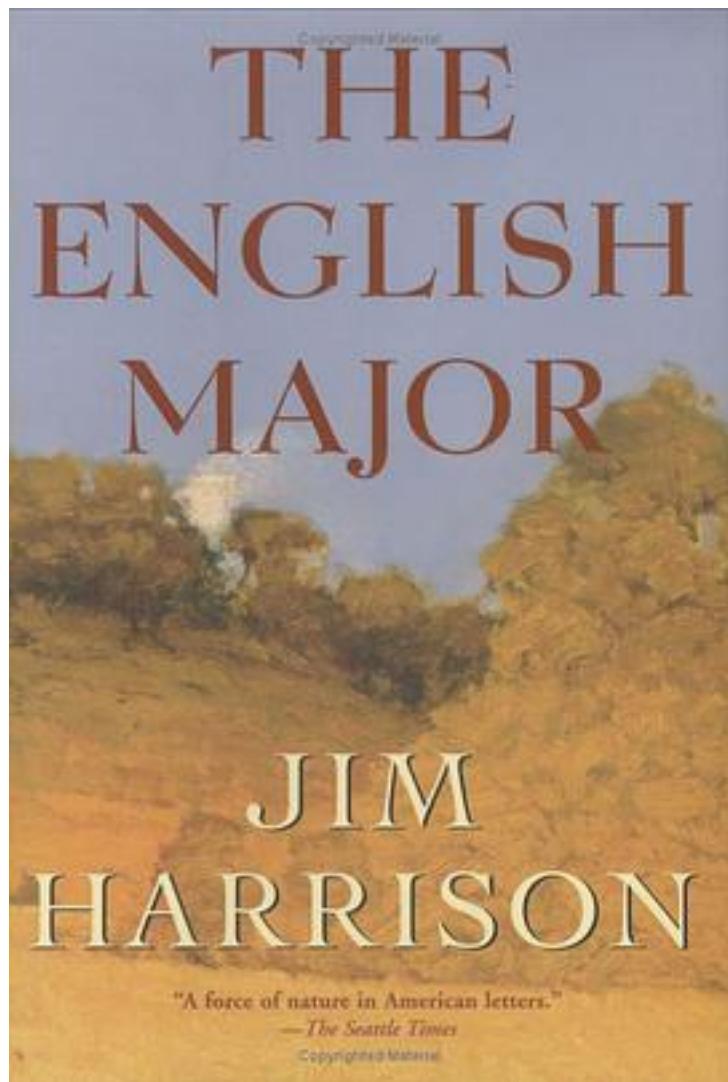


The English Major



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著者:Jim Harrison

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At the end of a class reunion that he didn't want to attend, poor Cliff notices that his wife has returned to the party with grass stains on her clothes. She soon deserts him to run off with an old high school flame and, in the bargain, pockets most of the profits from the sale of the Michigan farm where Cliff has raised cattle and tended orchards for the past 25 years. Oh, and his dog just died. With a dim future ahead, the 60-year-old protagonist of Jim Harrison's latest novel hits the open road like a superannuated Jack Kerouac in search of adventure and self-understanding. He's also propelled by his absurd "sacred project" of assigning new names to birds and to the 50 states. In his long-ago past, Cliff was an English major at Michigan State and spent 10 years as a high school teacher. Somewhere in Minnesota, he hooks up with a libidinous former student named Marybelle -- a married woman 17 years his junior -- and the two embark on a graphically described cross-country sex romp. "There's something about Nebraska that has me sexually wired," says the insatiable Marybelle. (As a native Nebraskan, I have to confess I've never had quite that response toward my home state.) By the time they get to Montana, Cliff has grown tired of Marybelle's drama and, more to the point, her constant cellphone chatter. "Forty-five years of sex fantasies come true," he says before dropping her off, "and I'm thinking that I wish I could go fishing." He continues his tour of Western states, developing a crush on a new waitress in every town. Between his minutely detailed meals -- lots of meat, lots of booze -- Cliff muses on reuniting with his wife and wonders if he's wasted his time and his mind by working on the farm. This much is certain: Harrison has saddled Cliff -- English major or not -- with some atrocious prose. He writes with all the grace of a car that has blown its tires and is running on the rims. Some passages are laughably awkward on many levels: "At dinner my ears had reddened watching a pretty Mexican waitress float across the room with her trays of food. There was Mexican music on the jukebox and I felt like I was in a foreign land, Mexico to be exact." In one of the more ludicrous scenes, Cliff meets a 21-year-old waitress who agrees to take off her clothes for \$300, if he'll keep a distance of at least 10 feet. "You might be a farmer," she says, "but I bet big money you were an English major in college." Yeah, sure. Somehow, I doubt if Harrison's aimless road trip will have many students rushing over to the English department.

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