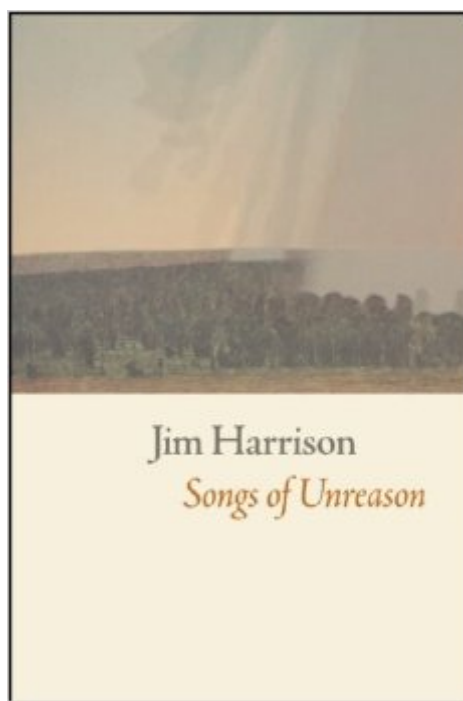


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Songs Of Unreason



Synopsis

#1 on the Poetry Foundation Bestseller List; a Michigan Notable Book; a Los Angeles Times Book Prize finalist. "A beautifully mysterious inquiry." "Songs of Unreason, Harrison's latest collection of poetry, is a wonderful defense of the possibilities of living." "The Industrial Worker Book Review" As in all good poetry, Harrison's lines linger to be ruminated upon a third or fourth time, with each new reading revealing more substance and raising more questions. "Library Journal" Jim Harrison's compelling and provocative Songs of Unreason explores what it means to inhabit the world in atavistic, primitive, and totemistic ways. "This can be disturbing to the learned," Harrison admits. Using interconnected suites, brief lyrics, and rollicking narratives, Harrison's passions and concerns "creeks, thickets, time's effervescence, familiar love" emerge by turns painful and celebratory, localized and exiled. From "Suite to Unreason": Where's my medicine bag? It's either hidden or doesn't exist. Inside are memories of earth: corn pollen, a bear claw, an umbilical cord. If they exist they help me ride the dark heavens of this life. Such fragile wings. Jim Harrison is the author of thirty books, including Legends of the Fall and River Swimmer, and has served as the food columnist for Esquire. Harrison divides his time between Montana and southern Arizona.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Over his last three or four poetry books, Jim Harrison hit a genius stride, and I've been waiting for this new book since his gnarled face was on the cover of Narrative magazine when they published

"Suite of Unreason." Reading that long poem was an amazing experience--like watching a wildfire from a hovering helicopter. And now, in book form, it is an even wilder wildfire. The suite is printed one-stanza-per-page on the left-hand pages, running throughout the entire book. The stanzas stand on their own as individual short poems, then flow together beautifully when read as an interlocking piece. On the right-hand pages are the 60-plus poems in the rest of the book (one of which appeared in the journal published by the Yale Divinity School). What happens, page after astonishing page, is exactly what poetry books are supposed to do: spark, swirl, and roar with energy and insights and music. The book is at least three books packaged as one: the long suite on its own; stanzas of "Suite of Unreason" in interplay with the "normal" poems; and the book read as the table of contents suggests. I've experienced the book in multiple ways, and plan to keep reading it until it falls apart in my hands. Then I'll buy a new one, because Songs of Unreason is going with me until the end.

I've been rereading Jim Harrison's Songs of Unreason over the last week or so. At first, I thought I might try to review it this time around, but a second go through has only reminded me why I didn't attempt to "review" it the first time. To put it simply: the whole thing astounds me too much. This is a book that comes at you with the all the force of a powerful writer with something to say, something that has grown out of many years of living and thinking and feeling. I tried to read it like a poet and learn something about what the man is doing. But the magnetism of the poems kept pulling me into their centers where I'd forget I was supposed to be doing anything except inhaling. The fact that they were poems at all disappeared. I felt like I was listening with a tin can at the forehead of a grizzled old wise man and I had to be very quiet so I wouldn't miss anything. God, I love these poems. It was hard to choose exactly what lines to put here to show you why, but I settled on the final lines from "Nightfears," since that poem goes into several of Harrison's big themes--human fears, the hard truth of human failings, our relationship to nature, just to name a few. The poem begins with a list of what might frighten us in the dark and then toward the middle imagines that "The night/has decided to stick around for a week." And here is how that strange disruption of the usual day/night cycle turns out: . . . When the red sun decides to rise again we humans of earth swim through the acrid milk of our brains toward a rising light, a new song on our lips, but all creatures retreat from us, their murderers. In real dawn's early light my poached egg is only an egg. I give you these lines without commentary. They don't need any, or if they do, not from me. All I can do is reach up and close my jaw and remind myself to breathe. Which I had to do about fifty times while reading this collection.

"Songs of Unreason" is a tremendously beautiful and profound book, filled with insights into both the heart of man and the heart of the world. An amazing talisman created by American's greatest writer. Like a fine wine, Jim Harrison gets better and better with age. Thank you Jim...!

Like Letters to Yesenin, and Jim Harrison's more recent poetry, Songs of Unreason alternately soothes, stirs and tells the truth. With the cover art by Russell Chatham adding to the overall presentation, this beautiful book reaffirms the art of the book, the durability and vividness of poetry and ultimately provides real hope.

Harrison stays true to form, putting both the dark and light of human nature in prose. As always, his poems revisit you throughout the day - I have found myself stopping what I am doing because a line has come back to haunt me. If you are a Jim Harrison fan, you won't be disappointed.

Since the Romantic period, poets have loved to speak of themselves as agents of the intuitive, the irrational, of divine madness--probably in hopes of disassociating themselves from the sad mansion of academic poetry that killed so many trees in the twentieth century. This kind of language gets all over Jim Harrison--he describes his thinking as "atavistic, primitive, totemistic"--but that doesn't mean it's wrong. Harrison has obviously found his own way through the poetics of modernism, but has retained an elemental, Antaeus quality--an awareness of ground and plant and insect and air--that gives weight and weather to his imaginative and symbolic flights, a mordant gravity. Harrison's 2011 collection alternates independent pieces with a "Suite of Unreason" which one might call surreal but for its stubborn human appeal. It's a great book. Glenn Shea, from Glenn's Book Notes, at www.bookbarnniantic.com

Thoughts are difficult to process into "Minds-Eye" configurations. Mr Harrison does it beautifully. When he sets his pencil to paper a vision of "Life" is created then nurtured; at the mature stage there is no doubt about the experience and the memory of having lived it. I have read everything he has written, loved all of his characters and the situations he puts them in. He is a true master!

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