

Hekkanen's *Of a Fire beyond the Hills*
Certain to Enflame the Establishment but Delight the True Patriot

A Review by Beth L. Virtanen, PhD

Bravo, Ernest! *Of a Fire Beyond the Hills* chronicles the verbal confrontation of pro- and anti-war groups that culminates on his front lawn in Nelson, British Columbia, in 2007 and the preamble to it in the weeks preceding the event. Of course, the story is fictional, much like some work by G. K. Wuori, but the drama of the story brings to the forefront of our attention the importance of examining the interests vested in national and international politics.

We as Americans—and Hekkanen as a former American—must stand up and take notice of what is happening in our world as a result of our politics. In true American fashion—in the fashion of our forefathers who dared to stand up for our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—Hekkanen caustically calls to accounting pro-war individuals of both Canadian and American extraction. In his account of the confrontation, no pro-war individual owns his own stance on the war by signing his name to a petition that names Hekkanen as an anti-war protester who should be induced to remove himself from the community.

As usual, Hekkanen engages in deep and serious criticism of American politics and, here, of Canadian complicity in them. While his writing is as nuanced and subtle as any notable author and more well-crafted than many, Hekkanen's most important contributions are made in the substance of his work.

The political commentary he engages rests on and reminds us of the bedrock of democracy, the right of the individual to speak without fear of reprisal, upon which our society was formed. In these difficult times when civil rights have been eroded under pressure from a government that has sought to extend its power to include torture and to fabricate bases to justify an unfounded war, voices such as Hekkanen's remind us of what is truly at stake.

In the novel that details a span of time of no more than a few days, Hekkanen's characters engage in acts of resistance against a small-scale public official who seeks to end Hekkanen's dissent by bullying him into silence. Of course, grounded in the kind of tradition of *sisu* that allowed Finns to fight the Red Army of the Russians to a draw in WWII, Hekkanen's characters do not and can not cow tow to the threats of the petty tyrant.

Of course, while the primary characters in the novel board a plane for an extended vacation in Switzerland at the end of the action, many citizens in the same situation have no such luxury. They must stay put and engage continuously in meaningful resistance that forces response from the government. Hopefully, that response is compliance with the will of the people rather than retaliation against it. In a post-Bush era, perhaps a figure who is representative of the people, such as Barack Obama is, will provide a venue for a welcome respite from the kinds of political practices that are disparaged in this work.

Hekkanen does not use large online retailers. To purchase the book, go to www3.telus.net/neworphicpublishers-hekkanen/.