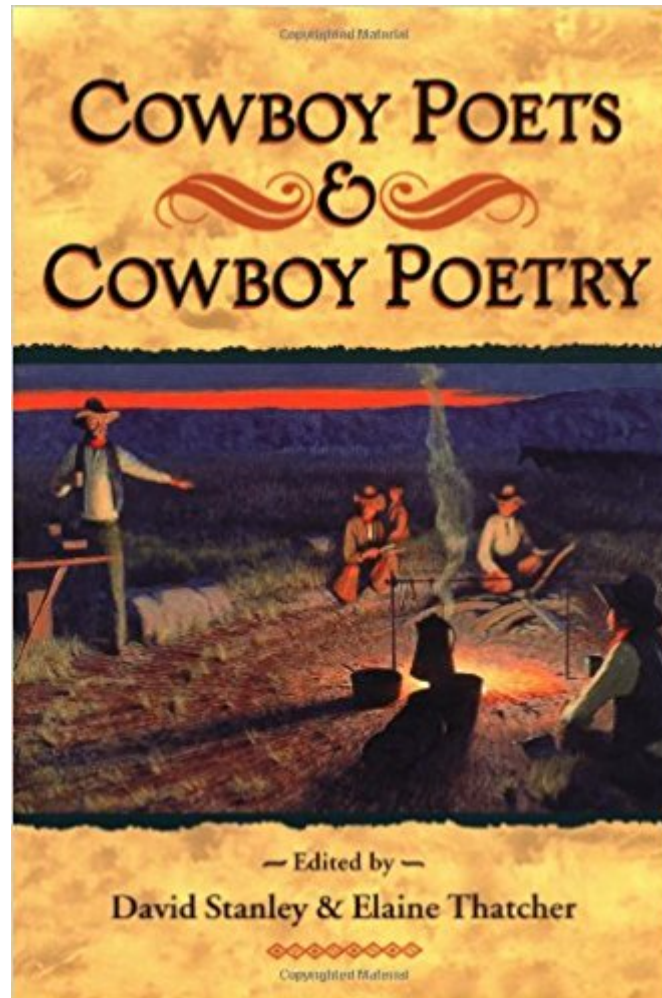




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# Cowboy Poets And Cowboy Poetry



## Synopsis

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 b

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## Customer Reviews

"The first book-length volume to examine this American tradition of occupational verse in all its historical and contemporary complexity and depth. Even better, it does so in a mixed chorus of voices that includes the poets themselves, in addition to folklorists, historians, and creative writers... The overall effect is of a surprisingly unified voice describing the history of the tradition, the values it

expresses, and the strong sense of community and commonality among the poets and ranch people they speak for." -- Andrea Graham, *Western Folklore* "It's tough to create a serious study that's also rollicking reading, but this impressively complete look at cowboy poetry is a winner in both categories... Essays include excellent examples of cowboy storytelling in verse and rhyme." -- Si Dunn, *Dallas Morning News* "The 27 critical essays ... are exegetical, evangelical and sometimes (intentionally) risible in appreciating and explicating a rich, complex idiom." -- *Publisher's Weekly* "While treating this popular form, the contributors do not lose sight of the exacting craftsmanship required of a poet whose works communicated well enough to be recited and repeated... Cowboy poetry involves oneness with nature, using the sky as an umbrella, and the speaking of authentic experience." -- *Choice* "Once derided as unworthy of serious consideration by connoisseurs of fine verse, cowboy poetry finds a growing acceptance among sophisticated readers without a lessening of the love for it held in the hearts of its original audience." -- Martin Naparstek, *The Salt Lake Tribune* "A new and valuable, intimate understanding of the American West as it is today, and a sense of continuity with the past that formed our American character. It shows that cowboy poetry is fundamentally about human relationship to the land." -- Nicholas Peterson Vrooman, *North Dakota History* "These samples are enough to make you want to find the book with the complete works of the poet." -- Kent Peterson, *Utah Historical Quarterly* **ADVANCE PRAISE** "This book gives cowboy poetry the serious study it deserves, exploring its cultural significance and examining its aesthetic worth. Like cowboy poetry itself, the essays are varied, vital, and accessible. Reading them, one can begin to understand why cowboys love their work so much that they have produced more poems and songs than any other occupational folk group in the country." -- James Hoy, author of *Mounted Herders of North America: The Vaquero, the Cowboy, and the Buckaroo* "Taking off from the remarkable Elko Cowboy Gatherings that began in 1985, this collection of twenty-seven essays goes on to cover just about every imaginable aspect of cowboy poetry: its history, its themes, its techniques, and its individual poets. As a result, the book reaches out well beyond its announced subject and has important things to say about both 'folk' poetry and poetry in general. Highly recommended!" -- Edward D. Ives, director of the *Maine Folklife Center* "There is no better overview than this roundup of informative essays on this evolving tradition. Readers will come away not only newly informed but eager to attend the growing number of public gatherings featuring cowboy and ranching verse at its best: face-to-face in performed oral recitation." -- Robert D. Bethke, author of *Adirondack Voices: Woodsmen and Woods Lore*

"Cowboy Poets and Poetry" is as important a compilation of work as the field recordings of early

rural musicians. Thank you David Stanley and Elaine Thatcher. Pam Brown

The selections are enjoyable to read and get the flavor of the old west. They help my research around my Grandfather.

This varied group of essays is a collection of viewpoints on cowboy poetry by both folklorists and practitioners, many of whom grew up on ranches and know about cowboying from firsthand experience. According to the writers, there have been three periods in which cowboy poetry flourished: the years of the cattle drives in the 1870s-80s, the 1920s-1930s when a great many of these poems were collected and published, and more recently since 1985 with the first Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada. Currently, as some of the writers point out, it is a field of folk literature that is burgeoning in both output and popularity. This book is an attempt to bring the varied aspects of this resurgence into focus. Among the more academic of the writers here, I liked Warren Miller's discussion of how poems like these evolve in an oral tradition and James McNutt's discussion of authenticity vs. the impact of commercialism and tourism. The practitioners are more entertaining and no less informative. Among them I liked Buck Ramsey's discussion of Bull Durham libraries and the prevalence of book-reading among early cowboys, Glenn Ohrlin's story of his life as collector and singer of cowboy songs, and Bill Lowman's description of writing poetry as he runs a ranch. Also interesting are John I. White's account of Montana cowboy poet J. O'Malley. Well known western writer and poet Henry Herbert Knibbs is remembered by Ronna Lee and Tom Sharpe. Elaine Thatcher and Teresa Jordan write revealing chapters on the emergence of women writers in the tradition. John Dofflemeyer looks at the directions in which cowboy poetry is currently evolving, and western writer William Kittredge closes the book with a heartfelt appreciation of the way of life that cowboy poetry and song represent. Also recommended: Robert McDowell's "Cowboy Poetry Matters."

Stanley and Thatcher's book contains 27 essays written by a variety of contributors including college and university teachers, folklorists, and cowboy poets. Perspectives are historical, literary, and international in scope. Topics include women and cowboy poetry, form and tension in cowboy poetry, Australian bush poetry, oral traditions of the South Texas Mexican American cowboys, traditional and contemporary poetry, poems and songs on the rodeo trail, and the relationship of cowboy song to poetry.

All I can say is that I loved the collection of poetry and information. This is true Americana and should be required in our schools. Good Job!

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