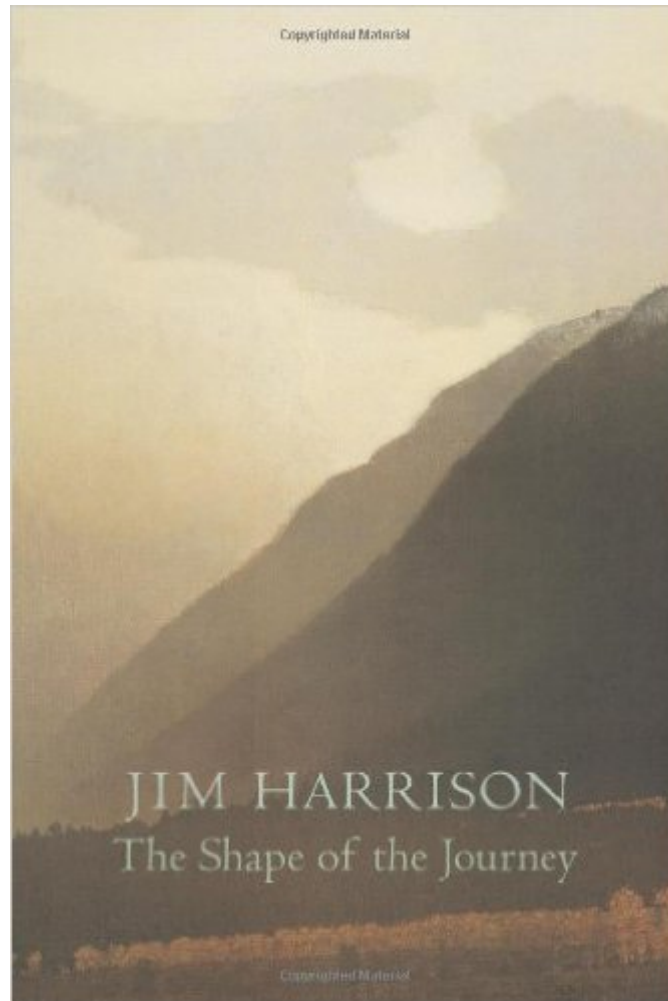


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# The Shape Of The Journey: New & Collected Poems



## Synopsis

"This is poetry worth loving, hating, and fighting over." •The New York Times Book Review Here is the definitive collection of poetry from one of America's best-loved writers •now available in paperback. With the publication of this book, eight volumes of poetry were brought back into print, including the early nature-based lyrics of Plain Song, the explosive Outlyer & Ghazals, and the startling "correspondence" with a dead Russian poet in Letters to Yesenin. Also included is an introduction by Harrison, several previously uncollected poems, and "Geo-Bestiary," a 34-part paeon to earthly passions. The Shape of the Journey confirms Jim Harrison's place among the most brilliant and essential poets writing today. "Behind the words one always feels the presence of a passionate, exuberant man who is at the same time possessed of a quick, subtle intelligence and a deeply questioning attitude toward life. Harrison writes so winningly that one is simply content to be in the presence of a writer this vital, this large-spirited." •The New York Times Book Review "(An) untrammelled renegade genius | here's a poet talking to you instead of around himself, while doing absolutely brilliant and outrageous things with language." •Publishers Weekly "Readers can wander the woods of this collection for a lifetime and still be amazed at what they find." •Booklist (starred review.) When the cloth edition of this book was first published, it immediately became one of Copper Canyon Press's all-time bestsellers. It was featured on Garrison Keillor's Writer's Almanac, became a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and was selected as one of the "Top-Ten Books of 1998" by Booklist. Jim Harrison is the author of dozens of books, including Legends of the Fall and In Search of Small Gods. He has also written numerous screenplays and served as the food columnist for Esquire magazine. He lives in Montana and Arizona.

Dead Deer  
Amid pale green milkweed, wild clover, a rotted deer curled, shaglike, after a winter so cold the trees split open. I think she couldn't keep up with the others (they had no place to go) and her food, frozen grass and twigs,

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I first read Jim Harrison's poems almost thirty years ago in the Crawford County library in Grayling when I was at the beginning of a long teaching trail. Harrison saved my life that day and he has almost every day since. I return, almost daily, to his work which serves as a "shock tippet" against the "stuff" of the world. I don't think anyone comes close to his ability to chronicle the spirit of the natural world...the language he speaks comes from the most secret of places.

"I have decided to make up my mind about nothing, to assume the water mask, to finish my life disguised as a creek,.."-from Cabin Poem. I met Jim Harrison once in New York. He and Russell Chatham signed the books I had collected by Harrison. My first thought was how could this gruff large loud man with one glass eye write such moving literature and poetry? How could he write with such realism and romance and with such deep spirituality and beauty? How does he know these things? I realised in the same moment that others must have felt the same about Hemingway. We have genius among us.

Author Jim Harrison says, "this book is the portion of my life that means the most to me". His poems vividly reflect the truth of his words. He writes about himself, his journey through life in outrageous and brilliant language weaving images of nature and earthly passions. Pause, and wander through the forests of this collection. It is lovely, lyrical and passionately beautiful.

As much as I love Jim Harrison's novels, especially his most recent, *The Road Home*, his poetry is dearer to my heart. It's magnificent. There are only a handful of American poets who are dealing with real life as it is lived in our time, in a way that is accessible but still intellectually and emotionally challenging. Harrison is one of those poets. He's a powerhouse! *Copper Canyon's* beautiful collection is way overdue.

I had feared for a long time now that Jim Harrison's poetry would continue to go out of print - though I am not wholly familiar with this new collection, I have read a good deal of the pieces. The thirty

(point five) poems of Letters to Yesenin changed my life. It is a set of 30 poems in which a man measures life with some of the most agile and powerful poetry, I believe, ever written. I still read it every year. I cannot recommend this book too highly. I only wish that Copper Canyon Press would collect the work of Jack Gilbert (The Great Fires was his last) as well, and then two of our greatest living poets would still be available to future generations who care for poetry.

As with Ron Padgett's Collected Poems, I finished the late Jim Harrison's The Shape of the Journey: New and Collected Poems feeling that we need a judicious selection that would be perhaps half the length of this volume. For this reader, the work that remains compelling in its entirety comes in the ghazals Harrison originally published in book form in 1971 as Outlyer & Ghazals. Each ghazal has a minimum of five couplets, not necessarily related. Here are the closing two couplets of ghazal IX: "The sun straight above was white and aluminum and the trout on the river bottom watched his feet slip clumsily on the rocks. I want an obscene epitaph, one that will disgust the Memorial Day crowds so that they'll indignantly topple my gravestone. Catch the exquisite presence and longing in the closing couplet of ghazal XI: "When it rains I want to go north into the taiga, and before I freeze in arid cold watch the reindeer watch the northern lights. As in Harrison's fiction, there's a lot of highly enjoyable play in the ghazals. For example, here's the second couplet of ghazal XIV: "I've decided here in Chico, Montana, that Nixon isn't president and that that nasty item, Agnew, is retired to a hamster farm. Or here's the fourth couplet of ghazal XVIII: "We don't need dime-store surrealists buying objects to write about or all this up-against-the-wall nonsense in Art News. And then suddenly there's something as exquisite as the third couplet in ghazal XIX: "A pure plump dove sits on the wire as if two wings emerged from a russet pear, head tucked into the sleeping fruit. That one closes with this perfect capturing of what-there-is: "The cattle walked in the shallow water and birds flew behind them to feed on the disturbed insects. Lastly, from the section of new poems that closes the collection, here's Geo-Bestiary #29: "How can I be alone when these brain cells chat to me their million messages a minute. But sitting there in the ordinary trance that is any mammal's birthright, say on a desert boulder or northern stump, a riverbank, we can imitate a barrel cactus, a hemlock tree, the water that flows through time as surely as ourselves. The mind loses its distant machine-gun patter, becomes a frog's occasional croak. A trout's last jump in the dark, a horned owl's occasional hoot, or in the desert alone at night the voiceless stars light my primate fingers that lift up to curl around their bright cosmic bodies." Since learning of

Harrison's death last week, I've had the thought that if anyone should write R.I.P. on his marker, somebody else should put beside it ROAR.

Jim Harrison has stretched out his arms and hugged a bear, I know he has. His poem "My Friend the Bear" has been running through my head since I first read it 3 years ago. This is one of many poems describing the flora and fauna of Michigan and driving home the delicate nature of our interaction with it. Picture Jim cheek to cheek with a bear... if you have read him and met him you will know it is possible.

As either intro to Harrison's poetry or a collection of his verse masterpieces, "Shape Of The Journey" delivers. If you are looking to get a single volume of his poems, this is the one to buy! There is enough diversity of subject, imaginative range, and strength of writing in this book that I can always find a piece that speaks to me in Harrison's powerful language & imagery.

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