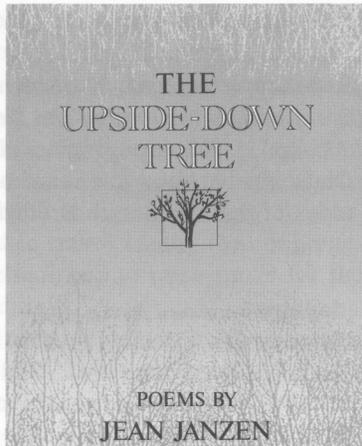


Book Review

Jean Janzen, *The Upside-down Tree* (Winnipeg: Henderson Books, 1992). \$11.95. Available at Pacific Bookshop, 1717 S. Chestnut, Fresno, CA 93702.

Reviewed by Wilfred Martens, Professor of English, Fresno Pacific College.



A poet is a person who uncovers buried metaphors. Jean Janzen's recent collection of poems represent an uncovering of buried metaphors that become for the reader a discovery of a treasure. A recent interview with the poet provides us with insights into the process of digging for memories and transforming them into poems.

This poetry collection is about your roots, your history, your family. What is the value of expressing your heritage in poetry rather than in narrative or history?

Janzen: Poetry brings a dimension that goes deeper than a historical account might. The poet tries to identify real persons, details, and situation as if they were your own—to make a connection. We need artists as well as historians to reclaim the past and to tell the story.

What challenges do you face in dealing with distant memories?

Janzen: It is a challenge to try to place myself a few centuries back. It was helpful to visit places in Holland, Poland, and Russia to help recapture the past. One of the poems, "Potato Planting," is a symbol of what I am trying to do—going for the roots instead of the crown. It's a kind of dig. That's what the title is all about. Traveling to these historical places helps put me into the skin of those people. It helps to reclaim the real heritage for me as well as for others.

A number of the poems are dedicated to specific persons. What's the relationship of these persons to the poems? Why do you do this?

Janzen: The poems which are dedicated to persons fall into one of two categories. Some are gifts to persons—"Today," for example, a gift to my daughter Jill. Others emerge out of experiences I have had with persons—"River" is such a poem for my brother Loren. There can be a risk in doing this. Some readers may sense that the poem is not for them. That is one of the reasons why I put some of the dedications at the end. It may not detract the reader as much as one at the beginning might.

Do specific persons from your memories nourish the creative process or block it?

Janzen: I find that I must remove myself, gain some distance, so that I'm free to write, so that it becomes universal. In that sense it can become a danger if one is too close. At the same time, there is something present that nourishes the idea. So closeness can also be an advantage.

Your poems are written in a variety of forms. "Fox" is free-form with continuous lines. "Silver Apples" is very balanced with three-line stanzas. "This Earth" has an unusual shape. How important is form?

Janzen: I choose form intuitively. An idea "feels" a certain way—it is a search in which form seeks to be unified with the idea. I am looking for a sense of order, a sense of unity. "January Happiness" is like walking. "After the Pruning" gives more of a sense of order. "Reclaiming the Land" expresses a search. "This Earth" is a response to the movement of an earthquake. Form is unique to the written expression of poetry, but not to the oral.

Do you experiment much?

Janzen: I've done some of the traditional and fixed forms such as sonnets and sestinas, but it's not a goal of mine to experiment. It's difficult to do traditional forms in fresh ways, but I'd like to work at it. Meter without rhyme would be fun to try, but even that is challenging. My goal is more to say something worthwhile and come to a discovery. A poem seeks its own form—even demands it.



"Potato Planting" is an appropriate poem to open the collection. Like an upside-down tree, a potato's "fruit" is below the surface, buried underground. Like the potato digger, Janzen digs for treasured memories that turn out to be "fruit" for the reader.

Her style is a simple, sparse one, a style of understatement. No excess phrases or clauses, adjectives or adverbs. Figurative devices are present, but rarely obvious. In the first poem, for example, there is gentle alliteration in "waiting/to be washed . . ." and an onomatopoeic quality in "rough tongues." But such devices are usually subdued. Even with punctuation she is conservative, rarely moving beyond the comma and period.

Her poems are rich with images, never forced or artificial, images that are multi-sensory. The opening lines of "January Happiness," the final poem in the collection, is such an example: "I burn the sweet burdens/of cedar, touch the rough/stiffness of the loquat/still green after frost." The images throughout the collection are usually quiet and gentle, like the rippling edges of a deep lake.

The Upside-down Tree is not only about the past. It is a four-strand cord that connects the past with the present.

Those persons of a decade and century past become immediate members of the reader's world. Their pleasures, pains, achievements, and experiences are shared in the present. If the measure of a good poem is its ability to share the experience with the reader, then Janzen's poems are successful. It is a pleasure to dig below the surface, to discover and share those treasures, experiences, and memories of the past. But it is equally enjoyable to climb up the roots of the upside-down tree and discover that they point outward and upward.

Commendations are also given to artist Spencer Newell, the poet's son-in-law, for the imaginative cover that sensitively reflects the title as well as the tone and style of the poetry.

New books in the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies

The following are only a few of the many new books received in the Center for MB Studies during recent months:

Bartel, Matthew. *Bartel: From 17th Century Nederlandt, 18th Century Prussia, 19th Century Ukraine, 20th Century American*. Rosenort, Man.: Prairie View Press, 1991.

A history of the Heinrich Bartel (1834-1867) and Gertrude Warkentin Bartel (1832-1872) family.

Bartsch, Abe F., ed. *A.J. and Susie Wiebe Family*. n.p.: privately printed, 1992.

A history of the Abraham John Wiebe and Susie Ewert Wiebe, prepared for a Wiebe family reunion in July 1992.

The Descendants of Ohm Abraham Wiebe: 1831-1991. Winkler, Man.: privately printed, [1991].

A history of Abraham Wiebe (1831-1900) and Maria Koop Wiebe (1831-1892).

Janzen, Jean. *The Upside-down Tree*. Winnipeg: Henderson Books, 1992.

The latest collection of poetry by this Fresno poet. See the book review elsewhere in this issue.

Janzen, John, William Janzen & Ruth Hildebrand, comp. & eds. *The Heinrich F. Janzen Family Record*. Saskatoon: privately printed, 1992.

A history of the Heinrich F. Janzen (1849-1920) family.

McKee, Wilma. *Heritage Celebrations: A Resource Book for Congregations*. Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1992.

A practical guide for local Mennonite congregations planning a church celebration event.

Nolt, Steven M. *A History of the Amish*. Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1992.

A new history of this significant branch of the Anabaptist-

Mennonite family.

Redekopp, Alfred H. *The Muensterberg Hueberts: A Family History and Genealogy of the Descendants of Claas Huebert (1785-1853)*. Winnipeg: privately printed, 1992.

Claas Huebert was the father of Heinrich Huebert, the first elder of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia.

Pedagogy (continued from page 2)

in Sagraadowka, Neufeld studied for four years at the Evangelical Seminary in Basel, Switzerland and later at Spurgeon's Pastor's College in London, founded by the renowned Baptist minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Upon completion of his studies, Neufeld moved back to Russia, settling in the Ufa Colony near the Ural Mountains, over eight hundred miles northeast of the Molotschna Colony. There he became the principal of the Davlekanovo *Zentralschule*.⁸

The Ufa settlement, founded in 1894, was far removed from the heartland of the Mennonite colonies in Russia. For the first several years of its existence, the Ufa Colony had no adequate educational system. Some wealthy members of the settlement sent their children to schools in the more established colonies, but this was hardly practical for most people. Faced with the need for improved local education, a committee in the Ufa Colony set about to establish a secondary school in its main city of Davlekanovo. They secured the services of two Mennonite teachers, Kornelius G. Neufeld and Johann Peter Rogalsky, who began teaching there in September of 1908. Neufeld served as the school's first principal.⁹

In 1913, after five years at Davlekanovo, Kornelius Neufeld left Russia. Following a short stay in Germany, he emigrated to the United States in 1914. Like Wilhelm Neufeld, he skipped over the more established midwestern Mennonite settlements and moved directly to California. Neufeld initially settled at Fairmead in Madera County, where a new Mennonite settlement had been established only about one year before. With Cornelius Wittenberg, he served as an ordained minister of the Fairmead Mennonite Brethren Church during 1914 and 1915. By 1915, however, the Fairmead congregation was beginning to unravel and many of its members moved away; Neufeld soon relocated to Reedley.

Kornelius Neufeld made his first contribution to Mennonite education in Reedley in the fall of 1915. That year the Mennonite Brethren Church there granted him permission to conduct a school on Sunday afternoons in the church basement.¹⁰ In the spring of 1916, representatives of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church met with their counterparts at the First Mennonite Church to discuss the possibility of reestablishing a German school. Neufeld's involvement in this renewed effort to organize a school is not clear. It seems likely, however, that the arrival of someone with his expertise and experience might well have been an impetus for these negotiations.¹¹

It does not appear that these inter-Mennonite discussions went very far, since the Mennonite Brethren Church alone