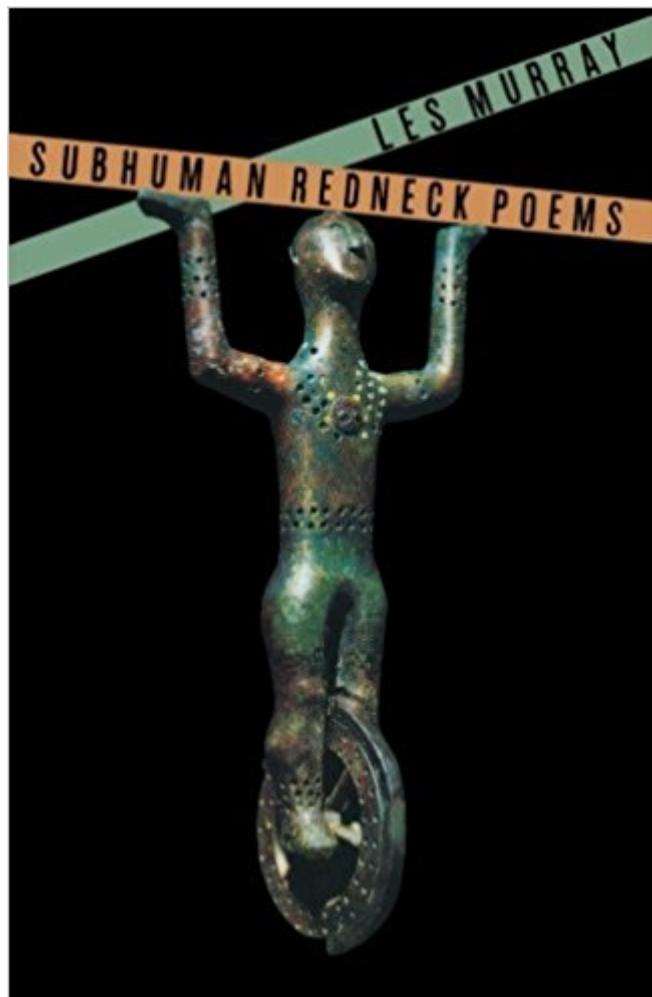


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Subhuman Redneck Poems



Synopsis

Winner of the 1996 T. S. Eliot Prize for the Best Book of Poetry in English Joseph Brodsky once said of Les Murray: "He is, quite simply, the one by whom the language lives." In these darkly funny and deeply observant Subhuman Redneck Poems, farmers, fathers, poverty-stricken pioneers, and people blackened by the grist of sugar mills are exposed to the blazing midday sun of Murray's linguistic powers. Richly inventive, tenderly detailed, and fiercely honest, these poems both surprise and expose the human in all of us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Les Murray is quite simply one of the finest poets of his generation. He combines the earthiness of a Seamus Heaney with the passion of a Dylan Thomas. Add a healthy dose of humour and a deep and compassionate understanding of the fallibility of humankind and you're getting closer. "Subhuman Redneck Poems" is a book full of gems - I challenge anyone to read "Burning Want" or "The Last Hellos" and remain unmoved. Les Murray has the gift of being able to quickly and clearly convey a person, a setting, or a situation. The poems are very accessible, which must surely be a rarity given the prevalence of Post-Modernist babble. He is a poet of, and for Australia, but his appeal is not limited to Antipodeans. From a discussion of cultural cringe ("A Brief History") to a heartbreakingly honest look at the life of his autistic son ("It Allows a Portrait in Line-Scan at Fifteen"), he carries his audience effortlessly. This is a superb book of poetry. But don't take my word for it - see for yourself why it won the 1997 TS Eliot Prize.

Les Murray packs it in, there isn't a syllable of rest in this collection. No other poet can say so much

in so few words. Here's the final verse of "Memories of the Height-to-Weight Ratio" But when the Institute started afresh to circle my job, we decamped to Europe and spent our last sixpence on a pig's head. Any job is a comedown, where I was bred. There's every colour of emotion in this collection. One thing about Murray: he knows.

Americans have not had a poet of talent in years. If one is in any doubt, consider the nonsense recited at the President's swearing in. Les Murray is now recognized as the best poet in the English language although I suspect his poetry is virtually unknown in American schools. We are so intent on "world literature" that we neglect the only English language poet in the world acknowledged to be Nobel-worthy. Murray has in common with many recent Nobel-prize winners the distinctive characteristic of courage, although his oppressors have not so much been government censors as teen aged girls and academic critics. Murray has suffered at the hands of the mob. His wounds come from being left out, mocked, humiliated, and ostracized. Like America's Charles Bukowski, Murray's terrain is the cruelty of freedom, the oppression of one's peers, the anguish and torment of nonconformity. Murray recognizes today that he and his kind have been finished off by trendy academics who are looking for the next best thing, the exotic, whose disfigurements can be exploited. They are looking for the Elephant Man, not a representative of that species known as just another human being, whose frailties the cognoscenti find so excruciatingly boring. These poems of Murray's represent him well. They are fiercely written, angry expressions of a man who finds the torment of normalcy all the more painful because it is ignored.

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