

THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER

# CLOSE RANGE

• *Wyoming Stories* •



# ANNIE PROULX

Pulitzer Prize–Winning Author  
of *The Shipping News*



## Praise for *Close Range*

"Geography, splendid and terrible, is a tutelary deity to the characters in *Close Range*. Their lives are futile uphill struggles conducted as a downhill, out-of-control tearaway. Proulx writes of them in a prose that is violent and impacted and mastered just at the point where, having gone all the way to the edge, it is about to go over."

—Richard Eder, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Ms. Proulx writes with all the brutal beauty of one of her Wyoming snowstorms."

—Michael Knight, *The Wall Street Journal*

"It's the prose, as much as the inventiveness of the stories here, that shines and shines. Every single sentence surprises and delights and just bowls you over."

—Carolyn See, *The Washington Post Book World*

"Her characters—stoical, hardheaded, yet willing to be ravaged by the closest available passion whenever the chance presents itself—crackle and cavort on the page. Served up a full array of life's wayward ecstasies and gut-twisting losses, they resign themselves, in true Proulx fashion, to the damage that loss and ecstasy do. . . . Amen to that, and amen to this book."

—Michael Upchurch, *The Seattle Times Book Review*

"Annie Proulx isn't easy. Little she writes about smacks of the familiar. Where so many successful authors strive to create worlds that are instantly, even comfortably, recognizable to readers, Proulx goes where few others would. It isn't easy, but *Close Range* is definitely worth it."

—Jill Vejnaska, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"*Close Range* is not one long dirge simply played in eleven different keys. Each story presents a subtle change of mood and each character inhabits a particular world, a world that Proulx constructs with graceful, devastating sentences."

—Anna Mundow, *New York Daily News*

"Blends harsh realism with macabre humor and a touch of the supernatural. Proulx is a masterful storyteller, engrossed by the beauty of Wyoming ranch country."

—Judith Wynn, *Boston Herald*

"These Wyoming stories require all five senses. And when you finally rest, your knuckles perhaps bloodied, you see in these stories a life that is fragile and subtle, much like cactuses and desert flowers."

—*Los Angeles Times*

"Despite the stumbling lives and untimely deaths that afflict her characters, Proulx is a pure joy to read."

—Betsy Willeford, *The Miami Herald*

"The stories here speak with enormous power. They bear the authority of a writer so accomplished and so attuned to the hard-luck characters that she wrenches from their experiences with shivery, majestic beauty."

—Dan Cryer, *Newsday*

"Proulx's language does not admit 'yes, but' or 'really?' When it works, which is most of the time, it sweeps aside all ideas, her own and the reader's, and allows no response except banging the hands together."

—John Skow, *Time*

"The work of a writer who casts a giant shadow over most of the competition. Proulx's prose is magisterial in force."

—*Vogue*

"Proulx's folksy stoicism isn't a pose. Her stories are solid oak. . . . Rustic baroque. She's a writer who does her thinking by hand, crafting sentences whose specific gravity mysteriously exceeds their size."

—Walter Kirn, *New York*

"If you've got the guts for it, cowboy up and read this book, because it is a masterwork, terrifying and gorgeous."

—Elizabeth Gilbert, *Mirabella*

"A dazzling collection of eleven stories . . . the pieces meld seamlessly into each other to create a nuanced portrait of a bleak and windswept world."

—Vanessa V. Friedman, *Entertainment Weekly*

"Proulx has written to barbed perfection about the wasted, wanton, often violent characters whose ties to the land form the preternatural heart of these spine-tingling stories."

—Lisa Shea, *Elle*

"Gritty, authoritative stories of loving, losing, and bearing the consequences. Nobody else writes like this, and Proulx has never written better."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)



ALSO BY ANNIE PROULX

*Heart Songs and Other Stories*

*Postcards*

*The Shipping News*

*Accordion Crimes*

ANNIE PROULX

*Close Range*

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WYOMING STORIES

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"The Bunchgrass Edge of the World" originally appeared in

*The New Yorker*; "The Half-Skinned Steer" appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*;

"People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" appeared in *GQ*.

These stories are for my children

Muffy

Jon

Gillis

Morgan





## *Acknowledgments*

**T**he encouragement and support of many people saw me through the writing of these stories and I am grateful to them. Special thanks to my editor, Nan Graham, for advice and counsel, and for her interest in reviving for this collection the brilliant Scribner tradition of illustrated fiction. Thanks to my agent, Liz Darhansoff, and the staff of Darhansoff and Verrill for every kind of help. I'm grateful to my old friend Tom Watkin for putting up with long discussions of minute facets of characters' lives. My thanks to Elizabeth Guheen, Sharon Dynak, and Keith Troll of Ucross Foundation for a hundred kindnesses, and to John and Barbara Campbell of the Foundation's Big Red Ranch for their generous hospitality, information and gripping plane rides with John over the landscape. It was both a pleasure and an education working with *The New Yorker* fiction editor Bill Buford in adapting several of these stories for publication in that magazine. Thanks to Paul Etchepare for talk about sixties sheep camps, and to musician and songwriter Skip Gorman who persuaded me to go to the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada, where I met Texas songwriter and singer Tom Russell. I thank Tom Russell for his kind permission to use as story title part of the title of his powerful song "The Sky Above, the Mud Below." At Elko I also met the painter William Matthews whose extraordinary work accompanied the original edition of this col-

lection, and to whom I am intensely grateful. Thanks to Buzzy Malli, proprietor of the Arvada Bar, who asked for a story set in that town and got it—"The Blood Bay"—a Wyoming twist on the folktale "The Calf That Ate the Traveler," known in many stock-raising cultures. Another story, "The Half-Skinned Steer," which was first published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, is based on an old Icelandic folktale, "Porgeir's Bull." I am also an aficionado of local histories and for years have collected memoirs and accounts of regional lives and events in many parts of North America. I found I could not forget a few disturbing paragraphs in Helena Thomas Rubottom's 1987 fine regional Wyoming history, *Red Walls and Homesteads* (edited and published by Margaret Brock Hansen) and that real-life anecdote was the takeoff point for the story "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water."

The lines of poetry quoted in "The Governors of Wyoming" are by the seventeenth-century poet Edward Taylor from the 1960 Yale University Press *The Poems of Edward Taylor* edited by Donald E. Stanford.

"The Half-Skinned Steer" set this collection in motion when the Nature Conservancy asked me to contribute something to a proposed collection of short fiction (*Off the Beaten Path*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998). The stories were to be inspired by a visit to one or more Nature Conservancy preserves. I agreed, if I could visit a Wyoming site. That was the 10,000-acre Ten Sleep Preserve on the south slope of the Big Horns where I spent several days. My grateful thanks to Phil Shephard and Anne Humphrey for their time and help. I found working again in the short story form so interesting and challenging (short stories are very difficult for me) that the idea of a collection of short fiction set in Wyoming seized me entirely. I am fortunate in having a publisher who allowed me this side trip.

The epigraph "Reality's never been of much use out here" comes from an anonymous rancher quoted in Jack Hitt's

### *Acknowledgments*

“Where the Deer and the Zillionaires Play,” *Outside*, October 1997. The elements of unreality, the fantastic and improbable, color all of these stories as they color real life. In Wyoming not the least fantastic situation is the determination to make a living ranching in this tough and unforgiving place.

Most of all, deepest thanks to my children for putting up with my strangled, work-driven ways.



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“Reality’s never been of much use out here.”

—Retired Wyoming rancher



