



Poems

Hermann Hesse

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Few American readers seem to be aware that Hermann Hesse, author of the epic novels *Steppenwolf* and *Siddhartha*, among many others, also wrote poetry, the best of which the poet James Wright has translated and included in this book. This is a special volume—filled with short, direct poems about love, death, loneliness, the seasons—that is imbued with some of the imagery and feeling of Hesse's novels but that has a clarity and resonance all its own, a sense of longing for love and for home that is both deceptively simple and deeply moving.

Poems Details

Date : Published 1970 by Farrar Straus Giroux (first published 1942)

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Author : Hermann Hesse

Format : 96 pages

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Jeff says

Hesse's *Poems*! Gone digging, and cannot verify another English edition of this German master's poems. James Wright, circa 1970, at the height of the Hesse craze (Magister Ludi on the half-shell), brought these 31 poems into English, and the translations are like a combination of Edward Thomas and Rilke, only this enormously sober and cognitively ravishing hybrid also went to the Far East, and reported back, mostly before the European conflict that destroyed eight million men (including Thomas). I am admittedly stunned by the other reactions on this site, so don't get me started about my hyperbole. Obviously, I am able to parse my reverence for the translator from the almost gnostic difficulty of the poems, but I'm little inclined to do so given the talk elsewhere here on Hesse, the poet. But to get a sense, see "Der Dicter" ("The Poet"), or the "Ode on Holderlin". The difficult and beautiful idealism is right there.

Rachel Ann Brickner says

Over the years, I've gotten into the habit of collecting used, hardbound copies of Hermann Hesse's books. This one in particular is quite a gem. It was once owned by the John C. Hart Memorial Library in Yorktown, New York, so it still has the awesome pocket with the stamped due date card. Unfortunately, I enjoyed the aesthetic of the book much more than its contents. I suppose I was expecting a lot as I'm a huge fan of Hesse's *Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf*. I was expecting to be inspired and moved, but instead I felt adrift and a bit agitated by Hesse's lack of precision and momentum in these poems. I find him to be much more confident and in control of image and rhythm in his prose. "Ravenna (1)" and "Childhood" are somewhat memorable, but I don't feel the desire to read them again and again. Perhaps I'll come across this book at a later date and discover something more worthwhile, but for now, I'm tempted to tear out the pages and use the beautiful binding and nostalgic library details as a new journal. I'm sorry, Hermann!

Hayder Hasan says

3.5 stars

" I have already died all deaths,
And I am going to die all deaths again,
Die the death of the wood in the tree,
Die the stone death in the mountain,
Earth death in the sand,
Leaf death in the crackling summer grass,
And the poor bloody human death.

I will be born again, flowers,
Tree and grass I will be born again,
Fish and deer, bird and butterfly.
And out of every form,
Longing will drag me up the stairways,
to the last suffering,
Up to the suffering of men. "

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Die Gedichte = Poems, Hermann Hesse

Poems is a collection of 31 poems written by the German author Hermann Hesse between 1899 and 1921. They were selected and translated to English by James Wright in 1970 from Die Gedichte, which was published in German in 1953. This collection was first published in 1971.

Each translated poem in this volume appears alongside the original German text. The poems, and the year they were written, are:

"I Know, You Walk" / "Ich weiß, du gehst" (1899)
 "Across the Fields ..." / "Über die Felder ..." (1902)
 "Elizabeth" / "Elisabeth" (1902)
 "Ravenna (1)" / "Ravenna (1)" (1902)
 "Ravenna (2)" / "Ravenna (2)" (1902)
 "Lonesome Night" / "Einsame Nacht" (1902)
 "A Swarm of Gnats" / "Mückenschwarm" (1911)
 "The Poet" / "Der Dichter" (1911)
 "Mountains at Night" / "Berge in der Nacht" (1911)
 "At Night on the High Seas" / "Bei Nacht" (1911)
 "To a Chinese Girl Singing" / "An eine Chinesische Sängerin" (1915)
 "Departure from the Jungle" / "Abschied vom Urwald" (1915)
 "Evil Time" / "Böse Zeit" (1911)
 "On a Journey" / "Auf Wanderung" (1911)
 "Night" / "Wohl Lieb ich die Finstre Nacht" (1911)
 "Destiny" / "Schicksal" (1911)
 "Ode to Hölderlin" / "Ode an Hölderlin" (1911)
 "Childhood" / "Die Kindheit" (1915)
 "Lying in Grass" / "Im Grase Liegend" (1915)
 "How Heavy the Days ..." / "Wie Sind die Tage ..." (1911)
 "In a Collection of Egyptian Sculptures" / "In einer Sammlung Ägyptischer Bildwerke" (1915)
 "Without You" / "Ohne Dich" (1915)
 "The First Flowers" / "Die Ersten Blumen" (1915)
 "Spring Day" / "Frühlingstag" (1915)
 "Holiday Music in the Evening" / "Feierliche Abendmusik" (1911)
 "Thinking of a Friend at Night" / "Denken an den Freund bei Nacht" (1915)
 "Autumn Day" / "Herbsttag" (1915)
 "To Children" / "Den Kindern" (1915)
 "Flowers, Too" / "Auch die Blumen" (1911)
 "Uneasiness in the Night" / "Angst in der Nacht" (1911)
 "All Deaths" / "Alle Tode" (1921)
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Emily says

"I know many countries and cities are still waiting,
But never again will the night of the forests,
The wild fermenting garden of the earliest world
Lure me in, and horrify me with its magnificence.

Here in this endless and gleaming wilderness
I was removed father than ever from the world of men--
And i never saw so close or so clearly
The image in the mirror of my own soul."

"Now I drink pain in every delight
And poison in every wine;
I never knew it would be so bitter
To be alone,
Alone, without you."

BrokenTune says

Starting with the disclaimer that I have absolutely no interest in dissecting poems with respect to rhyme, structure, symbolism, whether the author was suffering from a headache when he/she wrote it, and what-not. A poem either speaks to me (on whatever level) or it doesn't.

With Hesse, I was curious to see how his poetry compared to his novels and how his poetry reflected the themes of his novels, because to my mind Hesse's novels are works of beauty but they are also very complex. I've been trying to write a review of Steppenwolf for several months now and just don't know where to start...

Anyway, the great thing about this collection is that it is a complete collection of all of the poems that Hesse wanted to publish. I have not counted but there seem to be 700+ of them and they are in chronological order.

The order helps to relate the poems to different events in Hesse's life (if you want to do that) and to his novels.

What is stark with Hesse is there is not just the expected change in the themes and complexity of his work if you compare the early works with the later ones, but there is a marked differentiation of his approach to dealing with themes of darkness and isolation which interchange with other themes. The poems that tend to be on the "existential" side are the ones that draw me in most, simply because it seems Hesse doesn't need to try to compose them, they just seem to flow. It is this seemingly effortless expression of doubt, anger, frustration, anxiety and the simplicity in which he expresses them that are captivating.

By comparison, his love poetry (especially the early ones) kinda fail to persuade me that they were anything but writing exercises.

3.5*

Jerome Peterson says

I work for a Park & Recreational District in a Northern California town. As I was cleaning up the public park I saw items on a picnic table that looked like books. The closer I got I realized there were two lonely books someone had left; one of them was this book I am reviewing. Little did I know that I had found a treasure of pondering insight. I love books like this.

Hesse's words wooed me caressing my soul. I wanted to know these people he talked about lovingly, with sorrow, and longing. I wanted to lay in the grass and watch the animal shaped clouds float by. I wanted to feel the sun on my face, hear the birds sing, and doze off with a babbling brook in the background. I wanted to step into that world Hesse created and talk with these people. I have never read more compelling poetry in my life. I refuse to quote any of his work here because I don't want to spoil the joy and fulfillment of the mysticism of his work upon reading for the first time.

It is ironic in finding a book of poetry by Hesse like I did. It is actions like this that make me kick up my heels or ponder lengths at a time how I happen to find the book and the nature of it all. Long live poetry!

Mark says

"He is homesick. But what is home? I do not know the answer, but I cherish Hesse because he at least knew how to ask the question." (James Wright in the Translator's Introduction)

Wright selected and translated these poems which, yes, could be said to center around the theme of homesickness. It is a short book but the poems are well chosen and cohere superbly. Few are truly dark but some menace and they all question (in the larger sense).

I will need to revisit this volume from time to time, no doubt.

This edition is a bilingual one with the German on the left and the English on the right so may be of help to those trying to learn or better their German/English.

Susan Budd says

Had I been assigned Hesse's poems in my college German class, I might have persevered with the language. As it was, I ran out of steam by the second year and never achieved fluency. It is one of my regrets. It is one of the things I would do differently if I could live my life over again. (Sorry Nietzsche. I'm not nearly as tough as you.)

So I'm glad that James Wright's collection of Hesse's poems is a bilingual book. The little German grammar and vocabulary that I did learn allows me to get a feel for the original poems as I read Wright's translations.

The theme of the poems is homesickness, not the ordinary homesickness one has when travelling, but the spiritual homesickness that comes to those who are not at home in this world. It begins with a longing for the days of childhood innocence, but then it extends farther back to a time before birth. Novalis called it the dream of the Blue Flower.

*"The world and my self, everything
Within and without me, grows into one.
Clouds drift through my heart,
Woods dream my dream,
House and pear tree tell me
The forgotten story of common childhood"* (59).

The feeling I so often call nostalgia is nothing less than a desire for the impossible. I read the books of my youth. Revisit places I once lived. Dream of people long dead. And call to mind the fondest episodes of my childhood. But it is all for naught.

*"Not a single path leads back
To the garden of our youth"* (35).

As a devotee of the Blue Flower, I have felt that longing which is both the longing for something not of this world and the longing for my true self.

*"O dark gate,
O dark hour of death,
Come forth,
So I can recover from this life's emptiness
And go home to my own dreams"* (39).

I'm grateful to James Wright for translating these poems because if he had not done so, I would never have read these beautiful and inspiring verses by my favorite novelist. I like them so much that perhaps I will dust off my German-English dictionary and, with Wright's translations at my side, read them again in German.

Jen says

"To Cheryl - On The Happiest Of Days, Love Michael" - that is what is handwritten inside the cover of my copy of this book, which I purchased at a used bookstore. I always wondered what the "happiest of days" was - a wedding? Birthday? Anniversary? Well, Michael's pretty cool for having gifted Cheryl this book of

poetry - it is a wonderful collection of verses.

Isobel says

These are not the best poems you will ever read. They are repetitive, juvenile, and excessively obsessed with flowers and death. I find such vulnerability appealing, but even I had to chuckle a bit at the third or fourth nature allegory to the impermanence of a man's life. Hesse is a long-time favorite of mine, and I bought this book mainly to help complete my collection of his works, but this book is way down on the bottom of my list of Hesse favorites.

Mehwish Mughal says

*"How heavy the days are.
There's not a fire to warm me,
Not a sun to laugh with me,
Everything bare,
Everything cold and merciless,
And even the beloved, clear
Stars look desolately down,
Since I learned in my heart that
Love can die"*

Francesca says

Meravigliose

mwpm says

A slim volume of Hesse's poems (31 poems to be exact), selected and translated by the poet James Wright.

The 31 poems are "I Know, You Walk", "Across the Field", "Elizabeth", "Ravenna (1)", "Ravenna (2)", "Lonesome Night", "A Swarm of Gnats", "The Poet", "Mountains at Night", "At Night on the High Seas", "To a Chinese Girl Singing", "Departure from the Jungle", "Evil Time", "On a Journey", "Night", "Destiny", "Ode to Hölderlin", "Childhood", "Lying in Grass", "How Heavy the Days...", "In a Collection of Egyptian Sculpture", "Without You", "The First Flowers", "Spring Day", "Holiday Music in the Evening", "Thinking of a Friend at Night", "Autumn Day", "To Children", "Flowers, Too", "Uneasiness in the Night", and "All Deaths".

Hesse's Wanderings are well documented. The theme is frequently explored by Hesse in his fiction and poetry...

At night, when the sea cradles me
And the pale star gleam

Lies down on its broad waves,
Then I free myself wholly
From all activity and all the love
And stand silent and breathe purely,
Alone, alone cradled by the sea
That lies there, cold and silent, with a thousand lights.
Then I have to think of my friends
And my gaze sinks into their gazes
And I ask each one, silent, alone:
"Are you still mine?
Is my sorrow a sorrow to you, my death a death?
Do you feel from my love, my grief,
Just a breath, just an echo?"

And the sea peacefully gazes back, silent,
And smiles: no.
And no greeting and no answer comes from any where.
- At Night on the High Seas (pg. 23)

There is a poem dedicated to the memory of Knulp. I can't find any information to provide a basis for Knulp, whether he was a friend of Hesse's or a historical figures. What I do know is that Knulp also formed the basis of Hesse's novel of the same name...

Don't be downcast, soon the night will come,
When we can see the cool moon laughing in secret
Over the faint countryside,
And we rest, hand in hand.

Don't be downcast, the time will soon come
When we can have rest. Our small crosses will stand
On the bright edge of the road together,
And rain fall, and snow fall,
And the winds come and go.
- On a Journey *in memory of Knulp* (pg. 31)

Many of the poems limit themselves to basic descriptions of nature. Not that there's anything wrong with that. In fact, many readers prefer this kind of poetry. I'm not one of these readers. In spite of my bias, I found the nature poems to be agreeable...

Across the sky, the clouds move,
Across the fields, the wind,
Across the fields the lost child
Of my mother wanders.

Across the street, leaves blow,
Across the trees, birds cry -
Across the mountains, far away,
My home must be.

- Across the Field . . . (pg. 5)

The lake has died down,
The reed, black in its sleep,
Whispers in a dream.
Expanding immensely into the countryside,
The mountains loom, outspread.
They are not resting.
They breathe deeply, and hold themselves,
Pressed tightly, to one another.
Deeply breathing,
Laden with mute forces,
Caught in a wasting passion.

- Mountains at Night (pg. 21)

Beside the brook
Toward the willows,
During these days
So many yellow flowers have opened
Their eyes into gold.
I have long since lost my innocence, yet a memory
Touches my depth, the golden hours of morning, and gazes
Brilliantly upon me out of the eyes of flowers.
I was going too pick flowers;
Now I leave them all standing
And walk home, an old man.
- The First Flowers (pg. 51)

My favourite poem in the collection...

I should tell you a story,
The night is already so late -
Do you want to torment me,
Lovely Elizabeth?

I write poems about that,
Just as you do;
And the entire history of my love
Is you and this evening.

You mustn't be troublesome,
And blow these poems away.
Soon you will listen to them,
Listen, and not understand.
- Elizabeth (pg. 7)

Vishy says

Loved it.
