Clarion Review

Poetry

A Book in the Dialect of Northern Minnesota
Tom Hanson
978-1-4259-7732-0
Three Stars (out of Five)

A Book In The Dialect of Northern Minnesota speaks with a consistent attitude. One gets the impression that Tom Hanson is never ruffled, startled, stressed or otherwise pulled out of line. Where some poetry collections are unified by the expression of meaning and others by the use of form, *The Dialect* is unified by voice. Hanson's poem, *I Can Write Forever,* plainly declares his mind: "Relax, / I can write forever, / There is no hurry."

There are a few gems scattered through the volume, such as *Blizzard.* Here, in a manner that is reminiscent of haiku, Hanson captures the wild violence of a storm: "The wind-blown blizzard, / In wrath as a wild lion, / With furious instincts, / Slaughtering the air." There are plenty of original thoughts and turns of phrase, but some of the poems seem to be only small pieces of a poem, or the germ of an idea.

Hanson is at his best with the concrete. In *A Memory of a Landmark*, he portrays the images and recollections of a boyhood hunting trip with his father. These concrete images are, unfortunately, too seldom seen in his writing. Some poems drift toward the ethereal, or obscure, leaving one wondering, "What does that mean?" Other poems will carry an idea forward well except for a line or two that seems to have no relation to the rest of the poem.

Occasionally the flow of meaning and imagery are interrupted by the strained reach for a rhyme. Such occurs with 'absurd' and 'heard' in the poem called *Treasure.* He writes: "They say the treasure was absurd, / Beyond all dreams ever heard, / A caravan and marching on, / As night could never hold the dawn." The idea of dreams being heard overreaches and is a bit too distracting. The "caravan marching on" also seems too disconnected to call it a metaphor, diminishing the coherence of the overall impression. However, the last line is a beautifully fresh and vivid image depicting how absurdly bountiful the treasure was.

Similarly to the poem, *Treasure*, quoted above, the book has spots of beauty and insight, but much that leaves the mind reeling in confusion as well. One must also ignore the

punctuation. There is a comma after almost every line in the book. The commas are often unnecessary and sometimes they interfere with the meaning and make reading difficult, as in "Writing to me is insulation, / against the cold."

One of Hanson's favorite topics is the experience or process of writing, but themes in *The Dialect* range from the simplicity and beauty of nature to the passions and inspiration of Hanson's faith. This is a volume worth exploring, but which leaves the reader feeling that there are a few pieces missing in the puzzle.