



Poetry and Prophecy: The Anthropology of Inspiration

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The "magic" of words is something many people refer to without qualification or, often, attention. In this pathbreaking collection, John Harold Leavitt has assembled five essays that explore the places where magic and words most clearly intersect: in prophetic or inspired acts of speech and writing.

Based on rich ethnographic work in Western and non-Western cultures, the essays represent distinct approaches to the topic, from one person's account of her interactions with a possessing spirit to another's world-spanning statement on prophetic poetics. Each contributor challenges easy assumptions that poetic texts are crafted works, products of skill rather than inspiration, while prophetic speech and writing are best understood as spontaneous performance rather than formal art.

As a whole the collection aims to reorient the anthropological study of possession and oracular experiences toward an awareness of the word, and to draw the attention of literary critics to "inspired" poetry. It will also appeal to readers in performance studies and comparative religion.

Contributors are Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, James Fernandez, Paul Friedrich, John Leavitt, Dennis Tedlock, Margaret Trawick.

John Harold Leavitt is Professor of Anthropology, University of Montreal.

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