Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame.

Reviewed by Gregory Hansen

"It is the cowboy who is considered to express the essence of the West, and who has come to symbolize for the world not only this country's westward expansion, but ultimately even America herself" (p. 49).

Rodeo contains its share of grandiose claims, each one worded straightforwardly and unapologetically. Few writers present their generalizations so unabashedly while also constructing their support with Lawrence's convincing subtlety. Her boldness is admirable. Her analysis makes the book an intriguing venture into the world of the cowboy.

Lawrence develops a dualism of "the wild and the tame" and explores the cowboy's relation to both poles as expressed through the performance of a game, the rodeo. Thus the cattle industry's past, present, and future are brought into the arena, along with the rodeo's events.

Rodeo could have presented the relationship of the cowboy to the wild and tame more clearly. According to Lawrence, the cowboy plays a complex role as a tamer who often identifies with what he is subduing. The many permutations involved in this theme are examined in the book, and Lawrence often cites cross-cultural evidence to complement her study. She uses anthropologists' findings to present human-animal relationships as well as more widely studied anthropological issues. Particular attention is given to how a cowboy's conception of his role as a tamer is related to his expression of masculinity.

The rodeo world is dominantly and overwhelmingly a masculine one. A cowboy's relation to the wild and the tame is at its most complex when he deals with feminity. Lawrence argues that he regards women as the civilizers of the West, the tamers par excellence. Because the cowboy is primarily a tamer, it should follow that he would hold women in high esteem. Although "decent ladies" may receive the exaggerated politeness given to the archetypal schoolmarm in John Wayne movies, women generally are considered part of the wild. They are seen as being somewhat threatening and as yet another entity to be controlled. Lawrence
argues that this discrepancy is a product of the cowboy's unique relation to the wild and the tame, but she does not fully explore this ambivalence nor does she present it well.

Thorough discussion is given to the cowboy's expression of his masculinity. The weakest and most tenuous arguments deal with male sexuality, particularly when she searches for and identifies phallic symbols in the material culture of the rancher. The cowboy boot as a powerful representation of the penis is rather far removed from the psyche of the cowboy, and when conceptualized, the metaphor becomes more than a little absurd. It is much to Lawrence's credit that she presents this discussion tentatively and in the words of the foot authority William Rossi.

It is more difficult to exonerate her limited conclusions about a male's conception of his sexuality. Her theoretical base is the orthodox Freudian perspective of the phallus as a tool of power and only mentions eroticism as being the other aspect involved. The recent critiques of Freud are not even mentioned, and the failure to consider, discuss, or dismiss these alternatives limits her analysis. This evident lack of awareness of some of the criticism leveled at Freud shows a lack of careful scholarship in investigating sex roles. This same sloppiness also manifests itself in her failure to use sexually inclusive language, thus undermining much of her authority to discuss sex roles.

But the heart of the book is an investigation of the wild and the tame, and Lawrence fares much better here. Her analysis is novel, interesting, and reasonable when she explores the various relationships between the cowboy's culture and nature's wildness. The cowboy and his horse have long deserved scholarly attention and Rodeo presents some thoughtful alternatives to the Roy Rogers and Trigger conception of this strong, romantic image. I found her discussion of the relation between the ranch/rodeo complex and the wild to be the most engrossing chapter, for she shows how the rancher's native categories present a pattern for action. By labeling certain animals as "predators" or as "varmints," the rancher is free to wage war against them. Rarely does the typology
work in the animals' favor, but some species are protected by the proverbial power of the word. By the appellation "song bird" the mourning dove wins a reprieve from the hunters who set their sights on the "game birds."

If "speciesism" can be added to the list of other "isms," then ranchers' attitudes are terribly prejudiced. Most animals are regarded as servants or as enemies. Even animals that are regarded favorably are victimized by a patronizing attitude that makes them look ridiculous—deer, for example, are beloved by ranchers because of what game wardens term the "Bambi complex." After reading Rodeo I did not feel compelled to become an activist for animal rights. This is not the book's purpose. It did, however, point out the cattle industry's, and perhaps much of America's, view of the wild and the tame.


Reviewed by Liana Stanton.

Romanian folklore provides unique testimony to a lengthy cultural and linguistic continuity under very inauspicious circumstances. In southeastern Europe, the Tatar invasions continued until late in the 18th century, long after the rest of Europe had forgotten the upheavals caused by the migration of Goths, Vandals and other peoples. Romanian society, an island of Latinness in the midst of a foreign environment, developed a folklore with a preponderantly conservative nature, with archaic features and vestiges of prehistoric Indo-European folklore in it. Romanian folk music comes nearest to what ancient South European music was in Homeric times. The folk costumes used in Romanian villages on holidays is identical with the Dacian dress that can be seen on Trajan's column. Similarly, archaic details preserved in Romanian folk tales reflect motifs and ways of life that go far back in history and that can be found in the folklore of now geographically remote nations.

Professor Carianu, a translator of considerable experience and former chair of the English Department at the University of Bucharest, has selected these tales from two collections (published in 1953 and 1967). Unfortunately, there is no information on where the tales were