

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1996

Review of *Talking Up a Storm: Voices of the New West* By Gregory L. Morris

Gerald Shapiro

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Shapiro, Gerald, "Review of *Talking Up a Storm: Voices of the New West* By Gregory L. Morris" (1996). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1099.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1099>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

BOOK REVIEWS

Talking Up a Storm: Voices of the New West. By Gregory L. Morris. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Photographs, bibliographies, and index. xix + 246 pp. \$27.50 cloth, \$12.00 paper.

The fifteen interviews collected in Gregory L. Morris's *Talking Up a Storm* showcase the new generation of writers telling stories of the American West—writers who've inherited the mantle of authors such as Zane Grey, A. B. Guthrie, and Wallace Stegner, whose stories and novels created much of what we thought we knew about the West. As Morris's interviews demonstrate, the West is in good literary hands.

Literary interviews can be a swampy mess, as anyone familiar with the genre will attest. ("I'm appallingly stupid when talking about my work," Ron Hansen ruefully admits in the introduction to his interview—a confession that could apply to most major writers.) But guided by Morris's insightful, well-informed questions, the authors profiled in *Talking Up a Storm* (Hansen included) sound gifted and wise. Morris is a skillful, intuitive listener, able to elicit heartfelt responses from his subjects while avoiding the sort of *Paris Review* chit-chat ("Do you write with a pen or a pencil? What time of the day do you have your first drink? Do you write in the nude?") that weakens so many literary interviews.

Morris seems especially gifted in his ability to ask writers questions that go to the very heart of their work. Interviewing John Keeble, for instance, he zeroes in on Keeble's involvement (both as a writer and an activist) in the

aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill—clearly the subject Keeble would most like to discuss. Morris catches William Kittredge in a nostalgic mood, and so Kittredge's interview is taken over by the ghosts of family, friends, and teachers now gone. And from Molly Gloss, he draws this revelation about the origins of her work: "I began to be a writer by first being a mother. . . . Motherhood puts you in touch, every day, with the big issues of life—heavy-duty things like Love, and Loss, and Conflict, and Tolerance, and Dignity. . . ."

Morris's subjects include a handful of very well-known writers: Amy Tan, Thomas McGuane, Ron Hansen, and Richard Ford, winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize. Mixed in with these are interviews with lesser known western writers such as James Crumley, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Mary Clearman Blew, and Ralph Beer. For readers interested in Western literature, an especially useful feature of *Talking Up a Storm* is the bibliography following each interview. As with any collection like this one, a reader is likely to be left with some questions: Why is this author included but that one left out? Why is the West seemingly defined to include one state but not its neighbor? But these questions shouldn't detract from the basic pleasures of *Talking Up a Storm*, a book that should provide both pleasure and enlightenment to anyone interested in the best contemporary literature of the American West.

GERALD SHAPIRO
Department of English
University of Nebraska-Lincoln