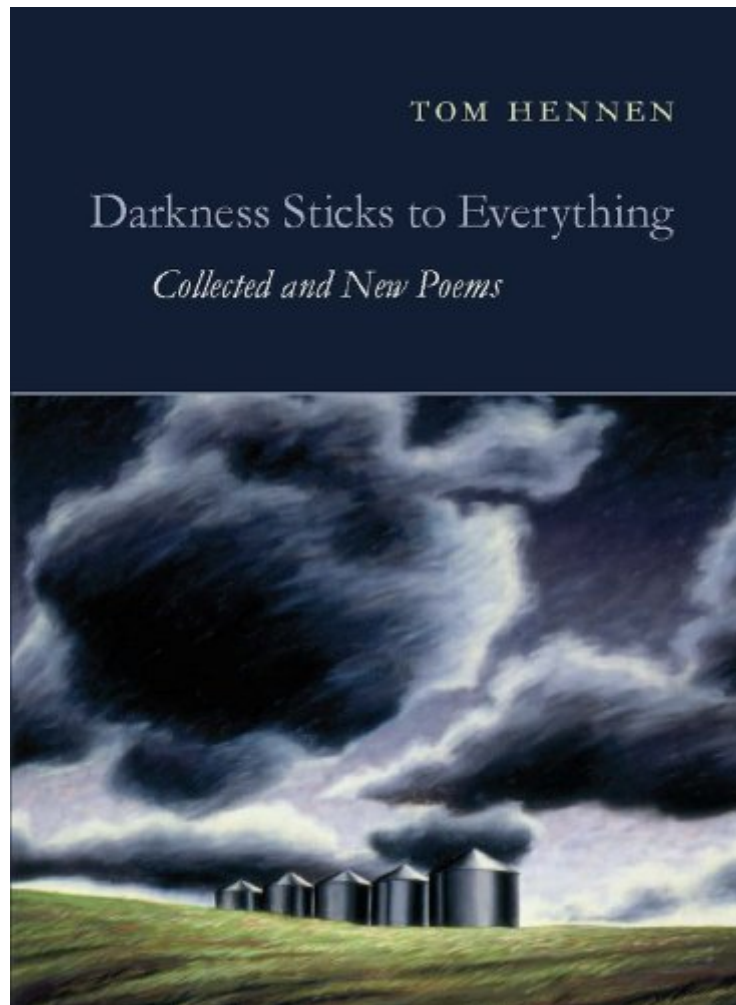


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Darkness Sticks To Everything: Collected And New Poems



Synopsis

"It's hard to believe that this American master--and I don't use those words lightly--has been hidden right under our noses for decades. But despite his lack of recognition, Mr. Hennen, like any practical word-farmer, has simply gone about his calling with humility and gratitude in a culture whose primary crop has become fame. He just watches, waits and then strikes, delivering heart-buckling lines." --Dana Jennings, The New York Times

"As with Ted Kooser, Tom Hennen is a genius of the common touch. . . . They are amazingly modest men who early accepted poetry as a calling in ancient terms and never let up despite being ignored early on. They return to the readers a thousandfold for their attentions."--Jim Harrison, from the introduction

"One of the most charming things about Tom Hennen's poems is his strange ability to bring immense amounts of space, often uninhabited space, into his mind and so into the whole poem."--Robert Bly

Tom Hennen gives voice to the prairie and to rural communities, celebrating--with sadness, praise, and astute observations--the land, weather, and inhabitants. In short lyrics and prose poems, he reveals the detailed strangeness of ordinary things. This volume is Hennen's long-overdue introduction to a national audience.

"In Falling Snow at a Farm Auction"

Straight pine chair
Comfortable
In anyone's company,
Older than grandmother
It enters the present
Its arms wide open
Wanting to hold another young wife.

Tom Hennen, author of six books of poetry, was born and raised in rural Minnesota. After abandoning college, he married and began work as a letterpress and offset printer. He helped found the Minnesota Writer's Publishing House, then worked for the Department of Natural Resources wildlife section, and later at the Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota. Now retired, he lives in Minnesota.

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Customer Reviews

Darkness Sticks to Everything has sparked once again my interest in poetry, which I am sad to confess has flagged through the decades since as an undergraduate I scoffed at the notion that poetry's appeal primarily is to the young. Even more surprising for me is that Tom Hennen's tactile imagery hearken the works of poets I disdained in my youth, particularly Gerard Manley Hopkins and William Carlos Williams. I also detect a little something of Robert Frost there as well. And, I see the ghost of Robert Penn Warren in the melancholy underlying personal relationships. Each of the poems strikes a chord in me, such as this from Clouds Rise Like Fish: The island in the lake drifts even farther from shore. Heat increases. The afternoon begins its insect hum. We can tell a storm is coming. By looking into each other's eyes. Sheep in the Winter Night brings Penn Warren's A Way to Love God to my mind. Both have sheep as their subject. Penn Warren's poem is considerably more expansive and in contrast to Hennen's now seems less focused. Hennen's concludes: The owl and rabbit were wondering, along with the trees, if the air would soon fill with snowflakes, but the power that moves through the world and makes our hair stand on end was keeping the answer to itself. As the title suggests, darkness insinuates itself in these 157 poems, not unlike the darkness Frost saw in the forest in his meditation while Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening. Again though, Hennen's poetry is considerably more economical and streamlined than Frost's.

Having been in both places for long periods of time, I can attest to the reality of Hennen's places - New Mexico and North Dakota - as he writes about them. But of course his work is much more than describing places. How do those places work on a person, how does a person settle in to lonely places, how does nature become a partner. Keep this one on the table, not the bookshelf. Read bits frequently.

"The poetry of earth is never dead," said Keats, and he's certainly right, although it's a subject so often visited that it must be deucedly difficult to find fresh ways of poetically exploring it as opposed

to, say, leukemia or fat children or Native American smoke signals. In the introduction to this marvelous collection, Jim Harrison comments that he knows of no other poet in the United States better informed on the simple rural life, and that's not hyperbole. These poems are breathtaking. I tend not to like short lines, but the short-lined early poems often sledge-hammered me at some point along the way, and the prose poems of later in the career are endlessly staggering, to wit, this final verse from the poem titled, "What the Plants Say:" "Weed, it is you with your bad reputation that I love the most. Teach me not to care what anyone has to say about me. Help me to be in the world for no purpose at all except for the joy of sunlight and rain. Keep me close to the edge, where everything wild begins." Hennen's work is a marvel.

I picked up this collection by chance at a bookstore. It is the best I have read in years. I have recommended it to friends and given it as gifts. The connection to nature within the lines of every poem is sublime.

I first learned of this collection from a New York Times article. When I read a few lines, I knew I had to pick up the book. I am delighted to report on what I found. Hennen reminds me so favorably of Carl Sandburg. He knows how to record the song of nature with originality. There is such diversity of theme here, within the world of nature. But what lingers most are the recollections of nature's beauty. I am excited to read more of Hennen's work.

This is the most beautiful book imaginable. Tom Hennen's poems are a delight - easy to read and very touching. I think one goes about with new eyes once one has read a few of his poems. I think this book is a marvelous way to introduce a person to poetry. Tom Hennen is deeply aware of seasons, changes in nature, and the passing of time. I cannot say enough good things about this lovely book!

Came to this via Jim Harrison's poems, which I love. Tom Hennen's have their own quiet unshowy authority and beauty. His work has simplicity and strength without being in any way dull or flat or sweet (something which ain't easy--try it). You could easily go from reading Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal to reading these without feeling any discontinuity or maybe from McPhee's Pine Barrens to these is a better comparison.

This was the first time I read the poetry of Tom Hennen. He impresses me with the simplicity of his

style and the vividness and vitality of his imagery. Even inanimate things are given choices to make in some of these poems. He makes us aware of the world in a specific way, related to the northern prairie, but containing elements anyone can recognize who has spent any time observing nature. The poet himself, and indeed any humans, seem peripheral to the natural world he writes about, and have only cameo appearances in many of these works. There is a depth of solitude about these poems for me, but not of loneliness. There is a pervading impression of calmness, thoughtfulness and understated wonder in Tom Hennen's poetry. It will not get your blood boiling, or make you blush; I think it will make you see things around you with heightened awareness and appreciation. This poetry can be a welcome antidote for the turmoil and anxiety of the daily headlines.

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