



A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales

Joy Harjo

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In her fifth book, Joy Harjo, one of our foremost Native American voices, melds memories, dream visions, myths, and stories from America's brutal history into a poetic whole.

A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales Details

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Sydney Jane says

This is a book I read for my poetry analysis class. I really liked it honestly. I don't think it is a book that I will think about a lot, but reading it and analyzing it in class was a very positive experience. Joy Harjo works at my college, The University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and I actually got the chance to attend a lecture that she spoke at whilst reading the book. I really like getting to see her outside of the covers of a book. This is a combination of poems and prose/short stories telling about her Native American heritage, her connection with the world, and the people in her life who shaped her.

Greta says

Joy Harjo shows tremendous skill in her essays and poetry, and great effort. Telling much of her personal story as well as that of those closest to her, her words resonate most pleasantly and sometimes startle. A Map To The Next World is a masterpiece.

Louise Chambers says

Harjo always asks me to do more than read; she asks me to participate. A Native American woman who has lived in many worlds writes hauntingly of personal history and of History, the History which may not be as pleasant as we might like it to be. What saves the poems is the language, fine and dancing, and always connected to the heart.

Amy says

I enjoyed the poetry more than the prose, but Harjo's work doesn't disappoint.

Paul says

In A Map to the Next World Joy Harjo's poems and tales bear beauty and grace amidst tragic witness to Native American history and identity.

"Instinct" (16)

"In the dark I travel by instinct,
through the rubble of nightmares,
groaning of monsters toward the crack of light
along your body's horizon.

I roll over to my side, take you in my nostrils
test you for shape, intention and food
as nations fall apart.
Small winds tattoo my cheek.
Soon they will bring mist,
a small rain to clean the world
send rainbows to dress us,
for the ceremony
to rid us of the enemy mind."

"when we were born we remembered everything" (17-18)

"We are living in a system in which human worth is determined by money, material wealth, color of skin, religion, and other capricious factors that do not tell the true value of a soul. This is an insane system. Those who profit from this system have also determined, by rationale and plundering, that the earth also has no soul, neither do the creatures, plants or other life forms matter. I call this system the overculture. There is no culture rooted here from the heart, or the need to sing. It is a system of buying and selling. Power is based on ownership of land, the work force, on the devaluation of life. The power centers are the multinational corporations who exploit many to profit a few. True power does not amass through the pain and suffering of others.

Phillip Deere, a spiritual leader from the Mvskoke, predicted the many twists and turns this path through the colonized world could take. He and others like him warned that this season will eventually pass, but not without great pain and suffering for everyone.

It's difficult to walk through the illusion without being awed and distracted by it. Power is seductive and sparkles. False gold also glitters. We think we know the difference, but it's easy to be seduced when all appearances tell you there is everything to be gained by winning.

At birth we know everything, can see into the shimmer of complexity. When a newborn looks at you it is with utter comprehension. We know where we are coming from, where we have been. And then we forget it all. That's why infants sleep so much after birth. It is an adjustment. The details of a new awareness have to be fine-tuned. But memory is elastic and nothing is ever forgotten. It's submerged below the bloodstream, in the river of memory informing us of direction, like a gyroscope in the heart of a ship. We are all headed to the same destination, eventually.

We who greet these arriving souls rejoice that the old ones have returned and will accompany us through the next cycle of the story.

I struggled and choked as I slid down the road through my mother. She was terrified, had not maternal instruction on birth. I wanted out as quickly as possible yet had serious doubts as to whether I wanted to take it on, a life that early on would run the jagged borders of despair and joy, so I went forwards and backwards, fought and nearly killed both of us as I came into this world, two months before my due date. I still battle impatience and the bad habit of struggle when there need be no fight.

I try to remember the beautiful sense of the pattern that was revealed before that first breath when the struggle in this colonized world threatens to destroy the gifts that my people carry into the world. But we cannot be destroyed. Destiny can be shifted by evil, but only for a little while."

"A Map to the Next World" (19-21)

"In the last days of the fourth world I wished to make a map for those who would climb through the hole in the sky.

My only tools were the desires of humans as they emerged from the killing fields, from the bedrooms and the kitchens.

For the soul is a wanderer with many hands and feet.

The map must be of sand and can't be read by ordinary light. It must carry fire to the next tribal town, for renewal of spirit.

In the legend are instructions on the language of the land, how it was we forgot to acknowledge the gift, as if we were not in it or of it.

Take note of the proliferation of supermarkets and malls, the altars of money. They best describe the detour from grace.

Keep track of the errors of our forgetfulness; the fog steals our children while we sleep.

Flowers of rage spring up in the depression. Monsters are born there of nuclear anger.

Trees of ashes wave goodbye and the map appears to disappear.

We no longer know the names of the birds here, how to speak to them by their personal names.

Once we knew everything in this lush promise.

What I am telling you is real and is printed in a warning on the map. Our forgetfulness stalks us, walks the earth behind us, leaving a trail of paper diapers, needles and wasted blood.

An imperfect map will have to do, little one.

The place of entry is the sea of your mother's blood, your father's small death as he longs to know himself in another.

There is no exit.

The map can be interpreted through the wall of the intestine--a spiral on the road of knowledge.

You will travel through the membrane of death, smell cooking from the encampment where our relatives make a feast of fresh deer meat and corn soup, in the Milky Way.

They have never left us; we abandoned them for science.

And when you take your next breath as we enter the fifth world there will be no X, no guidebook with words you can carry.

You will have to navigate by your mother's voice, renew the song she is singing.

Fresh courage glimmers from planets.

And lights the map printed with the blood of history, a map you will have to know by your intention, by the language of suns.

When you emerge note the tracks of the monster slayers where they entered the cities of artificial light and killed what was killing us.

You will see red cliffs. They are the heart, contain the ladder.

A white deer will come to greet you when the last human climbs from the destruction.

Remember the hole of our shame marking the act of abandoning our tribal grounds.

We were never perfect.

Yet, the journey we make together is perfect on this earth who was once a star and made the same mistakes as humans.

We might make them again, she said.

Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end.

You must make your own map."

"The Gift" (125)

"When I walked your land of buffalo and tall grasses
under a sky that shimmered thick with spirits who watched over you
I knew I had walked into an encampment of distant relatives.
Though it was winter, and your country is famous
for breaking horses and souls with little tolerance for ice and darkness,
I was taken in and seated next to the fire. The children were curious
about the songs I was carrying, the horn packed in the bag
that had traveled with me, many lands to get here.
You offered me soup with corn, and meat from a recent hunt.
We traded stories, laughter about the usual foul-ups of our terrible
human selves. We spoke quietly, even fearfully of the cruelty
galloping our lands, each new act of violence more inspired than the last.
We knew we knew nothing and this nothing was the huge expanse of mystery
kept alive in the brightness of remembering everything, from the exquisite detail
of the finest running horses, shining eyes of the newly born, or
spirits who allowed themselves to be kept in a song or story as food
through the longest seasons of brutality.
When it was time to leave we left behind any words of sadness
or hopelessness. I followed the tracks of other travelers
toward thinking stars on the horizon of loneliness.

I wanted you to know this song overcame me.
I carry you with me everywhere."

"Morning Song" (128)

"The red dawn now is rearranging the earth
Thought by thought
Beauty by beauty
Each sunrise a link in the ladder
The ladder the backbone
Of shimmering deity
Child stirring in the web of your mother
Do not be afraid
Old man turning to walk through the door
Do not be afraid"

"In the Beautiful Perfume and Stink of the World" (133-135)

Tracy E. says

I've read two other Harjo books and really enjoyed them, so I was a bit disappointed with this one. Everything in this book follows a similar set of themes. There are some very nice moments, but no where near on par with some of the sharp truths and insights in some of her other works. The kind of insights I had to read over and over again because of how wonderful they are. I found myself re-reading very few things in this one. The writing itself is fine, it just isn't as emotionally moving as others.

Kivrin Engle says

Adrienne Rich wrote of this book, "I turn and return to Harjo's poetry for her breathtaking, complex witness and for her world-remaking language: precise, unsentimental, miraculous." And, I whole-heartedly agree.

Joy Harjo is a visionary, a fierce story-telling warrior woman. Her writing is holy, insightful, contemplative, honest and graceful. I will turn and return to Ms. Harjo's poetic prose also.

Kelly says

No matter how many times I read this volume, it's always amazing.
Each time I've read it, I've picked up new insights through this work.

I love the Native elements and references; her language is indicative of a world view that I love being a part of each time I read.

Jessica says

Full of sincerity and reverence for the world, this book is a good reminder to be grateful. It is also necessary for someone to be constantly reiterating the politics and history recounted in the book. That said, there is virutally no artisitic or literary merit to the writing in this book. My guess is that the author's response to such a comment would be that I am mired in the language of "the enemy." I'm willing to consider that possibility.

Naomi says

Joy Harjo is among the two dozen poets I turn to when I yearn for poetry that illuminates the spirit, for such poetry much be fiercely and fully grounded in the beauty and the pain of this life. This volume, where stories interleave the poems, delivers, inviting reflection and memorization of lines to hold onto in future storms.

cat says

Joy Harjo and Mary Oliver are two of my favorite poets and I have turned to each of them this month for solace. Joy Harjo's words are magic to me - the truth that pours from her feels like it heals me every time. I first read this book many years ago (and long before my Goodreads account) and return to it often, but it had been a while since I sat and read the whole book again. Sometimes one dip into poetry (Mary Oliver's , when she died earlier this month) suddenly makes me want a whole ocean of poetry to sink into. The poem below is the title poem and my favorite from this collection.

A Map to the Next World (for Desiray Kierra Chee)

In the last days of the fourth world I wished to make a map for those who would climb through the hole in the sky.

My only tools were the desires of humans as they emerged from the killing fields, from the bedrooms and the kitchens.

For the soul is a wanderer with many hands and feet.

The map must be of sand and can't be read by ordinary light. It must carry fire to the next tribal town, for renewal of spirit.

In the legend are instructions on the language of the land, how it was we forgot to acknowledge the gift, as if we were not in it or of it.

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We might make them again, she said.

Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end.

You must make your own map.

- Joy Harjo, 2000

Barbara says

My blog review here: <http://poetaensanfrancisco.blog-city....>

Kevin Spicer says

Poetry and prose that meditates on the ways that history lingers and spirals, not so much repeating itself but coming back to itself under new light and conditions. And the hope that new light may provide clarity and illumination to our enduring conflicts and dreams.

Abby says

This is one of those books full of almost-great lines, which distract me as I rewrite them in my head. That doesn't necessarily make a bad book or a lazy writer, but it sure doesn't increase my enjoyment.

Among the almost-greats is some truly beautiful poetry, "spirits who allowed themselves to be kept in a song or story as food/ through the longest seasons of brutality." Much of it doesn't need the explanation of the "tales" that follow, which are a little self-indulgent. Perhaps I'll try another of her books. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt.

maria says

between 4 - 4.5 stars. a vulnerable and haunting collection.

*"There was a massacre in El Salvador. The soldiers had gathered all the men and boys in the church at the center of town and killed them. Then the women and the girls were taken to the fields and raped and killed. One particularly beautiful one was assaulted by many soldiers before they left her to die. She began her song as she was pushed down into the dirt and did not stop singing, no matter what they did to her. She sang of the dusky mountains who watched them that day from the clouds. She sang of the love of a boy and a girl. She sang of flowers and the aroma of the moon as it linked the night with dawn. **She did not stop singing. She is still singing. Can you hear her?"***
