



## Human Wishes

*Robert Hass*

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## **Human Wishes** Robert Hass

Poems deal with language, desire, suffering, art, human relationships, and mortality.

## **Human Wishes Details**

Date : Published June 1st 1990 by Ecco (first published 1989)

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Author : Robert Hass

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# From Reader Review Human Wishes for online ebook

## Chanel Earl says

There are perfect poems in this collection, poems that are accessible, meaningful, beautiful, sad, joyful. I could go on.

The second section (prose poems) was particularly wonderful. I also enjoyed the fourth section a lot.

There are poems in this collection that didn't speak to me at all, and I wonder if they will later in life, or if they would have 5 or 10 years ago.

Great book.

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## Francisca says

\*4.5\*

according to stanley kunitz (who i have just read on hass' wikipedia page), "reading a poem by Robert Hass is like stepping into the ocean when the temperature of the water is not much different from that of the air. You scarcely know, until you feel the undertow tug at you, that you have entered into another element"

couldn't have said it better myself even if i had tried (and i didn't)

i became, unbeknownst to me, enamoured with this poetry collection. like slowly stepping into the sea.

i usually keep a notebook beside me while reading poetry because, most of the times, the book is not actually mine to note on, and yet i have the impending need to write the quotes that strike me the most. once i had finished this book, i realised i only have one quotation scribbled down and it's not even that *fantastic*

*each poet  
had to agree to be responsible for the innocence of all the suffering of the earth,  
because they learned in arithmetic, during long school days, that if there was anything left over,  
you had to carry it*

i read this quote and it makes me smile. yet, it cannot really do justice to hass' work mostly due to hass' own work. there aren't really pieces here for you to pick, no lines to save up for the future detached from their context. you either take each poem as a whole or you let it go away. i would say, rounding up roughly speaking, i took 75% of these poems with me. the other 25% was rather a miss for me and i have no quarrel with the notion of leaving them behind. i suppose this must be an inevitable response from someone who works with mixed styles--prose-like blocks and free verse--that one has a favourite form over the other. and, considering this is my very first incursion into any form of poetry not written within nice little columns, i would say this was quite the successful read for me and, so far, my favourite poetry collection of this year (sorry, seamus heaney)

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## **Bradley Harrison says**

"The archbishop of San Salvador is dead, murdered by no one knows / who. The left says the right, the right says provocateurs. // But the families in the barrios sleep with their children beside them and / a pitchfork, or a rifle if they have one. // And posterity is grubbing in the footnotes to find out who the bishops is, // or waiting for the poet to get back to his business. Well, there's this: // her breasts are the color of brown stones in moonlight, and paler in / moonlight. // And that should hold them for a while. The bishop is dead. Poetry / proposes no solutions: it says justice is the well water of the city of / Novgorod, black and sweet."

an excerpt from, "Rusia en 1931"

Who doesn't love a reference to Romero?

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## **Daniel Klawitter says**

What moves this book from 3 to 4 stars for me is that it contains one of Hass' best poems: "Misery and Splendor," a meditation on two lovers embracing:

"They are trying to become one creature,  
and something will not have it. They are tender  
with each other, afraid,  
their brief, sharp cries will reconcile them to the moment  
when they fall away again. So they rub against each other,  
their mouths dry, then wet, then dry.  
They feel themselves at the center of a powerful  
and baffled will. They feel  
they are an almost animal,  
washed up on the shore of a world-  
or huddled against the gate of a garden-  
to which they can't admit they can never be admitted."

Good stuff.

There's also a few moments of levity to be found in this collection, as in the poem "Berkeley Eclogue":

"She slammed the door.  
He was, of course, forlorn. And lorn and afterlorn."

And then there are the "prose poems" that make up quite a bit of the book. A "prose poem" is something of an oxymoron, since technically, the only thing you can do in poetry that you cannot do in prose is write VERSE...i.e., metrical writing...or at the very least, the artful line breaks that distinguish poetry rhythmically from the standard prose sentence and paragraph structure. All that being said though, there IS certainly such a thing as "poetic prose", and Hass accomplishes that particularly in the piece entitled "A Story About the Body" by using understated but skillful imagery and language. For example: "The radiance that he had carried around in his belly and chest cavity--like music--withered very quickly." Still, the piece is poetic prose and not strictly a narrative poem (even though the narrative is well done). But this is exactly what Hass was playing with in this book...the boundaries between poetry and prose and trying to blur them. He doesn't always succeed, but he is almost always worth re-reading.

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### **Steven says**

In these lush and intelligent poems, Robert Hass explores several human dichotomies, being most concerned with the chasm between what humans desire and what the reality of those realized desires is comparatively. He also investigates aging ("January," 34-36), the contrast between suffering in the United States and the global view of suffering ("Museum," 18), and the connectedness of the natural world and human actions ("Spring Rain," 7-8, "Human Wishes," 23). Hass is a technical virtuoso, moving easily between free verse and prose poetry, while keeping his tone and voice consistent. I return often to "A Story About the Body" (32), a complex meditation on how we objectify the body and the implications of that on human emotion.

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### **Matt says**

You know what it is about Bob Hass? He gets the ratio of things to ideas in a poem just right, according to some ancient formula, with a result that can be perfect, but also perfectly bland. But he's smart, especially in this book, to make the voice *speak* with a human frankness that folds back the edges of the page to reveal more dimensions of the poem.

Hass's poems, from a wider vantage, limn a certain bourgeois morality with absolute precision, and by defining its limits, critiques them. But still, when I'm done, I often have the desire to drink good wine with friends and talk about books and have our laughter ring out over his Berkeley hillside, far above the poor peoples' heads.

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### **Edward Nudelman says**

A great poet, but sometimes I find his poems a bit thick, a bit arduous to wade through. But I've learned a lot through reading Hass. He's been criticized for not being broad enough, and I think that's somewhat founded. But what he does, he does well. This is one of my favorite Hass compilations.

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## Jeff says

A lot of people will be immediately turned off by the general context of these poems. They are, after all, the result of a middle-aged white dude reflecting on his middle-aged white dudeness and are thus populated by flowers and mountains and suburban abortions, banalities refracted through the prism of stereotypical and stereotypically stirring meditations on birds and angels and Memories Of What It Was Like To Be Young.

Even so, this fucker can *write*. You won't find yourself reciting incisive lines to your significant other on a Tuesday after dinner but these poems – their ideas, thoughts, maneuverings and wanderings – nevertheless vibrate the Aeolian harp that's surely in all of us, smooth through the creases of our aches and wrinkles and pains, rub the sleep from our eyes so we don't have to.

In short, they make us human all over again, renew that which but for art we might have lost. And if you want more than that from poetry (or life!) you're just being greedy.

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## Shannon says

Mesmerizing.

At first, I wasn't sure what to make of Hass' poetry. The poems were long--some of them pages--composed of statements. "She had bobbed hair ..." "He must have received a disability check. ..." "The main course is French, loin of pork probably, with a North African accent, and very good." Knowing that good writers show, not tell, and avoid statements, I began to wonder if Robert Hass was overrated and almost did not finish the book of poems.

On second re-reading, I fell in love with his words. Accepting his blunt statements as invitations into the everyday world, I could sift into his deeper thoughts of life, love, death, winter skies, a small family in a museum cafe, a widow in the Holocaust. My heart was full after reading the beautiful language in his works. I would recommend Hass to the poetry lover.

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## Tyler Pike says

This is a book I keep in the middle of the most easily accessible bookshelf in my house. I just had a thought that maybe I need ten copies so that I won't have to decide which shelf is best and could just have it on all of them. Because I love it and read delicious lines from it all the time and anytime. I used to sit in on Robert Hass' poetry classes at Berkeley even though I was studying physics and Chinese and had no time for anything. That was before Hass had won so many awards and accolades that made him a more "famous" poet than even Ginsberg, who haunts the halls of Berkeley too. I never sat down to chat with Hass and thank him for his words and sentences, like I did with Allen Ginsberg before he died. I guess there's still time because Robert Hass is very much alive still, but let this review serve as a giant resounding THANK YOU to Hass and even a BLESS YOU!!! The last word is always his:

There were orange poppies on the table in a clear glass vase, stained near the bottom to the colour of sunrise;

The unstated theme was the blessedness of gathering and the blessing of dispersal --

It made you glad for beauty like that, casual and intense, lasting as long as the poppies last.

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## **Helen says**

Robert Hass's poems are soft and emotional. A gorgeous weaving of life, tiny snapshots of landscapes described in such detail to make every day domestic scenes seem wondrous.

Some of the poems in this collection follow a traditional, blank verse form, but my favorites are the prose poems, brushing ever so lightly the line between the poetic and flash fiction. In one of my favorites, Quartet, a dinner party of four is described in such a way:

... The main course is  
French, loin of pork probably, with a North African accent, and very  
good. The dessert will be sweet and fresh, having to do with cream and  
berries (it is early fall), and it feels like a course, it is that substantial

It makes your mouth water, want to pull up a chair and join in the conversation. Every poem invites you in in similar ways, whether it's a duck hunt, a walk to comfort a friend after an abortion, or a summer vacation with a surly teenager. Good stuff.

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## **Brooke says**

The shorter poems ended too abruptly and the longer poems, with their stream of consciousness drift between the meta and concrete, felt klunky and not particularly revelatory, the digression evasive and unsatisfying. Maybe I don't share Hass' preoccupations (they often felt dated), but he didn't make much new for me. There were some pleasurable turns of thought, like in Berkeley Eclogue.

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## **Jay says**

Well I haven't read a Robert Hass book I think is perfect.

This one doesn't have the stretched-out, conversational, biographical poems of *Sun Under Wood* -- nothing like "Regalia For a Black Hat Dancer" or "English: an Ode" -- but it does have some buzzy, mysterious, beautiful, liquid-seeming poems; the whole last section of the book is incredible. Of the prose poems, "A Story About the Body" is unfortunately way far the best, although I still love "Duck Blind" too.

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## **Laura says**

Reading poetry feels like an almost impossibly intimate exchange between the poet and me. There is something absolutely vital the poet is trying to tell me, specifically. There is something about the immediacy and the vulnerability of poetry that gives me this feeling.

Robert Hass, in this book, is talking to me about balance. He's talking about the unbelievably painful balance between beauty and terror, about the balance between loving and being afraid, between the seasons, between home and away. His poetry is lyrical and sparse at the same time. He has this way of taking you on a journey through minute detail after minute detail, often unrelated, and then sweeping outward to make some statement of abstract truth that leave you breathless. Each of his poems is precarious, in a way, full of love for the ordinary and a need to express that, but also a need to express something that comes from outside the realm of the ordinary. In each poem, he presents something – a person, a place, an idea – says, LOOK AT THIS, and then says, IT WON'T LAST. The truly extraordinary moments in his poetry are the places where he explores the space and the distance and the balance between those two truths.

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## Helena says

my boyfriend studied with robert haas in grad school. my dad lives in the same neighborhood as robert haas and keeps meeting him at uc berkeley lectures where they end up seated together. when my dad and my boyfriend met, they bonded by unceasingly talking about robert haas as "bob." this sounds slightly obnoxious, but this book really, really, *really* makes you want to call robert haas "bob." It makes you want to sit on a porch in northern california with him and eat mangoes with your hands. It makes you want to tell him all your love life/family troubles and wait for him to nod and say "hmmm" raspy in his throat and then say something wryly humorous that would suddenly make it all right and then explain clear all your stated confusion.

in a recent *new yorker* article, the author said that haas' seemingly nonsexual poetry is in fact *exactly* the perfect poetry for one to use to get the kind of women who wouldn't want to be seduced by poetry to go to bed with you. try it. I bet it works.

anyway, this is without question the most important book of poetry published in the last 30 years.

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