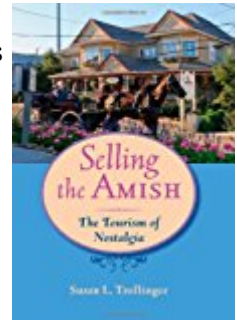


**Susan L. Trollinger.** *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia*. Young Center Books in Anabaptists and Pietist Studies Series. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. xxii + 193 pp. \$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4214-0419-6.



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Susan Trollinger, an English professor from the University of Dayton in Ohio, covers many Amish Country themes that reveal much about tourists and their ideas of the Amish in her book *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia*. She argues that three Amish tourist towns in Ohio (Walnut Creek, Berlin, and Sugarcreek) are designed around narratives that have meaning for tourists. Trollinger makes the book accessible to a general audience by writing both as a tourist and as an academic. As a scholar, she writes from a visual rhetoric perspective, which stresses that images can create meaning and/or present arguments for the observer.

Although the majority of the book is about the tourist sector, the book presents essential background on the Amish as well. Trollinger begins her work by providing a well-written condensed history that depicts the Amish as originating from a radical branch of the Protestant Reformation. These Anabaptists wanted to demonstrate God's kingdom by disentangling the church from politics, and in turn to separate their religious lives

from citizenship. This basic knowledge is essential to understanding the myths of Amish tourism.

Trollinger argues that the Amish Country tourist industry cannot fully and accurately depict the Amish lifestyle partly because the Amish want to live apart from mainstream society in an effort to maintain a faith life centered in their family and community. This may be in part why the tourist industry convinces tourists that they are strangers in a strange land and that they need a guide. This approach places the Amish in the background which has the benefit of protecting them from tourists; they do not want tourism to affect their simple lifestyle. The overarching theme of Trollinger's book is that the tourist sector creates certain visual images about the Amish in the way that shopping and eating establishments are designed and decorated. Trollinger demonstrates how these themes are centered on fundamental challenges with the tourists rather than an in-depth and accurate view of the Amish. Some of the fundamental challenges of tourists include their relationship to time, gender, and tech-

nology, as will be summarized more in this review.

One of the main objectives of Amish Country tourism, according to Trollinger, is to convince tourists that being in Amish Country will ease their anxieties about modern American life. The tourist industry tailors messages to visitors, most of whom are white, middle class, and middle aged to retired, generally from areas surrounding the three major Amish tourist locations that represent the American Heartland: Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The tourist sector provides visitors with the comforts of modern American life through shopping and eating establishments. The tourist industry also uses the Amish to depict images of what a more positive future would be like, where families are unified and life is simpler, slower, and more relaxed.

According to Trollinger, time and gender are major themes of Walnut Creek's tourist sector. As she describes, Walnut Creek's tourist industry provides a different conception of time and gender than most Americans have today. Tourist establishments show the beauty of Victorian-style buildings, which point to a "better" era when people, women in particular, had time to engage in maintaining indoor beauty. The Amish are interwoven into this visual rhetoric; tourist venues seek to present the Amish as living harmoniously, with better management of time, domestic beautification, and distinct gender roles. Trollinger cites outside research to illustrate the importance of these themes. For example, she draws on what John P. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey call a "time famine," meaning that modern people are working more and relaxing less.[1] At Walnut Creek, Trollinger argues, the goal is to make tourists feel like they have plenty of time to explore and relax. Walnut Creek has many exterior resting spaces for travelers; area restaurants offer food made from scratch that resembles slow, home-cooked meals; and Amish buggies evoke old-fashioned images and a slowness of time. She discusses how

these images and experiences can create an experience where time in a sense slows down for the tourist momentarily compared to their fast-paced modern life. Trollinger describes how Walnut Creek's narrative of time is intermixed with allusions to an era with clearer gender roles. Shopping and dining establishments accentuate the female domestic realm. Shops clearly target female customers. She further argues that the tourist sector displays and sells such items as cookbooks, scented candles, lotions, lace, and flowers, with shops encouraging women to create indoor beauty in their own homes and to be more domestic. Cookbooks and feminine decorative items may not seem like a unique tourist experience as many tourist sites include gift shops with similar items. However, the underlying argument of the book is that the tourist can connect these themes of time and gender to stories that the tourist industry tells about the Amish. This connection is unique to Amish tourist sites.

The Berlin site is the busiest Amish tourist town in the United States. Trollinger illustrates how the tourist sector in Berlin uses the Amish, the frontier, and a 1950s theme to present romanticized visions of earlier times. The frontier theme is illustrated with a fort motif for the shopping area and simple tools that are representative of that era as well as artwork depicting peaceful images of frontier life. The author goes on to describe how the Amish, like the pioneers, have a different relationship with technology than most mid-twentieth-century Americans. She cites a 2001 Gallup organization report which found that a significant number of Americans long for a time when they better understood and more easily controlled technology. Recurrent debates blame electronics for negative influences on family and community life, as well as on privacy and time management.[2] In contrast, as Trollinger argues, Berlin offers the tourist the ability to interact with simpler technology and simpler tools. Tourists can have a tactual relationship with these tools as if they were on the frontier carving out civilization.

Likewise, references to the 1950s, such as a 1950s-style soda fountain and images of Elvis, cater to baby boomers. According to Trollinger, the 1950s is viewed as an era when technology offered “promise and possibility” rather than upheavals in society and family, such as the rising divorce rates after the 1950s. She critiques these themes as romanticized images, since life in the frontier was also associated with violent takeovers, familial and financial loss, and conflict. Likewise, the 1950s witnessed issues related to gender oppression, traditional versus youth movements, the Cold War, and many more. In summary, Trollinger argues that an overarching theme of Berlin’s tourist industry is the message for tourists that they can have control over technology and its effects on their lives.

Sugarcreek, waning in popularity in comparison to the booming tourist industries in Walnut Creek and Berlin, is a tourist town oriented around a Swiss theme that has a history of cheese making. As Trollinger notes, Sugarcreek depicts a romanticized view of the past, focusing on a time when Americans had a stronger sense of ethnic identity. The Amish in Sugarcreek serve as an example of Americans who have maintained their ethnic identity and agrarian lifestyle. She attributes the demise in popularity of Sugarcreek to the majority of Americans no longer identifying with any specific ethnic identity. White middle-class Americans are no longer the majority and they left their ethnic identity behind in the melting pot of American culture. She notes that it is not clear how the typical tourist can regain this connection to a clear ethnic identity.

The consumerism of these tourist sites, Trollinger argues, is antithetical to the plainness of the Amish. At the beginning and end of the book, however, she connects Amish Country tourism tangibly to the Amish with an interview of some Amish elders who view tourism as a way to reveal their Christian faith to the public. These interviews were with elders from a branch of the

Amish that tends to be more liberal and salvation-oriented (the New Order); it would have been useful to also get a sense of what other Amish people think about the messages of the tourist sector and the tourists. Trollinger does indicate that some Amish publications have printed silly questions that tourists ask and that some Amish may be frustrated with the misconceptions of tourists. Although the book is clearly about tourists, it would have been beneficial to get a wider view of the Amish perspective on tourism.

Is there something special about Amish tourism? Or are these sites just more venues for a group of people who like to shop and eat? As pointed out earlier, perhaps there is nothing particularly special to have these kinds of shopping and eating experiences located in a tourist site. Trollinger does not provide any direct evidence that the tourists are in fact making the connections outlined above. But this is not the goal of visual rhetoric. Furthermore, it would be challenging to measure these connections, because tourists may not be able to articulate these themes even if they were influenced by them.

Trollinger argues that even though the Amish tourist industry does encourage tourists to shop and eat, for visitors who “have eyes to see,” the Amish way of life should bring mainstream American consumer culture into question (p. 148). In this sense, the example of the Amish will continue to be effective in providing something special and distinct to tourists.

#### Notes

[1]. John P. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey, *Time for Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 53.

[2]. Lowell C. Rose, Alec M. Gallup, William E. Dugger Jr., and Kendall N. Starkweather, “A Report of the Second Survey Conducted by the Gallup Organization for the International Technology Education Association,” *International Technology Education Association*, September

2004, <http://www.iteaconnect.org/TAA/PDFs/GallupPoll2004.pdf>. This survey was conducted in 2001.

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