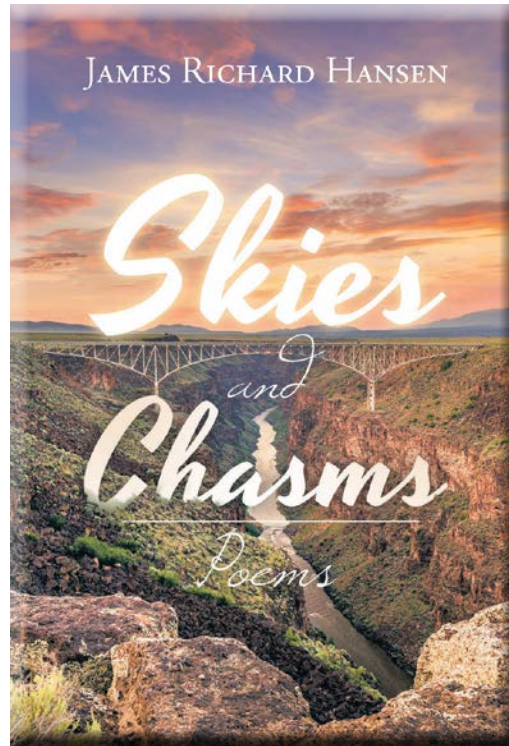

Skies and Chasms: The Poetry of James Richard Hansen

by Kate Jones, DSPE

Editor's note: Thousander James Richard Hansen's new book, *Skies and Chasms*, is available at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and authorhouse.com.



Poetry from the earliest days, dating back over 4,500 years, has taken many forms and purposes, involving strictest formats of rhyme, rhythm, meter, syllable counts, alliteration and assonance, tortured uses of language, metaphors and similes, abstractions and hidden meanings.

Styles have evolved through the ages, from book-length epics to 17-syllable haiku, and rebels have formulated their own peculiar versions of using language to embody the ideas of their unique personalities. Free verse liberates the poet from all rigid rules of structure, leaving a sculpture of words to express an insight or feeling.

It is my very great pleasure to report here on the latest book of a poet, James Richard Hansen, whose efficiency of words in free form pinpoints insights as in the flash of a lightning bolt. With fewest words he opens vistas of infinite perception.

Considering that I had read some of his poetry as published in past issues of *Telicom*, I was quite curious to get my hands and eyes on this newest collection, with the intriguing title of *Skies and Chasms*,¹ hinting at his love of nature and his reaching for the greatest heights and depths. I'll quote a few of them here. If my review rings more like a rhapsody than a report, let readers judge for themselves by their own response to the purity of language and clarity of revelation achieved by James Hansen.

The whole last section of this new book is filled with love poems for his wife, Kristen. The book is dedicated to her with this charming comment: "After 17 years, she still has not proven to me that she is not an angel."

Among the 49 poems included in this volume are many short verses expressing James's ever new ways of loving the natural world, earth

and sun and sky. The very first one, titled “An Afternoon,” exquisitely shows his relationship to the universe in the fewest words:

*Sun
Ocean
Clear sky
Gleaming sunlight
on the dark-turquoise Pacific,
electric diamonds glittering
and blinding me with ecstasy.
I’m bathing in the riches of the universe.*

In the very next poem, titled “Communion,” we get to share an even wider and deeper connection to all that exists and how it touches his very heart:

*The great mountains cast their glory
over the valley in strangely shaped shadows.
The trees and meadows shine like jewels
in the irregular light.
I hear the songs of several birds
and see deer and squirrels.
Wildflowers and a shallow, limpid stream
add to the grandeur.*

*Hiking in this masterpiece,
I commune not only with nature,
but with the universe—
and with myself.*

Contemplating nature brings a glow to the poet’s soul that is contagious. See how these lines evoke peace and a love of existence. It’s titled “Wonder”:

*Stars gaze at me
while I wonder at the wonder
of the universe.
Galaxies speak to me in light,
and darkness informs my peace.
Nothing can prevent me
from loving space and all of nature,
especially humanity.
Even with all its foibles and failures,
the beauty of all existence
is transcendent.*

*The nature of nature
propels me to rapture,
and I fly among the stars
beholding the infinitude of beauty.*

Reading James’s sensitively chosen words that feel as good as they sound can wrap the reader into a soothing aura of intensified life. Every poem engages the power of life and existence to lift the reader to the sky. Savor as you read. Each verse is a handful of jewels to be read more than once. Here is a short one titled “Antidote” that reveals the magic worked by sea and sand:

*As I stroll down the beach,
the breeze brushes my hair
and caresses my face.
The tide brings easy waves
that flow onto the beach
and spread across the sloping sand.
The wet sand comforts my bare feet.
I absorb the beauty of the setting sun
and the spectacular panorama.
Here I find inner peace,
an antidote to a turbulent world.*

A surprising interlude brings a total change of mood and pace as James celebrates with words a piece of music—Tchaikovsky’s “Pathétique.” My father was a classical pianist, and one of the treasures of my childhood memories was his playing this piece while I was going to sleep:

*Moody and intense,
surging from the deepest ocean
to the stratosphere and back,
it captured me the first time I heard it.
It was Tchaikovsky’s favorite, as well.
When I haven’t heard it in a while,
I start to crave its unparalleled
drama, darkness, pathos, and joy.
He creates incomprehensible beauty
and gut-wrenching sadness,
all within a few minutes.*

*What would the world be
without art like his?*

Another very short poem gives us a radically different glimpse into the poet's innermost motivation, titled simply "Freedom":

*In my intense drive for freedom,
I stagger and sway and stumble
over obstacles and recoil in fear
of my enemies.
I throw myself toward my goal,
knowing I must succeed
or die.*

I will never live without freedom.

Lest we think that the poet lives only in the stratosphere, we get this reassuring verse that helps to hold everything together. In "Imagination and Reality," we read:

*The sun disappears
to circle the globe,
and stars slowly shift
from invisibility in daylight
to brilliance in darkness.
Dozens of stars
and hints of the Milky Way
pull me toward an adventure in space.
I leave the comfort of our patio
for a journey among the galaxies.*

*When I return,
our home is the same—
warm, welcoming, and wonderful.
My imagination enriches my life,
but my reality is better.*

And lest we conclude that the poet never has a bad moment, we encounter his "Demons":

*As I drift into dreamland,
the demons start coming—
demons from the previous day,
demons from early life,
demons from my imagination,
demons from nowhere.
I cope as well as I can
with the dark side,
but only waking saves me.*

One way of co-existing with the doubts and uncertainties of life is to enclose them in a few lines of poetic self-knowledge, as James does in "The Road":

*As I wander down the road of life,
my solitude is surpassed
only by my desire to flee.
I want to escape to the light
on wings of friendship.
But the light could be treacherous,
and my wings are those of Icarus.
I don't want to fall
into the dark sea of oblivion.
My dilemma never ends.*

And in a few lines, he recollects the struggles of the past and how the darkness yielded to the light to overcome "Fighting":

*Spellbound by the moon,
I soon became possessed
and had to fight to stay sane.
The pain didn't leave me,
but neither did my mind.
I fought through life
knowing that every fight
could be my last.
But that's in the past.*

*Now, I often bask in sunlight,
feeling its warmth
and seeing the bright light
in my mind's eye.*

The glass is three-quarters full.

Even more profoundly, in "Cycle of Salvation (Survival?)" he reveals how he faces emotional storms to regain healing and peace. The reader may find inspiration here as well:

*Rain seems to seep through my skin
and cool my blood.
I stand in the storm as a porous being
and feel the rain soothe my soul.
But when the troubles of my day
return to mind,
I am overcome by a tempest of emotion.
I feel the burn
of the acid of anger and pain.*

*I try to cope.
I try to let go of the acid
and find comfort
in the healing moisture from above.
I try to rediscover inner peace,
as the storm outside of me continues.*

The poet's search for self-knowledge and self-revelation culminates, finally, in his mind and spirit merging into oneness with the universe. This last summary is appropriately titled "Clarity":

*As I rise through the clouds into space,
the clouds of my day recede.
I feel one with the darkness.
Only when I am free of the day
do my unity and totality become clear.
To fly through space as a free spirit
and see the stars and galaxies
is enough to make life worth living.
But many, many things
make life worth living.
And as I return to Earth,
these other things become clear, as well.*

The foregoing small selections serve only as an introduction to James Hansen's captivating poetry of the spirit. This reviewer has found each entry enriching and insightful as a beam of light emanating from the poet's psyche, coupling thought and feeling, mind and heart. With

each re-reading, recipients will discover new depths and heights of understanding, and find a pleasurable resonance in their own awareness. The final section of this volume presents a collection of 14 love poems to his wife, and while the reader may feel that partaking of them is an intrusion into personal and private spaces, each passage presents a jewel of passion shared with the world. I've chosen just two as highlights to leave a warm glow in the hearts of our readers. The first is titled "Miracles":

*When I think of my love for you,
the sun flares with brilliance.
Stars turn night to day.
Nature's beauty doubles.*

*But when you say you love me,
my joy surpasses these miracles.*

*When we met, the universe grew
to make room for our love.*

*As time progresses, we progress,
and our bond becomes indestructible.*

And this poem James wrote for Kristen on her birthday, titled "Liquid Love." No reviewer's comment is needed; it speaks for itself:

*A waterfall floods our hearts
with bracing, pristine spring water
that carries love from nature's reserve.
The source deep in the backcountry
is God's wellspring of happiness.
From the deep basin containing the liquid love,
God's angels keep the goodness flowing.
You were born of that spring,
the endless reservoir
that continues to give the world
untainted goodness
through the presence of your spirit.*

NOTES

1. James Richard Hansen, *Skies and Chasms* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2022), www.authorhouse.com. Ω