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Cowboy Poets and Cowboy Poetry

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In bunkhouses or rodeo arenas, on the trail or around the campfire, cowboys have been creating and reciting poetry since the 1870s. In this comprehensive overview, folklorists, scholars, and cowboy poets join forces to explore the 125-year history and development of cowboy poetry and to celebrate those who sustain it. Centered around six areas of focus, from historical background to biographical profiles to creative process, "Cowboy Poets and Cowboy Poetry" approaches the tradition of occupational folk poetry from a variety of perspectives. Contributors trace its history as an extension of the Homeric tradition of storytelling in verse and discuss such topics as the way a text evolves in retelling, how it becomes linked to a tune, and how poetic content fuses with form to generate narrative tension and humor. Personal and telling portraits of cowboy poets and reciters - including D. J. O'Malley, Henry Herbert Knibbs, and a number of contemporary cowboy poets - illuminate the creative process through which individual poets work within a long community tradition, while comparative studies examine poetry by women, Mexican-American vaqueros, loggers, Argentine gauchos, and Australian bush poets. "Cowboy Poets and Cowboy Poetry" offers the first in-depth examination of a distinctive and community-based tradition rich with larger-than-life heroes, vivid occupational language, humor, and unblinking encounters with birth, death, nature, and animals. Throughout, the collection shows that cowboy poetry interweaves two thematic strands: a fierce defense of an endangered way of life and a dynamic celebration of organic wholeness, camaraderie, and individualism.

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