

But the narrator is also a tourist whose alertness to physical stimuli – sights and (especially) sounds – is heightened amidst new surroundings. In “Almost 60 outside Pena de la Pateria,” “the alley is as long as anyone’s life,” “the moon tilt[s] into the courtyard,” and “a mongrel sidles near ... and eases its weight fully/into the buckled cobblestones.” These solid images are accompanied by sounds, some of them ephemeral as when the black clad gypsies “laugh [...] out of the east like a memory” or when “you hear the heat.” Others are more visceral: “the staccato of black shoes/hand claps and a familiar guitar” or the “splattering rain.”

Music has always inspired Friesen’s work and here too “the song outlives all” as one title puts it. The brilliant sound of a clarinet and the human voice of the fado singer, however tinged with sadness, provide a counterpoint to the darkness suggested by the book’s title, where the two main words bear connotations of a final journey. The darkness is there to be sure, in the underlying awareness of death, but it isn’t total.

Several poems honor the artist Goya, and poet Lorca is present not only as subject, “playing his piano/in the alhambra” but when his short lines and repetitions are echoed in Friesen’s work. Such repetition occurs in “dark night of the tree” a poem that pays tribute to St. John of the Cross, a mystic whose writing has long fascinated Friesen. Statements like “the/ only way toward/what toward what/was john’s abysmal/ridiculous/bliss” and words like “drunk” and “swoon,” trace the narrator’s apparent attempt to decry the way of this saint whose life and thinking are impossible to understand yet remain compelling and strangely desirable: “and you/still wanting the/darkness that burns/in the soil of/soil.”

Readers may not find Friesen’s work drastically renewed, or the language significantly overhauled, but his work remains vital and energetic enough for more to come.

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Jean Janzen, *Entering the Wild: Essays on Faith and Writing*, Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012. Pp. 124. Softcover, \$11.95 U.S.

In a series of twelve interlocking essays, award-winning poet Jean Janzen reflects on the places, relationships, and stories that have informed her identity as a writer of faith. The essays are arranged thematically rather than chronologically; however, most of them are

dated, so historically-minded readers can keep track of a narrative arc as the essays weave back and forth through time, building a textured reading experience from multiple facets of the poet's life and sources of inspiration. Janzen has taken her cue from Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China*. In the title essay, "Entering the Wild: My Writing Journey," situated in the middle of the volume, Janzen remarks that Wiebe's novel "challenged my assumptions about how to write a story by scrambling the linear telling, his characters growing rich with unexpected placement in the action, and by his skill in depicting their complexities." (50) That "history and life could be told artistically" is abundantly demonstrated in Janzen's poetry, and again in this volume of essays.

Although each essay focuses on a particular theme, all are interwoven by the twin journeys of faith and creative expression that inform Janzen's life. Janzen's lyric voice is present in her lucid prose, and those who already appreciate the poet's accomplished style will recognize and appreciate the subtlety of her poetic approach to prose. As a poet, Janzen relies on image and metaphor as the central organizing devices of each essay, and these images, rather than narrative tension, fuel the reader's discovery. Those looking for a narrative may be frustrated by the term "memoir" that appears before the author's name on the cover and the title page, though not in the book's subtitle. Yet there is story aplenty in these essays – stories of the daughter of an orphaned immigrant who in her own life fulfilled the American dream in her journey to a sprawling Tudor house in California surrounded by dream-like abundance; stories of the paternal grandmother who committed suicide after the death of her husband and departure of her oldest son; stories of a reunion with long-lost cousins in Kazakhstan in 1989 and of singing "Gott ist die Liebe" with them in their home.

Readers of Janzen's poetry will be delighted to discover the sources of a number of her poems in these essays. She tells of her father's immigrant journey and lifelong passion for learning, as well as the story behind her early haunting poem "These Words are for You, Grandmother." She describes both the rewards and the loneliness of her life as the wife of a busy medical student and doctor, and the solace the piano offered her as a means of artistic expression until her discovery of poetry and the "wilderness that the creative life demands," even within the structures of domestic life. In one of the later essays in the book she delves into the suffering and errors of three prominent Russian women – Czarina Alexandra, Anna Akhmatova, and her paternal grandmother – bringing this unlikely trio into a mutually illuminating dialogue through the metaphor of the pearl, created by the nacre released to coat a painful irritation. In a companion essay she writes of her discovery of the writings of three medieval women

mystics as the result of an assignment given to her by the *Hymnal: A Worship Book* committee in 1989, and the hymn texts they inspired, fulfilling a hunger for the divine feminine Janzen did not realize she had.

The further I read into the collection, the more deeply it held me, as Janzen proffered tastes of the “wildness” that compels her writing journey. Her evocation of Emily Dickinson as muse is apt, as both poets offer immensity in miniature, in poems of surface beauty and puzzling depths. Janzen’s own spiritual and artistic unfolding – from the pious preacher’s daughter fearful of imperfections to the bold middle-aged Master of Fine Arts student in a cutting edge program at Fresno State University, where she studied with Peter Everwine and Phillip Levine, then to the creator of hymn texts that have shaped and enriched the worship experiences of hundreds of thousands of contemporary Mennonite and Brethren and Mennonite Brethren Christians – is breathtaking.

This book is an important work in Janzen’s oeuvre and a valuable contribution to Mennonite literary studies, not only for its record of a remarkable and path breaking literary career, but also for its reflection on a major cultural transition in two generations of the twentieth-century Mennonite immigrant experience. It tells how the deprivations of Stalinist Russia came to be transformed through immigration, education, and exposure to the arts in an America of abundance and possibility, but also how Mennonite worship, faith, and practice have been transformed in North America, even as Mennonites have also sought a connection to the past through story, travel, and art. Janzen tells these stories with discretion, honesty and grace. Above all, these essays invite us to return to Janzen’s poetry and to read it in the light of the rich insights they offer.

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Rhoda Janzen, *Does this Church Make Me Look Fat?* New York: Grand Central, 2012. Pp. 272. Hardcover, \$27.99.

Rhoda Janzen’s *Does this Church Make Me Look Fat?* (recently retitled *Mennonite Meets Mr. Right* by her publisher) is a sequel to her popular 2009 memoir *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress*, a book which saw the divorced and unhappy Michigan English professor and poet revisit what she likes to call her “Mennonite community of origin.” These books are a somewhat uneasy blend of genres: part faith story,