

a distance. A knot of anger at a God who chose to blur everyone together tightened in his belly. He wanted to pull each book from its shelf, rip each page from its spine, and spread everything out so that God wouldn't be able to see them as one (283).

The depiction of Johan as a man frustrated by the plight of the individual within the collective identity of Mennonite history, culture, religion and family provides an interesting contrast to the rest of the novel, in which the individuals fail to fully cohere within their collective story.

What Jessica Penner does well in *Shaken in the Water* is imagine the lives of fascinating and flawed human beings. She deeply concerns herself with the motivations of her characters and has a gift for populating the text with significant, concrete details that manifest her curiosity and care for the world she creates. While the book as a whole would have benefited from another thorough editorial polishing to mend some awkward sentence structure and clean up some pesky typos, this is a first novel that shows Penner's strength of imagination and her ability to redeem what's perceived as off-kilter and to re-cast it as beauty, but always beauty in the context of human brokenness and the blood from it which comes.

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Patrick Friesen, *Jumping in the Asylum*. Toronto: Quattro Books, 2011. Pp.60. Softcover, \$16.95.

Patrick Friesen, *A Dark Boat*. Greenwich, England: Anvil Press, 2012. Pp. 119. Softcover, \$16.

Both of Patrick Friesen's latest collections, *Jumping in the Asylum* and *A Dark Boat*, draw on travels in Portugal and Spain. Concerning the travels of Canadian poets, critic Carmine Starnino writes: "[...] being abroad spurs psychological auditions, try-outs of self-invention under exotic test conditions." This premise – that we are freed by not feeling at home – also extends to language: a change of scene can uncork euphoric new noises.

Though these collections do not represent startling reinventions – Friesen's work has always evolved rather than veered dramatically – travel has provided new settings with plenty of local colour, new experiences and a scattering of Spanish words that may not be

euphoric but nevertheless enhance the text. As for “psychological auditions,” this poet has always evidenced what the Portuguese call: *souade*, “a longing for something in the past that can never be found because time has shifted everything away from what it was.”

Friesen’s second last collection, *Jumping in the Asylum*, is a small volume of poems with regular stanzas, long, sweeping, unpunctuated lines, and rhythms that reflect jazz influence. Like the crow in the collection’s first poem, the poet is doing “the work of witness,” observing and recording the entire spectrum of life, from vivid details of a boy’s birthday party to the frail old man, eyes closed and hands idly folded (“nonno facing the sun”).

Rhythm and the abundant imagery pull the reader forward, sometimes urgently, as in “bombed by the sun,” where the current moves swiftly from “hawk and body the meat of glory forgotten” past tomato sandwiches and women singing at a birthday party to “the fishy/life of the fetus at the door of the world.”

The current slows down in “lower fish street,” to fit the reflective mood called for by the narrator’s preoccupation with memory: “who were you? there was a time a time when you were// ...and it happens all the time everyday everything/I remember grows to approximation and filament.” Memory may be ephemeral and meditating on it self-indulgent, but this poem, ending with “uncles casting their lines” and “aunties spreading the table cloth again,” lands firmly on its feet, steering clear of syrupy sentimentality.

Looking back is not a new stance for Friesen; neither is reaching beyond the material in search of a possible spiritual reality. In “let the sun shine a shadow across their graves” a former time and place and a “way/of belief” are recalled with expressions like “perfume of martyrdom” and “bodies naked and spread-eagled.” Words like “grave,” “bleak,” and “dead” (used repeatedly) and, not surprisingly, “*seelenangst*” set the tone and create a mood for pondering the meanings of life and death.

In the book’s final poem, the narrator addresses a young boy with the words “I will carry you.” This hopefully repeated promise does not, however, silence the questions. The poem ends with: “have I arrived? / and if I have not arrived where do I go?”

In Friesen’s latest collection, *A Dark Boat*, the poet/witness wanders through foreign streets and into bars, sensing that “you are alone” and “you have nothing.” The feeling of aloneness shapes the observer’s perceptions. When a man enters a dark cathedral, “how can he not be a widower?” “[T]he widow at the window” has surely “loved death” and “lain with it” and now “no one knocks at her door.” Longing and loneliness, both of the observed and the alien observer, are poignantly captured.

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