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All Hat, No Cattle

Tracey Owens Patton and Sally M. Schedlock. *Gender, Whiteness, and Power in Rodeo: Breaking Away from the Ties of Sexism and Racism*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. Xxxii + 218 pp. \$70.00 hb.

This book may seem an odd one to review in this journal, as it does not make any claim to fitting within animal studies scholarship; in fact, it hardly concerns itself with animals at all. Yet this monumental omission underscores the incredible importance of animal studies to contemporary scholarship in the humanities: in a book about an activity — and, to some, a profession — that essentializes several kinds of human/animal relationships across American history and culture, how can an examination of gender, race, and power completely ignore the animals involved in these dynamics? This disjuncture is ultimately what undergirds an uneven treatment allocated to gender and race in this book, and creates an impassible barrier to a full analysis of power in the context of rodeo. Even in fairness to the authors, who explicitly did not set out to write a book about animals or human/animal relationships, their willingness to elide any kind animal analysis in rodeo speaks to the very real need for animal studies work in parsing problems of intersectionality. This is a pre-animal studies book in a post-animal studies world.

Tracey Owens Patton and Sally M. Schedlock take a communications-theory approach to rodeo, manifest in analyses of roughly 600 publicity photographs taken during the twentieth century, as professional rodeo evolved from Wild West shows to its modern, corporatized format. Patton is a professor of communication at the University of Wyoming, and she became interested in the gendered discourse of rodeo through her then-undergraduate student, Sally Schedlock, who herself identifies as a lifelong rodeo competitor from an “agricultural background” (xi). They set out together to read this archive against its visual grain: the public photographic record, they argue, does not reflect the breadth, scale, and variety of womens’ and ethnic minorities’ involvement in rodeo across the twentieth century, but instead actively hides or controls their participation in the service of whitening the rodeo arena and subjugating women to supporting, sexualized roles. By narrowing their attention to publicity photos that appeared in rodeo programs, advertisements, and souvenirs, Patton and Schedlock are

able to focus on a fascinating primary trove, discerning the institutional narrative that rodeo created for itself over time contra to its actual historical trajectory.

Using what they describe as a combination of the sociologically- and visual studies-derived methods of analytic induction and visual rhetoric, Patton and Schedlock divide their photographic data into six distinct categories that define both the subject matter and its chronology. Given the visual nature of their materials, each category also reflects an aesthetic. The first six chapters proceed according to these categories, developing a narrative of change over time (from 1890 through the present) in how women were presented in rodeo publicity materials, alongside a historical analysis of how their participation in competition either reflected or challenged the visual record. They start in the 1880s with “Cowgirls in Early ‘Equality,’” then move into the 20th century “as the Neo-Victorian Ideal,” and transform over time into “Pin-Ups,” “Sex Kittens,” and most recently, “Back to ‘Equality.’” These chapters tie together a complex web of labor, economics, entertainment, and sexuality. For instance, Chapters 3 and 4 examine how rodeo’s early efforts to organize into professional associations in the 1930s explicitly wrote women out of competition, leaving some women performers to seek work in Hollywood either as un-credited stunt riders (62), the faces of marketing campaigns (64), or, increasingly, as screen supporters *à la* Dale Evans (82 ff.). Early Hollywood’s combined influence on audiences’ visual expectations and performer salaries, for instance, dovetailed with the continued tendencies of rodeo’s governing bodies to marginalize women from competition in favor of using their images for promotion. The authors trace this trajectory over the next chapters to show how the post-WWII pin-up cowgirl image converged with beauty pageant conventions to evolve into the Rodeo Queen. Since “only women who abided by the rules were photographed” (84), and only women abiding by the rules were listed in programs, the authors make a compelling case for treating the extant visual record as evidence of a concerted and deliberate effort of erasure and control.

However, despite their acumen in critiquing the workings of visual hegemony, the authors unilaterally call women in rodeo “cowgirls,” a term which, on the one hand, infantilizes women rodeo participants, and on the other, highlights the degree to which human and animal are co-constitutive in rodeo culture. The terms “cowgirl” and “cowboy” invoke a tri-species centaur of human, cow, and horse (though the last is implied). The animals are there, literally, linguistically, and liminally: they are the text and subtext, the mythological construction and the corporeal reality. The authors are partially sensitive to the racial history of the term *cowboy* (159), which originally referred to enslaved laborers in opposition to the term *cowhand* (both terms, we should

remember, distinguish labor in sharp contrast to the term “cattleman,” denoting ownership). Yet ignoring the animal components of these terms overlooks the oddness of their contemporary persistence, and the common adoption of “boy” instead of “hand” during rodeo’s long process of whitening is one indication of Patton and Schedlock’s severely compromised treatment of race.

The final chapter considers ethnic minorities separately, the authors reasoning that “[i]f we were to integrate the ethnic minority experience in rodeo into each and every chapter, we feel we would be, by default, privileging White experiences (male or female), as the ethnic minority would become lost, and just one image in a sea of whiteness and White images” (xxiv). Yet I find three troubling aspects to this chapter: first, despite their justification, following six chapters about gender with one chapter dedicated to race still creates the unevenness they wished to avoid. Second, it finally, though scantily, engages with the history of the cattle industry, which is absolutely central to the timeline of rodeo throughout this book. The authors restrict themselves to two pages tracing human involvement with cattle from the Old Testament and “Cro-Magnon era” through North Africa, Spain, Russia, the Eastern Bloc, and Central and South America, arguing broadly that “[a]ncient global cultures shared threads of themselves to weave the complicated rodeo history tapestry” (147). This historical trajectory is too broad to critique incisively rodeo’s disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities. Third, it almost completely ignores the racially problematic history of zoomorphism. Despite Schedlock’s personal involvement with ranching, she remains no less blind to animals, as if their presence is naturalized to the extent that they are invisible and unremarkable. This has enormous consequences for the authors’ treatment of race in this solitary chapter.

By not connecting the animal body, and animality, to the operations of gender and race, many incredible photographs beg for deeper analysis. One, a 1904 image of noted African American performer Bill Pickett, shows him bringing an enormous steer to the ground by digging his teeth into the steer’s lip, all while dressed in toreador costume. This arresting photograph merits only commentary on how Pickett’s technique was “one of the greatest contributions to rodeo” (160) and became known as bulldogging (which abandoned teeth, and black competitors, in short order). Aside from the shared result of wrestling a steer to the ground, what we today term “bulldogging” bears no resemblance to Pickett’s, and without this image and its historical context the term makes no sense. Left unexamined is that this terminology characterizes Pickett literally as a bulldog, e.g., an animal, and that whitening the activity also quite literally defangs it. We must ask further: how are the power problems of race and gender at the center of

this book's critique shored up by a black man's teeth sunk into animal flesh? By black skin, hidden in an ethnic costume, performing a racialized animality that, in its complexity, confronts the legacy of slavery and conquest mythologized in cowboy culture? Does not this image, as the antithesis of blonde, pristine Rodeo Queens on their groomed and shining horses a century on, pointedly illustrate the authors' argument that the visual record of rodeo over time is an exercise in white sexuality?

A series of "Sex Kitten" cowgirl photographs in Chapter 5 ends in similar frustration. Three photographs depict successful professional barrel racers (the only event in professional rodeo in which women compete) in various states of wet, outdoor undress: one opens her shirt and pours canteen water onto her breasts, head tilted back, eyes closed, mouth open; one coyly reclines naked in a shallow stream, ripples obscuring her breasts and crotch; one faces away from us, soaking in a steel water trough, her arms and blond hair draped over the tub, her clothes hanging on a nearby post. The authors tie these sexualized images to the historical marginalization of women in rodeo and to broader photographic contexts, concluding smartly "while nothing may have gotten between Brooke Shields and her Calvin Klein jeans, there is something getting between a cowgirl and her opportunity to compete in the arena" (120). Yet, going unmentioned in their analysis is the presence of a horse looking at the women in each photo, ears pricked in interest, playing a strange role in the sexual politics at hand.

Patton and Schedlock's visual archive is vast, fascinating, and rich in analytical material, as is the sport of rodeo itself, and this book is exciting in its willingness to read the gaps in the archive and to approach rodeo from an academic perspective. Yet the heart of the problem in this book is that the authors are only willing to be critical to a point. While they do critically document the silencing of rodeo's historical diversity and account for the deliberate casting of women in prescribed visual and competitive roles, by remaining blind to animals they remain unequivocally supportive of the sport and of ranching culture, and hamstrung in their critiques. By simplistically positing that if rodeo would just allow women and minorities to compete on equal footing with white men everything would be great, the authors sidestep the possibility that destabilizing constructed gender and racial dynamics would unravel their celebratory "tapestry" of rodeo, revealing the animal and cultural brutality at its core. Despite their critical analysis, Patton and Schedlock conclude with an ode to rodeo as a "dangerous, volatile, and truly beautiful sport" (207). With such an investment, perhaps seeing the animals is too much of a risk.