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**Review of *Hot Coffee and Cold Truth: Living and Writing the West.*  
Edited by W. C. Jameson**

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*Hot Coffee and Cold Truth: Living and Writing the West.* Edited by W. C. Jameson. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. xii +206 pp. Photographs. \$17.95 paper.

As the title suggests, this collection of essays on “Living and Writing the West” is conversational and engaging, sometimes brash and

humorous. Editor W. C. Jameson arranges the different voices of twelve popular authors on Western subjects, and the result is indeed like listening in on the thoughts and reminiscences of seasoned writers over a hot cup of coffee on a chilly morning. For aspiring writers and general readers alike, this anthology presents an eclectic array of opinions and stories about the distinctive challenges presented to those who write about "the West."

Jameson introduces his vision of the book by recounting his initial response to a particular novel, Elmer Keaton's *The Time It Never Rained* (1973), which inspired his curiosity about the author's relationship to his subject: "I wanted to ask him how the western landscape sparked his imagination, inspired his ideals, and influenced his style." Ultimately, this became a quest to assemble these personal statements from professional Western writers "about their lives and what inspired them to write." As might be expected, the personal reflections here approach the subject from a wide variety of perspectives, expressing the diversity of training and interests in writers who work in genres as different as fiction, poetry, and history, and who write about regions representing the striking contrasts in Western environments, from the Southwest desert to the Rocky Mountains to the Great Plains.

The styles here range from passionately poetic to wryly professional. Win Blevins and Laurie Wagner discuss their writings within the context of colorful evocations of Western settings.

Margaret Coel and Paulette Jiles write of integrating family frontier heritage into stories evoking the "ghosts" and "buried treasures" still present in Western landscapes. Historians David Dary and Robert Utley describe how their interests and research methods evolved throughout their careers. Fiction writers Don Coldsmith, Robert Conley, Max Evans, Bill Gulick, Elmer Kelton, and Richard Wheeler reminisce about pitfalls and payoffs in their lives as Western writers. The stories weave together reflections on diverse subjects: adapting to specific natural and cultural environments; learning how to make and break rules; and paying appropriate tribute to classical and popular influences, to stupid reviewers and great editors.

"When young writers ask me the secret, I have to tell them there isn't one," observes Elmer Kelton. "At least I never found it." Except, he goes on to say, aspiring writers should always be "reading, and reading, and reading . . . and writing, and writing, and writing." Cold truths, perhaps, but some might find caffeinated inspiration here as well. Such words of caution are part of a series of conversations filled with down-to-earth advice, humorous rants, and sometimes inspiring stories of dreams vigorously pursued and at least partially fulfilled. For those who love Western writing, these are voices worth listening to as you sip your morning coffee.

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