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Robert Hass demonstrates once again the unmistakable intelligence and original voice that have won him both literary acclaim and the affection of a broad general readership. Here Hass extends and deepens his ongoing explorations of nature and human history, solitude, and the bonds of children, parents, and lovers. Here his passion for apprehending experience with language--for *creating* experience with language--finds supple form in poems that embrace all that is alive and full of joy. *Sun Under Wood* is the most impressive collection yet from one of our most accomplished poets.

Sun Under Wood Details

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Author : Robert Hass

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From Reader Review Sun Under Wood for online ebook

Liz Shine says

Has is the perfect mix of philosopher and nature observer. Reading his work is always a delight and an inspiration.

Allison DeLauer says

"Dragon flies Mating" - "...though it is perhaps also true that nothing happens to them quite like what happens to us when the blue-backed swallow dips swiftly toward the green pond and the pond's green-and-blue reflected swallow marries it a/ moment/ in the reflected sky and the heart goes out to the end of the rope/ it has been throwing into abyss after abyss, and a singing / shimmers/ from every color the morning sun has risen into."

This excerpt resonates with me. It's what one might include on a wedding program, if wedding programs always told the truth. We don't know how the coupling will work out in this excerpt, but Hass makes a supposition: "they can't separate probably/ until it is done." (I enjoy his endings. "Why of course!" I always think, but they always surprise me.

In this collection, memories and personal histories collage with historical anecdotes, myth, reflections on current events, travel notes, the history of place, an onomastic catalog of flora and fauna—all to circle the emotional state, like a hunter and not like a hunter, I think, to capture the intricacies of mood and feeling. What else are lyric poems for? The mother makes an appearance, and various couples, diverse landscapes, but mostly I wonder if we are exploring how one trusts oneself, trusts another. I might be projecting my own inner states on the collection, but again, what else are lyric poems for, if not to tease out our own understandings, our own psychic dilemmas?

Pt Bunch says

I didn't enjoy this book: more a comment on myself than Mr. Hass. It's relentless dark pathos felt self-absorbed. "My Mother's Nipples" eleven pages of various styles felt like a therapy session:

"So, back in California, it was with some interest that I retraced the drive from San Francisco to Santa Rose which my parents made in 1939..."

Hass goes on to expose that his brother was conceived out of wed-lock. Writing as therapy is great, but doesn't make for great reading.

The book is much better read allowed, as is most poetry, and there are moments of beauty:

Butterflies-
tiny blues with their two-dot wings like quotation marks

or an abandoned pencil sketch of a face. They hover lightly
over lupine blooms, whirr of insects in the three o'clock sun

But next stanza we're back to bleak:

She sat on the couch sobbing, her rib cage shaking
from it's accumulated abyss of grief and thick sorrow.

It comes off as unnecessarily obtuse, like a zen sutra.

Also two emptinesses, I suppose, the one
joy comes from, the other regret, disfigured intention, the longing
to be safe or whole flows into when its disappearing.

Is the craft great? I'm not qualified to judge. I am qualified to judge it as dreary and self-centered.

John says

Largely meditative, this collection is at times playful and serious. Many of the poems are long and conversational, as though Hass wants us to experience the inner mind. At times, the collection doesn't seem very poetic, or steps outside of the seriousness of poetry, as when he asks the reader the rhythm of a line and then places the line into "Emily's four and three." In another poem, he experiments with the expression of the same thought through different characterizations - the romantic, the regionalist, the saint, and the capitalist. The collection has a somnolent feel, but Hass is serious about his business, as he makes clear with the beautiful metaphor of grace as "ordinary light/faint music under things, a hovering".

Rebekah Bronwyn says

In this collection of poems, Robert Hass looks at everyday experiences, moments, and sights as their own beautiful Beings existing within our lives. I fell in love with his detailed descriptions of The Real. The threaded words that are sentences and stanzas and poems are depictions of his current moment, thought, or reflection of memories. It seems that within each poem Hass explores something real and individualizes it, makes it its own beautiful created thing. His language clearly shows his own acknowledgement of nature and appreciation of each moment, and all of its surroundings of moments and places and thoughts and things. Iowa City: Early April, was one of his poems that particularly colored on each particle of life within the poem. One line that verbally shows Hass's experience with particles within moments is halfway down page 35, "his experience of his being and mine of his and his of mine were things entirely apart". This line holds individuals in tact within themselves and acknowledges their own being.

Not only is each line a living meaning of reality, but it sounds crisp and new through the syntax and line breaks. The sound and pace sharpens, quickens, and slows with the intended meaning of each stanza and or poem. In this way, and through his obvious acknowledgement of each moments or creature's own importance and life, the wild nature and oneness with it all stands out in almost every poem.

Francisca says

3.5

Tom says

Poetry is kind of a magic trick when it's done well. Good poetry cuts through the crap, the window dressing, everything you think you're going to find in it and puts in your ears the sound of an authentic human voice. The voice is so authentic that at times it's as real and present to you as your own internal monologue. Maybe more so.

Yes, Hass was the US Poet Laureat. Yes, for so many reasons, his bona fides are unassailable. But when I read this, I heard that voice. I experienced that wonderful magic trick. Almost never did I feel the urge to roll my eyes because he was being "poemy" or trying to be too clever by half. If it doesn't work in places, that's only because the subjects are so ambitious (if someone aims for Mars, do you dismiss the expedition as a failure if it only makes it as far the moon?).

I'll be adding this one to my permanent collection.

C says

Not my favorite Hass, but still there are many moments of lucidity and beauty. His shorter poems captured me more, but I did enjoy seeing echoes of his previous work in the longer pieces (a man eats bread in one poem the way a woman "dismantles bread" in the famous "Meditation at Lagunitas"). The poem below is Hass at his best.

Our Lady of the Snows

In white,
the unpainted statue of the young girl
on the side altar
made the quality of mercy seem scrupulous and calm.

When my mother was in a hospital drying out,
or drinking at a pace that would put her there soon,
I would slip in the side door,
light an aromatic candle,
and bargain for us both.
Or else I'd stare into the day-moon of that face
and, if I concentrated, fly.

Come down! come down!
she'd call, because I was so high.

Though mostly when I think of myself
at that age, I am standing at my older brother's closet
studying the shirts,
convinced that I could be absolutely transformed
by something I could borrow.
And the days churned by,
navigable sorrow.

Cory says

I picked this book up during a weekend home (that is,
where my parents live), from a shelf of my treasured titles; somewhere
between Allen Ginsberg (first edition, signed, personalized) and
Arthur Miller (special edition, signed), sat Robert Hass (first edition, signed,
personalized). It happened to be National Poetry Month, and,
after I started to reread his book, Hass
won the Pulitzer for his most recent title -
as if my selecting him on a weekend home had something to do
with the greater selection. You're welcome, Mr. Hass.

The signature and "For Cory, best," stem from a visit he made to my college
when he was teaching at my school's rival
years ago. He read in a small classroom,
and I remember him perched on the edge of a desk, reading from there
not a podium,
and us students gathered around him, as if at the feet of the wise man,
a memory probably aided by the selection of haiku he read that day,
that he had translated,
along with his own poems. He had a kind of Buddhist air about him,
calm,
and I remember thinking, "Maybe I chose to attend the wrong school,"
because that day, in close proximity to a man of letters
his steady voice and smile,
his one (loafed?) foot on the ground, the other swinging as he balanced
on the edge of the desk
I thought
"I'm glad I'm here right now."
Yet that feeling was fleeting, as was Hass's visit, and I was already finding it
harder and harder
to find reasons to stay.

Now, reading his poems again, I find
a sense of humanity
some joy, sensuality, humor, suffering, and hard-won wisdom.

I find more to relate to than I ever could have when I first read these poems.
I find these lines in a poem called "Faint Music":

"I had the idea that the world's so full of pain
it must sometimes make a kind of singing.
And that the sequence helps, as much as order helps -
First an ego, and then pain, and then the singing."

I find that ten years after first reading these words
I am still waiting
for the singing.

Agnieszka says

Uneven, and missing diacritics in Polish place and people names, which as Miłosz's translator he should know enough to include and insist on. It may be an odd thing to fixate on but a poet should be careful with borrowed words, and treat them well. How can I know the borrowed Korean, Spanish, and Native American names and stories aren't equally awry? So I lose trust in the work and have very little patience to indulge its self indulgence.

Christina M Rau says

The Cons: A lot of the poems are about nature. Birds. A cat. One way to get me to turn away from a poem is to write about a horse. I don't remember any horses here, but I skimmed through the nature stuff, so one might be roaming around in some verse. The problem is that he's got these great lines, and sometimes I found really moving imagery and diction after forcing myself to continue to read a poem when the first line is about an animal. Also, some of his poems he writes twice, as in, he writes the poem and then offers a second poem entitled Notes on that poem, so really it's two poems. I tended to like the Notes better than the first poem. Finally, he's got a lot of paragraph, long-line, prosey stuff, and it was hard to plow through. He's tricky, though. Some poems he starts with short lined verse and then suddenly switches, and since I was in the midst of it, I had to continue. Tricky, very tricky.

The Pros: "Forty Something" is a short poem, very short, about a woman threatening to stab a lover in the heart if he leaves her. Nice! "Shame: An Aria" may as well be the story of my life. It's funny and dry and sweet and true. The piece on Frida Kahlo is unique and intriguing. "English: An Ode" is wordplay at the pinnacle of poetry. Using other languages, etymology, and polyptoton (fun word! look it up!), Hass creates a melding of language that flaunts his strong grasp of a difficult entity.

Daniel Klawitter says

"I had the idea that the world's so full of pain
it must sometimes make a kind of singing."

Hass sings his singular music all through this book about a variety of subjects: but mostly his mother's

alcoholism as well as his divorce.

"Regalia For A Black Hat Dancer" is one of my favorite poems of his: an extended 12-page poem about loss (and art and spirituality and nature and the quest for wholeness) that dances between the geography of Berkeley and Korea with great linguistic dexterity and some truly startling images. And towards the conclusion of the poem, we get these great lines:

"Private pain is easy, in a way. It doesn't go away,
but you can teach yourself to see its size. Invent a ritual.
Walk up a mountain in the afternoon, gather up pine twigs.
Light a fire, thin smoke, not an ambitious fire,
and sit before it and watch it till it burns to ash
and the last gleam is gone from it, and dark falls.
Then you get up, brush yourself off, and walk back to the world.
If you're lucky, you're hungry."

Aaron Bauer says

This is a wonderful collection of poems, especially the shorter poems nearer to the beginning of the book. At the end, the poems get really long and a little difficult to get through--think John Ashbery (a la Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror) but more coherent.

Sheri Fresonke Harper says

Thoughtful poems that linger and delve into the inner world. These poems seem to delve into the poet's emotional state following his divorce and also into his mother's alcoholism. The poems are very connected to the mythic world and to nature. They play with language and also with ideas, mixing long connected poems and short poems into a very pleasant collection to read.

Jess Ferla says

Our Lady of the Snows

In white,
the unpainted statue of the young girl
on the side altar
made the quality of mercy seem scrupulous and calm.

When my mother was in a hospital drying out,
or drinking at a pace that would put her there soon,
I would slip in the side door,
light an aromatic candle,
and bargain for us both.
Or else I'd stare into the day-moon of that face

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