



# The Humans

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## **The Humans** Stephen Karam

Breaking with tradition, Erik Blake has brought his Pennsylvania family to celebrate Thanksgiving at his daughter's apartment in lower Manhattan. Unfolding over a single scene, this "delirious tragicomedy" (*Chicago Sun-Times*) by acclaimed young playwright Stephen Karam "infuses the traditional kitchen-sink family drama with qualities of horror in his portentous and penetrating work of psychological unease" (*Variety*), creating an indelible family portrait.

## **The Humans Details**

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Author : Stephen Karam

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# From Reader Review *The Humans* for online ebook

## Harry McDonald says

Brilliant, genius, terrifying, wonderful, excellent etc.

I wrote actual thoughts on it here: <https://harrymcdonald.wordpress.com/...>

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## Otto says

A well written tale of nothing I couldn't experience from actually having conversations with my friends and family.

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## Jeff says

Absolutely a phenomenal play--one of the best I have read in quite some time. Karam has an almost preternatural ability to capture the real rhythms of family dynamics and family conflicts without making it too theatrical--and then drops an immensely theatrical and deeply haunting ending. This opens on Broadway soon and would be worth checking out.

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## Bailey says

*The Humans* tells the story of the Blake family spending thanksgiving with their youngest daughter at her apartment in Chinatown. Deidre and Erik Blake, the parents, are very catholic people with big hearts and small wallets. Amy Blake, the oldest daughter, has had her life fall apart around her. Her Girlfriend just broke up with her, she just got removed from the partner track at the law firm she works at, and her Ulcerative Colitis is coming back. Brigid, the Youngest daughter is dating an older man, and yet she still doesn't quite feel like a grownup. Momo, the grandmother is in the depths of dementia, and is prone to random Hurst's of gibberish. Richard is Brigid's boyfriend, and he is struggling to fit in with his girlfriend's family. Each individual has struggles, and yet in this play they don't define the character. This show is so well written, that you almost forget these aren't real people in real life. The characters banter back and forth like a real family, and goof around the same way. The show effortlessly mixes real world problems and family squabbles.

I really liked this show. Usually I don't like reading scripts for shows that I'm not in, but this was an exception. The way the script gives you an idea of the set through dialogue is amazing. There isn't really a typical plot, it just shows an afternoon of a family together that could happen anywhere in the real world. It really allows the audience to connect with the characters and their situation.

I would recommend this book to any director or theatre nerd out there, to show them what a truly natural show should look like.

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## **Heather Bottoms says**

The Humans takes place in real time and is meant to be performed with no breaks in one act. A family gathers together for Thanksgiving and we get to witness their familial affections, offenses, and revelations unfold over the course of one evening. It is funny and searing and real. Excellent play.

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## **Haley says**

A play that I did not fully comprehend until it was the final pages and the final beats just sprang themselves on me and swallowed me and I was absolutely breathless. This man can WRITE

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## **Laura Floyd says**

Hmm. It's not exactly uplifting? Lots and lots of real life in here. The title is apt. Not sure how to feel about it.

See you at auditions next week?

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## **Frank Hering says**

“Don’tcha think it should cost less to be alive?” That line, which concludes the father's speech to his daughter's new live-in boyfriend, captures much of what this play is about. Karam gets at the financial stress that burdens the middle-class in this period of stagnation. Jobs and pensions lost, dead-end jobs stoically endured for decades, caring for an aging parent while still holding down full-time jobs, etc. Karam shows the interconnections between these economic woes and the social and psychological burdens the family members also face: allegiance to one's childhood faith, struggles with weight, chronic health issues, the fear of NYC after 9-11, recovering from depression, use of anti-depressants, class differences, the importance of marriage, etc. Karam wonderfully avoids hitting one over the head with any of these issues; instead, they are subtly (and often humorously) invoked during conversations. What Karam doesn't make a conflict is also significant; we see here a family that has no problem with their daughter's/sister's homosexuality. Instead, each is incredibly supportive (mom even brings up scissoring during dinner). Nor is the young woman's depression due to her sexuality; instead, Karam suggests it has to do with the intersection of her ulcerative colitis and her worries about finding a new partner for life.

Karam tackles these issues through comedy-drama instead of tragedy. This family supports one another, but they can also make some great jokes about each other. I haven't seen this on-stage yet, but Karam gives a good amount of text that is supposed to be conveyed non-verbally, and comedic actors and directors could do a lot with this. This comedy in the face of financial, social, and psychological burdens, along with the family members' support and lack of hate for one another, characterize this play. Other key characteristics include the set design (kind of a cross-section of the two floors and four rooms of this apartment, where action often occurs simultaneously) and the use of what Freud calls the uncanny (which Karam quotes as an epigram to

the book). The use of the uncanny (think "hauntings") comes to a head at the very end of the play and is surprisingly nicely in tension with the incredible realism of the set (including the noises old apartments make) and the dialogue (characters often leave lines unfinished and interrupt each other).

I would highly recommend reading this play, and I can't wait to see it performed.

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### **Nicholas Montemarano says**

I love reading plays, perhaps as much as seeing them, even though they are meant, above all else, to be seen. Reading a great one is like reading a great long story or short novel; you can do so in one or two sittings. And the prose in some plays, like *STREETCAR* and *GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS*, is as dazzling as the best prose you'll read in stories and novels. All of this is prelude to my saying that I'm almost certain that I would enjoy seeing *THE HUMANS* more than I enjoyed reading it. This has less to do with the writing, which is excellent, and more with the two "sets" in one -- upstairs and downstairs -- and the almost constant overlapping dialogue. All of this, which fits perfectly with this particular play, would work better on -- and, of course, is meant for -- the stage. One observation about *THE HUMANS*: it strikes me as rare that this play, rather than ratcheting up almost every moment of tension into a full-out clash with yelling and anger and tears (this happens effectively and appropriately in plays I love such as *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* and *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*), suppresses bubbling tension with humor or other distractions (often auditory), and you get the sense of deeply flawed and sad people who actually love each other, rather than people whose hatred for each other is now coming to a boil. It has become a cliché to say that a work of art speaks to the way we live now, but in this case it's true: this is a deeply American play (a white, middle-class American play, to be specific) that accurately reflects the current moment.

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### **Rick Homuth says**

Sometimes it upsets me that the board decides who gets the Pulitzer Prize for Drama by spinning a big wheel, in a dark room, while drunk. But then sometimes it excites me because that means I've got a shot.

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### **Reese says**

Brilliant. Disturbing, but also quite funny -- unless you don't find dark humor humorous.

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### **Diane Gurman says**

Maybe my expectations were too high, since it won the Tony, but I didn't find it that original. Or maybe it comes off much better when performed as opposed to read. The story is about 3 generations going through financial, work, and health difficulties. It didn't seem that different from something you might see on TV. Maybe I've been spoiled by recently reading Tennessee Williams one-acts. Those were gems--depth of character conveyed in so little space. *The Humans* seemed somewhat superficial in comparison.

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## **Jason says**

This is the kind of theater piece that deserves a discussion after seeing. I did not understand the ending and perhaps needed to witness the theatrics, as plays are meant to be seen more than read.

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## **Kamila Kunda says**

I read Stephen Karam's brilliant "The Humans" in one sitting. It's a play which was commissioned by the Roundabout Theatre Company in New York, was a finalist for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and won the 2016 Tony Award for Best Play (I watched some fragments of the play on youtube and thought acting was actually pretty awful so maybe the competition wasn't so fierce). It's a chamber American family drama taking place on a Thanksgiving evening. And it is American to the core. The way family members (elderly parents, suffering from dementia grandmother, two adult daughters and a boyfriend of one of them) talk to each other, the topics they discuss or try not to discuss - money, healthcare cost, property, religion, depression, marriage, relationships - everything just oozes Americanness. There is this provincial naivety (the mother volunteers to help Bhutanese refugees in her small town and is shocked by their poverty), some religious preaching from the father, constant worries about money (it's the country where people are burdened with student loans, cannot rely on pensions and where the cost of medical treatment can literally make you go bankrupt if you lose your job and medical insurance attached to it) and the obsession with marriage, climbing up the career ladder and fixation on the cost of land and property. The nature of the climax just at the end is also so American it almost sounds like a cliché. At one point someone makes a statement that we humans are so afraid of monsters but monsters would probably find us, humans, a very alien species. Many reviewers pointed out how blisteringly funny this play is. I didn't find it funny at all. It is great but so depressingly sad it makes one want to slit their wrists. So much human mediocrity sometimes almost makes me suicidal.

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## **Jay Eckard says**

In the essays attached to the TCG edition of The America Play, Suzan-Lori Parks writes that, if you write a play, you should know the reason /why/ you're writing a play. In Stephen Karam's play The Humans, that's a question that's never addressed. I suspect Karam wants this to be a film, and that the entire theatrical existence of The Humans is nothing more than a dry-run for a cinema version.

The whole experience of reading the play was tiring. The characters come across as thinly-developed and ultimately trivial: as a reader/viewer, I just don't care what happens to these people. Their weathering of life is ultimately inconsequential; for me, none of them has enough dignity or matter to them to stand in for John Q. American or Jane Everywoman.

The dialogue is praised on the back cover for being gloriously realistic, but a good third of the play is simply characters talking over each other. Karam is so incredibly controlling of this dialogue that he insists in marking exactly who says what over whom, and this really reveals how much he trusts -- or rather, does not trust at all -- the actors and directors to do their job and figure that out on their own. At other places, he feels compelled to tell potential directors how, where and when they should be grouped onstage, which is as much

an act of unfaith. but also takes moments that could be subtle and blows them into searing melodrama. Even the "unsettling horror moments" -- just a few seconds at the tail end of the show -- are hoary with age and subtle as a trainwreck.

What's really frightening about the play is the awards it has won. Apparently, the bar of success for new American plays is terrifyingly low, if this play can walk away with Tony and Pulitzers.

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