts like this: “Matthew’s voice was low and harsh. ‘Yeah, well. It might be a good idea to eliminate the girls playing against the guys, and you know it.’” (272). By depicting his voice as brutal and mean, the image of Matthew as a bad guy with no good intentions is reinforced. It seems as if the only thing that could keep him among the Amish community is his date Rose. So when she breaks up with him, there is nothing to hold him back: “[...] I told her [Rose] if she broke up with me I was going to go English. I mean it. If I can’t have Rose, I’m not going to stay Amish. There’s no point

in it” (239). The way he talks, he reminds one of a stubborn little child, posing threats on grown-up people:

He always got his own way with everything, and when he couldn't have his gorgeous Rose – the one time he had ever hit a brick wall – he acted like the spoiled brat he'd always been and just left, taking it out on everyone. It was his battered ego, his pride that was driving him. (465)

Towards Sarah, he explains his desire to leave in a more sophisticated way: “He wanted to go away. He wanted to travel, see the world. He needed to get away on a spiritual quest” (425). He claims to be on a path of self-finding rather than being wounded in his vanity. Sarah realizes, that deep in his heart, he “did not want to be Amish. He didn't appreciate the heritage of his family, the old lineage of conservatism, the traditions, the way of life” (426). The simple enumeration of Amish values emphasizes the missing emotional connection of Matthew with the Amish culture.

Whenever the whole community gets together after another barn fire to help the affected family, Matthew is not part of it and even mocks those who are there to help:

Matthew listened and then responded kindly but with a sort of petulance, inquiring about her [Sarah] having to be there. [...]  
“Every time there's a scene, and that seems to be happening with a certain regularity, there you are in the middle of it. Why?”  
His tone was high, anxious, mocking.  
[...] “It's my duty. My parents always stress that.”  
“Well, mine don't.”  
There was nothing to say in response. (411)

The attribute of petulance, and his high, mocking tone paint a picture of ruthlessness, and by asking why Sarah is always there, his complete ignorance of community values such as helpfulness or care becomes obvious. This is in stark contrast to his claim of desiring to go on a spiritual quest. His thoughtlessness and vanity are further exposed in the way he talks about people with special needs:

“Yeah, well. One of these days the old boy [Levi] will kick the bucket. Mongoloids don't often live to be forty, do they?”  
Sarah opened her mouth in reply but was stopped short by Priscilla's clipped tones.  
“He's not a mongoloid, Matthew. That word is outdated, taboo. He has Down syndrome. We hope he'll live to be a hundred. You have no idea how much our family enjoys him. He's the star of the household. But you wouldn't know, because he doesn't look nice to you.” (212)

As the author makes use of colloquialism when Matthew is talking, this character appears even less sympathetic. Besides being rude, he is furthermore depicted as lazy, remaining “maddeningly absent” (393) when everyone else in the community is helping together. His mother Hanna is the only one who still excuses his behavior:

Hannah got up, saying she'd go get coffee and wake Matthew. It was embarrassing, the way he slept.  
Sarah had no idea Matthew was still in bed. My, he was quite a sound sleeper.  
(392)

To sum up, the character of Matthew is everything an Amish man should not be. He is portrayed as dominant, flirtatious, insensitive, lazy and proud and, nevertheless, Amish. He serves the purpose of the rascal in the novel and thereby emphasizes the importance of the good traits of Amish men.

### Lee Glick

Lee Glick is another young Amish man and the hero of the romance novel. He encompasses all the good traits of a young Amish. The narrator brings him into play without mentioning his name at first, thereby creating tension in the story: “This exchange [between Sarah and her brother Levi] was not lost on the blond youth, who watched Sarah and forgot to eat his cake. He'd never seen eyes that color” (64).

He is fascinated by Sarah right from their first meeting, which is conveyed by his action. Besides being blond, his features are described through Sarah's eyes, when they meet for the first time: “She looked at him fully for the first time ever, the blue of his eyes taking her completely off guard. His eyebrows were perfect, like wings. His nose was stubby and wide but somehow also just right” (198). The adjectives “perfect” and “just right” indicate a deeper meaning than the mere description of his facial features. It also serves the purpose of foreshadowing, that this young man might be “just right” for Sarah. Furthermore, he is “also very good-looking, in a blond, non-Matthew way” (147). The author begins already at this point to compare Lee and Matthew.

Concerning his character, Lee is portrayed as humorous and friendly: “He turned and smiled easily, unselfconsciously. The humor on his open face was genuine, a magnet that drew her eyes to his” (63). The adjectives “open” and “genuine” paint the image

of an upright character, someone who has no bad intentions. And his impression is compared with the simile of “a magnet”, hinting at the attraction that begins between Sarah and Lee already at this point of the novel. Furthermore, he is thoughtful – “The blond guy had jumped up and offered his hand to help her up. Not very many boys were so thoughtful” (147) –, as well as kind and helpful: “[H]e was always one of the first ones on the scene at barn raisings, one of the last to leave. It seemed as if that was all he did – work for other people and help them out” (347).

The image of Lee as a thoroughly good man is reinforced by this statement of him being always among the first who come to help and staying until the end. This constancy and patience is also in effect concerning his love for Sarah. Because he knows that her feelings are captivated by Matthew, he decides to stay in the background and not to rush things:

When a guy named Matthew ducked under the net and teased her [Sarah], the look of raw adoration she gave him cemented his resolve to stay in the background. (145)

“I’ll be honest, Sarah, okay? If you say it makes it easier, do you mean I may have a chance someday?”  
She was going to say, “Don’t wait for me, Lee.” She really was. What she said was, “Your eyes are so blue. They remind me of a . . . a . . . This is dumb, Lee.” She gave a low laugh. “Your eyes make everything easy. They’re calm.”  
“Thank you, Sarah.” (250)

He proves strong in his patience, and he does not force his feelings on her. Nevertheless, he is honest and clearly speaks his mind. He wants her to make a decision on her own, respecting her free will as a woman and is willing to wait until she chooses, and he outrightly tells her so: “When Matthew comes back, you’ll be completely unfettered. You alone must choose” (643). He goes even further and says, “But I think I honestly love you so much that I want only your happiness. If I have to give you up for you to find true happiness, I will. It won’t be easy, but I’ll do it. For you” (922). This kind of unselfishness is mentioned in the novel more than once, it seems to be part of his lifestyle, “he lived a life of unselfishness, always giving his time and energy to others” (953).

The more Sarah gets to know Lee, the more he reminds her of her own father, who is paramount example for an Amish male (see chapter 4.3.2):

She realized that Lee spoke, and thought, along the same lines as her own revered father. (446)

“Lee, pulling off to the side of the road and allowing cars to pass – that puts you in the same highly-respected category as my father. Thank you. Not all men will do that.” (845)

This similarity excites respect in Sarah, just as she reveres her own father. This comparison puts Lee in the category for a perfectly fitting husband for her, one who will keep the old tradition and the lifestyle she cherishes. After Sarah’s accident in the fire, Lee is also the one who does not care about her scars. Even though she struggles with her scarred face, he does not: “Lee had told her she was beautiful, which she obviously was not. And he had told her she was an amazing person, which she obviously wasn’t either” (757). This repetition shows his ability to look beyond outward appearance, and that he really cares about her inner values, when he explains her:

“(…) You can’t know how bad it really is. It will disgust you.”

“But Sarah. That has nothing to do with love. If a man truly loves a woman, he accepts her just the way she is. Her size, her looks, what she wears, scars, whatever – it’s all insignificant.” (922)

The perfection and the goodness of Lee, however, culminate at the end of the novel, when Sarah talks with her sisters about him:

“You mean, he never says no?” Ruthie shrieked.

“I wouldn’t know when.”

“He never gets angry? Not even when he’s stressed? Snappy?” Anna Mae asked in disbelief.

“I have never seen him that way.” (955)

With the character of Lee Glick, Linda Byler has created a real knight in shining amour. He is the epitome of the ideal Amish man. He is helpful, thoughtful, kind and good-hearted. He respects women and their wishes, is hard-working and hardly ever stressed or angry. All in all, the complete opposite of the villain Matthew.

#### **4.3.2. Other female/male gender roles**

##### David Byler

David Byler is Sarah’ father and has had his share of difficulties in his life. His firstborn son Levi was born with Down-Syndrome, which caused David to examine



his heart. At that time, he believed that he “must have done something wrong for God to send them a ‘retarded’ son” (4). But in the course of his life, Levi becomes a center of joy for the whole family. As the Byler’s barn is the first one to burn down, David’s faith is challenged again, as can be seen in this dramatic description: “Dat was a dark tragic figure now, so human and pitiful, somehow so unable” (9). He seems to be far away from a strong Amish believer. Yet, besides being a farmer, he is an ordained minister of the community, “carrying the burden of being a servant of the Lord, striving to keep peace and unity among his people – the small district of twenty-some families – protecting his flock from “the wolf”, the ways of the world” (16). The way his task is depicted – “carrying the burden and striving to keep peace” – makes it obvious that it is not always easy.

Although he is a person in leadership, his character resembles the one of a sensitive man: “Dat was the kindhearted one, the dreamer who colored your days with different shades of jokes, laughter, smiles, little sayings, or poems” (102). The phrase “colored your day with different shades” indicates that he is someone who positively influences the lives of the people around him. Furthermore, he is portrayed as a thoughtful and affectionate father, who goes to great lengths to make his children happy. For example, when Priscilla loses her horse in the barn fire, he shows deep compassion and is willing to pay a high price for a new horse:

Dat saw Priscilla’s fear, slowly laid his German Bible aside, and went to her. Gripping her arms, he looked into her terror-stricken eyes and gave her a small shake.

“Priscilla!” His voice was kind but firm.

As if roused from a faint, she blinked, looked at Dat, then fell against him. As she sobbed out her pain and anguish, his arms came around her, his head laid on her hair. (77)

What a precious father! She knew that he wouldn’t stop bidding until he had procured the one object that would successfully erase the hurt and the pain the arsonist had inflicted with a small rasp of his lighter. (92)

The determination of David at the auction expressed by “he wouldn’t stop bidding” proves that he is strong-willed, whenever a goal needs to be achieved. Although sensitive, he still has his beliefs and does not waver in them. Concerning the arsonist, he holds fast to the Amish belief of not taking revenge but to forgive. Even when a greater part of the community prefers to stand up and take action to find out who started the barn fires, he still holds fast to forgiveness: “That’s just it, Malinda.

It's not our way. It's not. We are a nonresistant people. Or used to be. To my way of thinking, we do not fight back. God allowed the arsonist to accomplish this [...]" (152). By the anaphora of "it's not", his decision is confirmed. However, that does not mean, that it is easy for him, as this metaphor describes: "But in the still of the night, he'd wrestled with his own personal angel" (121). Especially, when Sarah is severely injured in the last fire, his steadfast stand is challenged:

[...] the only emotion he felt, after a long while, was anger. Unresolved, boiling anger, as hot as the falling beam that had hit Sarah. It had scraped and burned her shoulders and back raw, like ground beef. [...] It was his fault. He'd clung to the old ways. How much of it was tradition, how much was pride, and how small was the slice of heartfelt conviction? [...] How could he forgive an arsonist who had burned his daughter at the stake? (736)

In this passage, the author makes use of an anaphora again: "how much, how much, how small", intensifying the image of David struggling with his faith and his tradition. During these challenging times, his wife Malinda is the support that he needs, and they are obviously on equal terms, complementing and helping each other in any situation: "When Dat reached across the tabletop and grasped Mam's hand, he told her she was all the support he needed and thanked her for being strong" (706).

At the end of his emotional fight, he finally returns to his steadfast belief in forgiveness. He is upright and open with his community and tells them about his feelings: "I wanted to literally beat up the person who did this. I am ashamed to tell you what I wanted to do. But there is only one way through this, and it's forgiveness." (766). Furthermore, when the arsonist is caught and brought to justice, he lets actions follow his belief, indicating that he does not only talk about forgiveness, but is actually acting on it:

When he rose to go, Dat did not shake hands, he simply pulled the young man into an embrace and released him. Keeping a hand on his shoulder, he said firmly. "We forgive you. Be a man now, and change your ways. You'll come out of this a better person." (863)

David Byler is not only a traditional Amish man, hard-working, God-fearing, respectful, thoughtful and working together with his wife on an equal level, he also serves as a symbol for Amish tradition and belief in the novel. Although shaken himself, he is still an anchor for his community throughout the story.

## Malinda Byler

Malinda Byler is the wife of David Byler and Sarah's mother. She is described as a "comely older woman with years of compassion and hard work molding her features" (*Lancaster Burning* 664), being a "hard-core realist" (102), and no matter what happens in her life or in the lives of her family, "[n]o one like Mam to bring you straight back to reality, plunk you down in the middle of it, and put you to work" (102). Even though she experiences more than one tragic event in the course of the story, she nevertheless tries to remain steadfast, not allowing hurt and grief to overtake her:

That was Mam. She was the best manager in Lancaster County, Hannah said. Sarah watched, amazed at her mother's ability to deal with the responsibility of the day's demands after only a few hours of sleep. (33)

When Sarah is severely injured, Malinda stays at her bedside to do what needs to be done. This behavior is portrayed with the short, clear sentences in this passage: "Mam never wavered. There were no tears. Her daughter was awake, she was calling for her, and she had a duty to perform" (712). Duty seems to be more important to her than giving in to emotions, and the other's well-being is more important than her own as she says, "Those times she didn't think of herself, her weariness. She just went ahead and did her duty, the same as she would do now" (712).

The author calls Malinda a "great traditionalist" (907) and a woman who knows her duty and her position:

What set a minister's wife apart? Nothing, and yet a great deal depended on her support. She needed to supply quantities of it, always striving to build her husband's confidence and his service by *guta-rote* (sound advice) as the lesser vessel. At the same time she was a powerful ally, and Sarah knew the power of her mother's prayers better than anyone. (321)

In this passage the juxtaposition of "lesser vessel" and "powerful ally" indicates that Malinda is not simply a submissive wife. On the contrary, as she is a powerful ally to her husband, she obviously complements him, and both are working together to have a positive impact on the community. Their roles might be different, but it is their relationship and companionship that makes them powerful and influential.

Concerning Sarah's attraction to Matthew, Malinda acts as a wise mother, who knows when to speak and when to be quiet. But she always lets her daughter know that she loves her and is available to her: "Mam saw the strained smile and the

increasing despair, but she decided to let Sarah busily weave her web of unhappiness until she was ready to talk” (137). However, when she feels that the right moment has arrived, she speaks openly and directly:

“So what should I do to change things?” Sarah asked.

“Stop thinking he wants you. He doesn’t. He’s dating Rose. He’s a flirt.”

Like rocks thrown at her, Mam’s words hurt, and Sarah winced, now painfully aware of her mother’s honesty. This was so unlike her soft-spoken mother. (142)

The simile of “like rocks thrown at her” show how clear Malinda’s words are, and portray her as an upright woman, who knows when the truth needs to be told. And especially because she is usually “soft-spoken”, her words of truth have an even stronger impact.

Besides, her realistic attitude and her experience in handling her children, Malinda is still a woman who enjoys beauty and a nice home:

Though she beamed and smiled and her eyes twinkled as she secretly anticipated her wonderful “new” house, she always kept her head bowed and tried to be humble – but she really wasn’t. (21)

She was, after all, a minister’s wife, and her house needed to be in the *ordnung* (within the rules) as befitted the wife of a leader in the church. But, oh, how she adored it! She scattered hand-woven rugs made from cast-off clothing, enjoying the charm the vibrant colors added, and went about her days with a song in her heart, surrounded by the things she loved. (22)

As the reader can notice here, Malinda thoroughly enjoys her new house, although at the same time she is aware that this might be interpreted as pride. She only “tried to be humble”, while she actually was totally excited about the home they had renovated. Thus, she can also be seen as a woman who enjoys pleasures in her life. Not only that, she certainly has a sense of humor and enjoys a good laugh as well: “Mam lamented her total lack of restraint but finally conceded to it, sitting down and laughing till she had to remove her glasses, wipe her eyes, and take a deep breath” (838). The detailed description of how she laughs enhances the sympathy she already gained with the reader and makes her even more loveable.

As one can see, Malinda Byler is a strong, traditional and realistic woman, who remains steadfast through the troubled times of her life. She exudes wisdom and kindness, but also great love for the people around her. Towards her husband, she is

a submissive wife but also a strong companion by his side. Within the confines of her family, however, she behaves very emotional, too, and enjoys the simple pleasures of life.

### Hanna Stoltzfus

The character of Hanna Stoltzfus is an unusual portrayal of an Amish woman. She is the mother of Matthew, and while she is described as “kind” and “understanding” at first (22), and outwardly follows the stereotypical image of an Amish mother who loves cooking and pampering family and friends with her meals, a closer look shows a different picture. For example, she arrives with lots of home-cooked food at a barn raising, but obviously does it mainly to be observed and admired: “Always running the show, being the boss, and then the minute the real chores started, she sat there in all her glory. It just irked Mamie” (64).

She is a woman who does not want others to see her only in a positive way. For any fault or failure she easily finds an excuse. When her son Matthew leaves the Amish and marries an English woman, although he has just started courting Sarah, Hanna reacts like this: “Hannah said he’s so soft-hearted, he just couldn’t tell you. He knew you would take it hard. He’s just so kind, Hannah said.” (472). With this anaphora, the excuses she makes for her son, appear even more ridiculous and show how much she ignores the wrongs of her son. Compared to her husband, who feels ashamed of his son’s decisions, she praises her son even more:

He [Elam] carried the true humility of having a son gone astray, but Hannah bore her pride for her son like a misplaced banner, speaking loudly about his missionary work in Haiti without an ounce of modesty in her bearing. (483)

With the simile “like a misplaced banner”, the author highlights the fact that this behavior, which might be totally understandable in the modern world, does not fit into the Amish setting. Instead of being a mother who tries to raise her child, sometimes encouraging and disciplining it, “Matthew was firmly glued to the pedestal of his mother’s pride, slowly turning from flesh and blood into various metals, hardening into an idol she would worship her whole life long” (629). This image that Hannah has of her son leads so far that she “was always hopeful that Matthew was pleased and not

too put out by her poor management” (719), revealing that in her eyes her son somehow has taken the position a husband might have.

Throughout the novel, her view of her son does not change. And she does not recognize her mistakes, but in the end blames her husband for the wrong choices her son has made:

Hannah berated her husband for just sitting behind his paper. She thought he should be admonishing Matthew, the way other fathers did. It was no wonder he wasn't Amish, and now it was hard to tell who he would marry. (829)

The interesting feature about the character of Hanna is that she does not change her behavior at all as the story unfolds. She shows only a few typical Amish female traits – being helpful, kind and an expert in the kitchen –, but there is hardly any humbleness or modesty; but she rather craves for validation and likes to put the blame on others.

## 5. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter of the thesis, the findings of the three serial novels concerning the gender roles of the characters portrayed in the books will be summarized. These findings will be compared to each other, especially in regard to the question, how these gender representations differ between the novels written by non-Amish authors compared to the ones of the Amish author Linda Byler. Furthermore, the relationship between female and male protagonists in the selected romance novels will be compared.

To begin with, the focus will be on the heroines. Meredith in *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013) fits into the scheme of a typical young Amish woman. In contrast to the other two heroines, she is about twenty years old, has recently married Luke and is not looking for a prospective partner – at least not on the outset. The situation changes a short time later, when she believes her husband Luke has died. She is portrayed as kind, friendly and modest, having a close relationship with her husband, but also as submissive, when realizing that Luke is stressed. Her behavior takes a turn, when she believes herself to be a widow, and she suddenly stands her ground, wanting to be self-sufficient. In this respect, she is similar to Sarah Yoder in the *Healing Series* (2015). Sarah Yoder is already a widow at the beginning of the romance, however, she is in her mid-thirties, raising two teenage sons. Her husband died five years before, so she has learned already to take care of her family, although she receives help from her relatives. Sarah has no intentions of finding another husband, she rather focuses on making a living as a herbal healer. Sarah Yoder is portrayed as a kind and helpful woman, too, but from the beginning on she wants to be self-sufficient. She is also rather outspoken and driven by the desire to help other people. Meredith, on the other hand, appears more like a woman who needs to be helped, although she does not want to admit it.

The third heroine Sarah Byler (*Lancaster Burning* 2013) differs from the two other female protagonists inasmuch as she is a nineteen-year-old girl hoping to find the right husband. She is also described as friendly, kind and helpful and cherishes Amish values and traditions. Similar to Sarah Yoder, she is someone ready to help and support other people, therefore also focused a lot on others, even though she is in a deep emotional conflict concerning the love of her life, Matthew. Concerning him,

one could say, she is submissive, but not because she sees it as her Amish trait as a woman but rather because she is ready to do everything necessary to win his attention. Although she does not allow other people to treat her unkindly, and she knows how to hold her ground, this attitude vanishes when Matthew appears on the scene. All three women show a certain stubbornness: Meredith, when she wants to take care of her herself, Sarah Yoder in raising her two sons on her own, and Sarah Byler when she is not listening to any warnings about Matthew.

To sum up, all three female main characters show the stereotypical feminine features of being kind, friendly and helpful. In addition, the kind of work they do stays within the confines of typical female jobs: sewing, planting, baking and working as a teacher. At the same time, they all use their circumstances to prove that they can stand their ground, nevertheless, they happily enter a partnership, as soon as the right husband appears on the scene. Although Meredith and Sarah Yoder question their background a little bit and quickly realize that they are happy within the Amish confines, Sarah Byler compares the Amish and the English world on a deeper level and even for a short time thinks about leaving together with the man she believes to be in love with. Sarah Yoder, on the other hand, knows that she will only enter a relationship with Henry, if he comes back to the Amish faith. This indicates that she is deeper rooted in her tradition than Sarah Byler, who is much younger and still has to find herself.

Turning to the male protagonists of the story, they differ more widely in the three novels. In *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013), Meredith's husband Luke, as well as her suitor Jonah are both hard-working, traditional, friendly, and helpful young men. Both of them desire to have a family and be the breadwinners. Luke shows some dominant attitudes when he realizes that he cannot provide for his family and keeps on denying the right to start looking for a job as well to Meredith. In the *Healing Series* (2015) the two opponents are Henry and Silas. These characters are more diverse than the men in *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013). Henry is a former Amish and is rather insecure, constantly drawn between his former life and the outside world, nevertheless he shows typical Amish features such as taking over the role of a responsible father, who disciplines young people if needed. At the same time, he shows a lot of sympathy for the Amish teenagers who overstep traditional limits, excusing their behavior. Furthermore, he is polite, gentlemanly and thoughtful. In



contrast to Henry, Silas always was and still is Amish, and is determined in finding a suitable wife. Although he behaves rather politely, he nevertheless shows traces of feeling superior to women, firmly believing that a woman cannot raise children without a husband. He is quite forward with Sarah, not readily accepting that his feelings are not reciprocated.

The highest contrast in male gender roles, however, can be found in *Lancaster Burning* (2014). Here, the author describes the young Amish man named Matthew, who is flirtatious, selfish and lazy. He does not consider women to be on equal levels with men but uses them for his own pleasure. In stark contrast to him is Lee, who is portrayed as thoughtful, kind and patient, always ready to be of help, where help is needed. He respects women and does not see them as inferior. Furthermore, outward appearance is not as important to him as the character of a person. In the portrayal of these two young Amish men, Linda Byler as the Amish author, differs greatly from the other two authors, whose male protagonists fit into a rather stereotypical Amish gender role.

When we look at the relationships between men and women in the stories, the heroine and the hero are almost always on equal level. Hardly any trace of dominance of the men over the women can be found, except in *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013), where at the beginning, Luke rejects the idea of his wife looking for a job, because he thinks it is his duty alone to provide for them. And he even quenches any further discussion about this issue. However, he apologizes to her later, and discusses his new plans with her. Still, the impression remains that Meredith does not really have a say in this, as he is determined to pursue his plan. In *Healing Grace* (2015) it is rather the woman, Sarah Yoder, who appears to be the stronger. Her steadfastness causes Henry to return to the Amish faith, if he wants to enter a relationship with her. During some incidents, however, where they are both involved in educating and training a teenager, Sarah allows and expects Henry to take the place of leadership. When looking at *Lancaster Burning* (2014), Sarah and Lee are a couple that really complements each other, not one of them being superior to the other. The villain Matthew, however, obviously feels superior to women and does not consider them having equal rights.

Apart from the lovers in the novels, there are some older couples portrayed, whose relationship is either very harmonic or rather unbalanced. The parents of Sarah

Yoder and the parents-in-law of her deceased husband Michael (*Healing Grace* 2015) are both portrayed as harmonic couples, there is no unusual interaction to be noted among them. They love each other, respect each other and discuss important issues together. Furthermore, the fathers as head of the household do not show any superior behavior. In Wanda Brunstetter's serial novel (*A Lancaster County Saga* 2013), there is one couple that stands out: Sadie and Elam Stoltzfus. At first sight they appear as a happy and harmonic couple, but soon it turns out that Sadie, knowing that her husband would not approve of her actions, secretly follows her own plans. There might be outward submission, but her actions tell another story.

Apart from Sadie and Elam in Brunstetter's romance novel, there is also one rather untypical couple in Linda Byler's book: the parents of Matthew, Hannah and Elam Stoltzfus. Hannah obviously spoiled her son Matthew during his childhood and teenage years and excuses every misbehavior on his part. But rather than disciplining him and being ashamed of their son's actions, she continues to take a stand for him. Apart from her behavior, her husband Elam does not intervene at all and shows no traces of being the head of the household. He simply lets his wife do whatever she wishes. Thus, there is neither any sign of leadership and submission in their marriage, nor any evidence that they discuss things at home and complement each other.

One figure that appears in Senft's as well as in Byler's novel, is the Amish patriarch. In *Healing Series* (2015), Sarah's father-in-law Jacob Yoder fulfills this role not only in his outward appearance (tall and with a long beard) but also in his character, who radiates strength and wisdom, and disciplines others in kindness. He is the epitome and guiding figure for the Amish tradition and faith. A similar character is found in *Lancaster Burning* (2014) in the person of David Byler, the father of Sarah. Throughout the story, he is described as the kind, friendly and wise bishop of the community, who speaks openly to the members of the congregation, reminding them of the Amish values of forgiveness and non-resistance. Furthermore, he not only preaches about these values, but follows them in his own life, no matter how hard it seems to be.

To sum up, the female main characters in all three romance novels – no matter if written by a non-Amish or Amish author – portray rather stereotypical Amish gender roles except for their desire to be self-sufficient at least until the right husband

appears. The thoughts and emotional struggles of the heroine are, however, most intensely described by non-Amish writer Linda Byler. Furthermore, she is the author who describes the greatest variety of characters, among them such, who do not fit into a stereotypical Amish gender role like Matthew or Hanna Stoltzfus. As far as this can be said about a fictional romance novel, Linda Byler portrays her characters in the most realistic way, including a wide range of different personalities. In contrast to the Amish writer, Wanda Brunstetter and Adina Senft stay mainly within the stereotypical gender roles in the depiction of their characters.

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## Appendix

### English Abstract

The Amish people have been moved into the focus of the American media in the last decades, not only through movies or television shows but also through books of various genres. Especially among readers of Christian faith, novels about the Old Order people have gained high popularity, the Amish's simple lifestyle providing a welcome alternative to the fast-paced lifestyle of the modern world. Apart from their outward appearance – women wearing long-sleeve dresses and head coverings, men with long beards and broad trousers with suspenders – they seem to still follow a patriarchal society model with the women staying at home, taking care of the children, whereas the men carry the responsibility of the breadwinner. Within the last decades, novels about the Amish were mainly written by non-Amish authors. Only about ten years ago, this situation changed, when Linda Byler, an Amish mother and grandmother, started writing fictional novels, too. The focus of this thesis is to examine how gender roles are portrayed in Amish romance novels by non-Amish writers compared to Amish writers. In order to analyze this question three serial novels have been chosen: Wanda Brunstetter's *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013), Adina Senft's *Healing Grace* (2015) and Linda Byler's *Lancaster Burning Trilogy* (2014). Although there are a lot of similarities, the novels show that the non-Amish authors mostly follow the stereotypical Amish gender roles in the portrayal of their characters with only a few small exceptions; whereas Linda Byler portrays a far wider range of female and male characters that do not always fit into a typical feminine or masculine Amish role.

## Deutsche Zusammenfassung

In den letzten Jahrzehnten wurden die Amischen in den amerikanischen Medien immer populärer, sei es durch Filme oder Fernsehserien oder durch Bücher unterschiedlicher Gattungen. Vor allem bei der christlichen Leserschaft werden Romane über die Amischen immer beliebter, da der einfache ländliche Lebensstil eine willkommene Abwechslung zur schnelllebigen, modernen Welt bietet. Die Amischen fallen nicht nur durch ihr äußeres Erscheinungsbild auf – die Frauen mit langärmeligen Kleidern und Kopfbedeckung, und die Männer mit Bärten, breiten Hosen und Hosenträgern –, sondern auch durch ihr patriarchalisches Gesellschaftsmodell. Die Frauen kümmern sich um Haushalt und Kinder, während die Männer die Hauptversorger der Familie sind. Die meisten Romane über die Amischen, die in den letzten Jahrzehnten geschrieben wurden, wurde von Autoren verfasst, die nicht den Amischen angehörten. Diese Situation änderte sich vor etwa zehn Jahren, als unter anderem Linda Byler, eine amische Mutter und Großmutter, begann, ebenfalls Romane zu verfassen. Der Schwerpunkt dieser Diplomarbeit liegt nun darauf, zu analysieren, wie die Geschlechterrollen in amischen Liebesromanen dargestellt werden, insbesondere darauf, ob in dieser Darstellung ein Unterschied zwischen Autorinnen, die nicht den Amischen angehören, und jenen, die tatsächlich Amische sind, besteht. Zur Durchführung dieser Analyse wurden die folgenden drei Romanserien ausgewählt: Wanda Brunstetters *A Lancaster County Saga* (2013), Adina Senfts *Healing Grace* (2015) und Linda Bylers *Lancaster Burning Trilogy* (2014). Obwohl es in den Büchern viele Ähnlichkeiten gibt, so zeigen die Romane dennoch, dass die nicht amischen Autorinnen größtenteils den typischen amischen Geschlechterrollen in der Darstellung ihrer Charaktere folgen – mit einigen wenigen Ausnahmen –, wohingegen Linda Byler ein weitaus größeres Spektrum an Personen beschreibt, die nicht immer in das Bild einer typischen amischen Frau oder eines typischen amischen Mannes passen.