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COWBOY AND GAUCHO FICTION*

S. Griswold Morley

THE COWPUNCHER is not an exclusive product of the United States of America. Wherever cattle thrive on a large scale there must be men to manage them. Here, what with long grass country, short grass country, Rocky Mountain plateau, part of the deserts, and a slice of the Pacific Coast, there are some 800,000 square miles over which beef critters, as well as buffalo and antelope, have roamed.

Turn now to the south of us, to the Hispanic countries of the Western Hemisphere. Large scale cattle raising is conditioned necessarily by the geography of the land. Extensive plains must exist, and a suitable climate. Going from north to south, the following nations possess a cattle industry of importance: Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, southern Brazil, Uruguay and the Argentine. Each has its type of cowboy. In Mexico he is called a *vaquero*; in Colombia and Venezuela, a *llanero* (plainsman); and in the regions along the River Plate, a *gaucho*. The name *gaucho* first appears in the late eighteenth century, and its origin is unknown.

Not by mere chance is our cowboy known in the Southwest as a "buckaroo," corruption of the Spanish *vaquero*. His art and his technique are strictly Spanish, by way of Mexico. The horseman and the cattlemen existed in Mexico and Spanish California before they did in the United States, and from them we learned the tricks of riding and throwing the lasso. If proof is wanted, consider the Spanish origin of the terms of the trade. Lasso, lariat, quirt, rodeo, caviya, mustang, cinch, hackamore, bronco, stampede, are all of Spanish derivation. Some of our cowboy's customs are the offspring, though he did not suspect it, of old Spanish sports: for example, the "lancing game," where the rider, going at full speed, tries to thrust a lance through a pendant ring. This was a Moorish pastime, described in full detail by

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Pérez de Hita in the late sixteenth century. The Argentine gaucho, so far away from Texas, but drawing on the same tradition, had his *juego de la sortija*, or ring game.

Here is a more curious instance of identical origin. Readers of two celebrated gaucho novels, *Soledad*, by Acevedo Díaz, and *Raquela*, by Benito Lynch, have been struck by an episode which they thought lurid and exaggerated: to put out a prairie fire, men kill a mare and drag its body along the line of flame. Lynch has even been accused of borrowing the idea from his predecessor. No borrowing is here, only the description of an actual technique. It was standard practice among our cowboys, who slaughtered a steer, fastened two lariats to fore and hind legs, and, as they called it, "straddled" the fire. Whether this too came from Spain, or merely originated in both countries from the exigencies of plains life, I do not know.

In essential details, the cowpuncher technique of Texas, Venezuela, and the Plate is alike. If you read a description of a rodeo or a bronchobusting in Will James or Philip Rollins, and another in a Uruguayan novel of Reyles or a Venezuelan novel of Rómulo Gallegos, you will think it is the same scene. True, some personal accoutrements are different. The gaucho used a *facón*, a hilted knife half a yard long, for his private fights, while the cowboy flourished his six-shooter—that is nothing more than superior Yankee mechanical genius. The gaucho had another singular weapon, unknown in the North, the *bolas* or *boleadoras*: two or three stone balls sheathed in leather and united by strands of rawhide. These terrible implements were thrown to trip ostriches, horses, and cattle, and they found a place in war as well as in ranching. Since the bolas leave the hand entirely, they have a longer range and require less preparation for hurling, than the lasso; hence they are quicker. It is a reproach to the white man's powers of invention that he did not think of the bolas. The Spaniards of the South took them from the Indians of that region. Our Indians had not devised them, and so our cowboys lacked that weapon.

The cowpuncher, in whatever land he lived and plied his profession, was a proper epic figure. Always on horseback, living day and night with his beasts, he became an extension of the horse, or the horse of him. Gait and physique showed his occupation: one cowboy was known as "wedding-ring Bill," from the rear view of his legs. The literature of both North and South is full of admiration for expert and daring horse taming, feats of balance and muscle reading, skill in roping and herding cattle. But cowboy and gaucho were more than

mere horsemen. Alike they developed a special code of honor, a pride in skills, a spirit of discipline, and obedience to unwritten laws of the trail. They risked their lives again and again. They performed their work in every weather; they went for days without sleep, if necessary, like a sailor or soldier. A broken arm or leg was all in the day's work if the cattle were delivered on time. Courage was taken for granted. Both plumed themselves upon generous hospitality to every stranger, and their code was firm to ask no questions of him.

In these respects the two were alike. In others they differed. The cowboy must have been among us from the moment the Great West was explored, but not until the Indians were cleared out of the plains could cattle raising become an industry. When, in 1846, the British officer George F. Ruxton crossed the plains from Santa Fe to Fort Leavenworth, and Francis Parkman explored the start of the Oregon trail, they found immense herds of buffalo. These had to be removed. The second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth were the cowboy's best days. Also, he was, in the last analysis, a hired hand on horseback, despite Gene Rhodes's brilliant protest against the term. He was a law preserver not a lawbreaker, and worked for a wage.

The gaucho antedates our cowboy by a hundred years or more, and his background is as dissimilar as possible. He began as a smuggler, a *contrabandista*; he stole before he guarded, unlike the cowboy, who guarded before he stole. The gaucho carried on an active trade in hides, dodging the Spanish tariff. He formed the backbone of armies, and his lawless upbringing made him apt for civil war. If he did not wish to fight in the ranks, he was impressed by force. If he deserted from the army, he became a *gaucho malo*, or bandit. He had, therefore, a backdrop of violence and tragedy, whereas the cowboy of this country, though pursuing a very dangerous profession, was in the main a law-abiding citizen like any other workingman. The gaucho began as an outlaw and was tamed by time into a farmhand; the cowboy began as a cattle hand and by exception strayed into banditry.

Moreover, the gaucho, as a good Latin, was a devotee of music. Our northern cowboy sang songs, as everyone knows, and part of his trade was to soothe the cattle with his tunes at night, when he rode herd; but he did not travel with a guitar slung across his saddle; he did not, like the gaucho, esteem skill in improvising verse as second only to skill in dueling. The Spanish song contest (*payada*) took place in saloon or patio, and a description of one is likely to come into any novel.

The gaucho, then, in comparison with the cowboy, was a many-sided being. He was an expert horseman and cattleherder, and that is where the two meet. But he was also soldier, bandit, musician, pícaro and gambler, politician at the orders of his local boss, and a cattle owner or cowman (for the word *gaucho* covers all these). For my present purpose I must leave out of account all the phases of his life that do not coincide with those of our cowpunchers, and I must consider him strictly as a cattle hand.

Gaicho and cowboy are alike picturesque figures; more, they are heroic figures. And if, to form an epic legend, perspective must be had, and the mist of remoteness must curl about the characters and blur the realistic sharpness of the faces, that too is present. The palmy days of the cowboy are past. He still exists, but his domain has shrunk. The farmer, the nester and his barbed wire have taken over much of it. The Chisholm trail and the Goodnight-Loving trail are only memories. The great cattle drives from Texas to Montana belong to the past. Agnes Morley Cleaveland's *No Life for a Lady* graphically depicts the change; so do the accounts of Douglas Branch and Philip Rollins. And in the Argentine, the real gaucho has passed from the scene. When Sarmiento broke the power of the tyrant Rosas in 1852, he rang the knell for the old wild, free life, and struck down the gaucho. He is now only a heroic legend and, as such, fit material for folklorists and novel writers. Cowboy and gaucho both deserve an adequate literature. What have they had?

Our cowboy has been lucky from the start in the writers who described him as he was. From Charlie Siringo and Andy Adams down to Will James and Douglas Branch and Philip Rollins and Agnes Morley Cleaveland, there are portrayals of Western ranch life written with knowledge, color, and enthusiasm. It takes no more than the plain truth about a cowboy to hold the reader. The facts about him are better than the fiction. The farther the narrative strays from pure observation, the weaker it becomes. Even old Andy Adams (*A Texas Matchmaker*, 1904), rambling along without literary pretension, has a surer vision of life than Owen Wister.

Fortunate in his historians, the cowboy has been unlucky in his novelists. No thoroughgoing account of cowboy fiction exists. Douglas Branch's *The Cowboy in Literature* (1922) has many gaps, and the

general histories of our literature concede only passing allusions to the "western" novel—very properly, if one considers its slight artistic value.

It appears that Owen Wister was the first to write a cowboy novel with a plot. Wister was a competent writer, but *The Virginian* (1902) set a vicious pattern. Every novelist since his day has followed it. The hero, I need hardly say, is a cowboy of surpassing skill; he is stronger than anyone else, more graceful than anyone else, he throws a lasso better and with less effort than anyone else; he can shoot quicker and straighter, ride harder and faster than anyone else; the toughest bronco has no terrors for him. If he is ever injured it is because someone takes unfair advantage of him. He is always mentioned on the first page of the novel. If he has any bad traits we do not hear about them, or they are he-man sins.

There is also a villain without the least redeeming feature; he is homely, brutal, underhanded. In *The Virginian* he isn't even a good horseman or a good poker player, and you only wonder why the hero didn't finish him off in the second chapter instead of the next to the last. Then, there is the girl. In the early novels she used to be an innocent schoolmarm just arrived from the East; she had to be taught not only how to ride a horse but also the facts of life. However, the latest fashion of "westerns" (the current trade term) casts aside the innocence. I quote advice to writers of pulp westerns as given in the *Writer's Digest* of August, 1942:

Keep away from that innocent virgin stuff. Lay off that pure-as-the-driven-snow. In selecting a heroine for this Vaquero of mine [he is describing how he himself composed a western] I selected someone to match his temperament: a little black-haired, black-eyed French girl, who was a mystery in town.

She doesn't have to be a black-eyed French mystery. Sometimes she is the wealthy daughter of a cattleman; in that case she is an expert horse-woman and condescends to the cowboy. As an example of this type let me quote from Emerson Hough, *North of '36* (1923), page 2, as the heroine appears in the room where a crowd of cowboys are eating breakfast:

Obviously now, she was tall, slender, supple, rounded to a full inheritance of womanly charm unhardened by years of life in the saddle and under the sun. More, she was an actual beauty. Anywhere else she would have been a sensation. Here, she spoiled each unfinished breakfast.

In any case, cowboy meets girl, and with the very happiest of consequences.

In short, "westerns" are not cowboy novels, but two-gun novels; and the lay figures who function in them might just as well be placed in the gangster jungles of Chicago as on the plains of Texas and Montana. They are the successors of the "detective story" and "wild west romance" of the 1890's. One may even carry their lineage much farther back, and compare them to the medieval romances of chivalry. In both, the characters are puppets, and the strings that pull them are the same. The sentiments of Amadis toward Oriana differ scarcely at all from the Virginian's adoration of his Molly. When Geraint the son of Erbin slew three giants with his potent sword, he comported himself no more nobly than gallant Charlie See, who in the poolroom of a saloon, with his mighty arm hardened on the baseball field, put six gun-toting cowboys to flight with billiard balls. The ancient author and Eugene Manlove Rhodes conceived the drama in like terms; only the setting differs.

The number of westerns now flowing from North American type-writers is enormous, though less than that of the mysteries. Besides hundreds of full-length novels, a dozen pulp magazines, paying half a cent a word, are devoted exclusively to western stuff. In a list of the most popular authors the average cultured reader would recognize only a few. You have heard of Peter B. Kyne, Zane Grey, Rex Beach, and Dane Coolidge, but only addicts and librarians react to the names of B. M. Bower, C. E. Mulford, M. Brand, E. Cunningham, D. Dresser, and J. Gregory. There are scores more, and most of them never went near a cowcamp. In 1940 Hurst Julian, who described himself as a cowboy temporarily in hospital recuperating from the natural accidents of his calling, wrote an article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* complaining of the technical inaccuracy of westerns. He claimed to have read some three thousand such books and stories, and nearly all misused the terminology of the range. The only names he excepted were Will James, Eugene Manlove Rhodes, and Ernest Haycox. Mr. Julian could have added a few to his list of good angels, I think, for Dane Coolidge, Emerson Hough, and Owen Wister himself (did not Teddy Roosevelt read and criticize his manuscript?) knew range life well. Ignorance of the subject matter was not their taint, but the adolescent tradition of the western.

Eugene Manlove Rhodes deserves a special word. A cowboy himself, he was more proud of being able to ride anything with hair than

he was of composing successful novels and poems, yet no man worked harder over his style. He it was who advised a novice writer to read his own stuff aloud three times, once to himself, one to a sympathetic auditor, and a third to one hostile or indifferent. By this means, he said, all faults would come to light. The result of such severe self-criticism is one of the most solid and distinguished styles written by any North American novelist. I would call Rhodes a first-rate writer of third-rate novels, for their sentences, humor, accuracy, and color are as admirable as their characters are distorted and impossible. His heroes are flawless and his heroines flabby, in the good Wister tradition. It is an advantage that there are not many heroines. At least two of his novels have no female characters at all.

Some fairly famous names are found among the writers of westerns. O. Henry, in *Heart o' the West* (1904), turned out playfully sentimental sketches with ranch background. Harold Bell Wright took a whirl at the game, and James Boyd, author of *Drums*, recently with little luck combined the picaresque and cowboy patterns in *Bitter Creek* (1939); one can only say that he spoiled both.

No North American novelist of the first rank has yet tried his hand on the cowboy. The reason may be that he does not bulk large enough in our civilization. His sway extended over thousands of square miles, yet he was only a hireling. The owners were the ones who molded history. He was not worth the ammunition of the big guns.

So, as the real cowboy fades from view, his passing chronicled and lamented by a few informed spirits, his debased and spurious ghost sinks lower and lower, till it reaches the subliterate plane. As Fred Lewis Pattee remarked, "The cowboy theme has been chased in every direction until it has found final refuge in the vast swamp of the movies." The last decade has seen some indications that clearer understanding and truer art may yet await ranch life. Real talent has here and there turned toward the great plains and the desert. But John Evans' stunning *tour de force*, *Andrew's Harvest* (1933), is the love story of a nester, not a cowboy. Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Ox-bow Incident* (1940) is a psychological study of lynch-spirit in Nevada; there are cowboys in it, but so far as their emotions go, they could have been factory hands in Pittsburgh or white-collar workers in San José. Perhaps such writers, or others of equal gifts, will some day discover the heart of the cowboy. Gene Rhodes and Will James saw the heroic stuff in him well enough, but they could not handle it. The cowboy, like the railroad man, is a hero who has not found his Homer.

When we turn to South American prose fiction about the gaucho, we step into another world. It is an adult world, not an adolescent. It is a world in which tragedy is the natural accompaniment of life. Out of his violent origins, continual civil war and pervasive injustice, the gaucho trails with him an aura of melancholy and frustration that contrasts as abruptly as possible with our naïve northern notion that all will come out right in the end. The gaucho has many enemies, and no defense save his own *facón*. The police were against him. The local judges were party tools, and unless he stood well with the proper faction the *gaucho* could expect no justice. If a petty rebellion was current, and it usually was, he found himself without choice but to fight on one side or the other, according to who was his protector. If made prisoner, if arrested on a false charge, he was forced into the army for the dreaded frontier service. He could not escape without being branded a deserter, and if he deserted he necessarily became a bandit. The gaucho did not object to fighting, to be sure, but he preferred to do it in his own causes. The sanguinary civil wars of the Plate region were largely fought by gauchos, and captained by *gaucho caudillos*. With such an origin and such training, it is not surprising that the cowboy of Hispanic fiction lives in sorrow and ends in violence.

Of the cattle-raising countries south of our border, only two have produced fiction that actually depicts the lariat-thrower in his reality. Mexico has some bandit novels, and Venezuela, with the celebrated *Doña Bárbara*, gives the reader a glimpse of *llanero* life, but in none of these is the cowpuncher the center of action. In Uruguay and the Argentine, on the contrary (two nations that are one in geography and origin, and are separated only by a freak of chance), gaucho literature is extensive, vital, and stirring. There are epic poems, chief among them the famous *Martín Fierro*; there are dramas, songs, histories, descriptions of customs, as well as novels. Gaucho character and habits of thought have penetrated the regions of the Plate to the marrow. In 1926 Manuel Gálvez wrote:

The *gaucho* and the border chieftains have disappeared, yet they still live among us. The pampa penetrates Buenos Aires in a thousand ways. It gives its Argentinian touch to poetry and painting, to novel and drama. Through the medium of the horse and the cult of the horse it seeps steadily into all the social layers and colors the slightly yankeeized soul of the great city.

Imagine yourself trying to write such words about New York or Chicago, as Gálvez did of Buenos Aires, and you will measure the difference between the status of the cowboy there and here.

As a result, the prose fiction of the Plate is, one may say, planted solidly on the old gaucho tradition. In the United States of North America the cowboy is relegated to the rubbish corners of literature; in Uruguay and Argentina, authors of the first rank are proud to interpret him. Javier de Viana, Carlos Réyles, Ricardo Güiraldes, Benito Lynch—there are no more distinguished names. The fiction of these and other writers covers every phase of that Protean being: soldier, bandit, submerged peon, politician, musician, lover, cowboy. Only the novels that touch his life as horse tamer and cowhand are my present concern. For that reason I must exclude from consideration many novels that seem at first glance to belong there. Thus, Benito Lynch's *Romance de un gaucho* tells the love story not of a cowboy, but of a *patroncito*, the son of a cattle owner. Lynch's *Los caranchos de la Florida*, too, describes a ranch owner. Viana's *Gaucha* is a naturalistic study of abulia in an environment of degraded ranch life. *Soledad*, by the elder Acevedo Díaz, portrays barbaric passions and instincts among gauchos who could as well be Australian bushmen. Very few are the novels that examine the skills and emotions of the man on horseback who has charge of cattle. Those few are of high rank. Barring the early sensational "police dramas" of Eduardo Gutiérrez, a sort of inferior Dumas, père, even the weakest of South American gaucho novels rates as genuine art. In them fiction stands on a level with factual description, and not, as with us, below it. And there are factual accounts of gaucho life both truthful and well written; some of the best are in English by Cunninghame Graham, Black Bill Craig, and that "Argentinian who preferred to write in English," as the Argentine scholar Tiscornia calls him, W. H. Hudson.

I have on several occasions asked well-qualified Latin Americans to select a title that should represent their fiction at its best; so that, if a man from Mars (or the United States of America) were allowed to read only one novel, he might receive the most favorable impression. It is an unfair question, I know, and no one could expect unanimity in the answers. But a surprising number of experts picked *Don Segundo Sombra*, by Ricardo Güiraldes (1926). This happens to be also the supreme gaucho novel, or one of two. Such a choice could not possibly happen in this country. No cowboy romance would fall within the first hundred. And this fact shows as well as anything the contrast

between the obscure footing of the cowboy in our economy and the prominence of the gaucho along the river Plate.

Arturo Torres-Ríoseco prefaced his critique of *Don Segundo Sombra* with these reflections upon various types of novels and their admirers:

It is likely that there are as many classes of novels as there are readers. Those who are fond of Dumas père will not enjoy the psychological novel in the order of *Le rouge et le noir*; he whose favorite reading is *Les Misérables* will not have the patience to follow the complicated analyses of Proust. . . .

Bernardo De Voto expressed the same idea and carried it a little farther when he wrote, in his early-Mencken manner:

There is a discouragingly large amount of literature which breaks in a sharp curve just as the reader swings at it. It will not behave, it will not order itself according to his requirements.

He was trying to say that some books do not conform to accepted rules of the art of writing, and yet they are good. I should hardly cite these two opinions, not original surely, except for one reason: both these distinguished critics were writing about cowboy novels. De Voto was making a straight-out apology for Gene Rhodes, whom he was prefacing, and Torres was making a veiled apology for *Don Segundo Sombra*. For when a critic begins his discussion of a work by saying that there are all sorts of novels and that what fits one man's taste may not fit another's, that is a manner of intercession for his author. It is as much as to say: "This novel is a bit queer, I know; it's not quite up to standard in some ways, but still it has its points, as I hope to show you." That is what both De Voto and Torres proceed to do. The faults of *Don Segundo Sombra* are in no way comparable to those of Gene Rhodes, but they are faults.

Who is Don Segundo of the shadowy name? He is a middle-aged wandering cowboy and horse tamer. In his diversified career he has laid up no wealth save that of experience, tact, and knowledge of the pampa world. He never makes a mistake; he always meets an emergency in the right way. He is a figure of mystery. He drifts into the story by accident, and at the end drifts out again. Nothing is known of his family or antecedents. By mere chance he takes up with a lad of fourteen who loves the gaucho life. Segundo's relation to him is sometimes like that of Baloo to Mowgli—mentor and friend. The youth turns out to be a rich heir, Segundo stays with him three years to give

him the proper start; then, his task completed, he says farewell and rides away over the hills. The only conflict in this story is between the lad's passion for a free life and the shackle of his sudden wealth.

It is a beautifully written book. The style of Güiraldes is sober, economical, full of overtones and undertones. The date of action is purposely left indefinite. The hero, drawn from a friend of the author, is a literary synthesis of the finest qualities of a gaucho—of a middle-aged gaucho, to be sure. He is a cowhand as Willa Cather might have seen him, had she chosen to try. He is without fault. Critics have compared him to Don Quixote and the pícaro Lazarillo de Tormes; not rightly, to my mind, for they are human, and Don Segundo is an object of worship.

So I would not consider Güiraldes' classic narrative the great gaucho novel of all time. It is too limited and too much in the nature of an essay. In 1931, five years after it appeared, the following words were penned by Carlos Reyles, the celebrated Uruguayan novelist:

The master novel is not yet written, that shall convey to the reader a living, definitive sensation of the wild land, of the primitive cattle ranch, of the *gaucho* and his tragic adventures. So far, only certain aspects, certain anecdotes, have been brought out; but the great trinity remains intact, awaiting the iron hand that shall grasp it, compress it, and in a supreme effort squeeze out its succulent juices. How grateful we should be if we possessed a native Don Quijote, a Hamlet or a Cid! Our essence has not yet found its complete expression.

In the following year, 1932, Reyles himself made his contribution to the gaucho novel, *El gaucho Florido*. I do not know whether he believed that it fulfilled the need he had just expressed; I suspect that he did. His novel does embrace all of his three phases of gaucho life, the *campo bagual* or untamed land, the *estancia cimarrona* or ranch in its pristine state, and the tragic career of the gaucho. The subtitle of *El gaucho Florido* is precisely "The Novel of the Primitive Ranch and the Unspoiled Gaucho."

If Reyles failed in his ambitious enterprise it is not because he did not understand the problem, or because he lacked technical knowledge. His novel pictures more sides of a gaucho's life and character than *Don Segundo Sombra*, more than any other novel in Spanish. We have the usual horse race, the usual feats of horse-taming and bull-wrangling, but also a developed account of ranch life, with its wise owner (a marvelous person more skilled than his men at throwing the bolas and the lasso), its *curandera* or witch-woman, a favorite type, and a throng

of accurate minor characters. Florido himself, the expert cowhand, the handsome Don Juan, borders a little on the North America hero, and the villain Manduca is as black as Owen Wister's. The women of the book are drawn with sympathy and skill. The gaucho was neither sexless nor saintly. The innocent schoolmarm had no place in his history; if she existed she stayed with her own kind. The gaucho had a *china* or two to keep him company, and he might marry one or he might not. He was not separated from women for months at a time, like our cowherders, for the simple reason that his plains were smaller and he never remained long far from a ranch. Women occupy a normal position in the gaucho novel. The two loved by Florido are refreshingly natural. They and their friends create an atmosphere of reality more convincing than the man's world of Don Segundo. The special gift of Reyles, his power to transmit the force of passion with unfiltered directness, shines and glows in these pages.

Reyles had within his grasp a truly great novel, but it slipped from him. Deficiencies of temperament entailed the strange lapses of taste that one associates with Iberian literature more than with Hispano-American. Violent scenes of unjustified jealousy and abrupt and unmotivated ending mar the whole, and many details show the same lack of balance. The novels of Reyles have a way of starting out on sure and prancing feet, only to stagger wearily into the finish.

These two are beyond doubt the best of the straight cowpuncher novels of Latin America. Many more are excellent. Zavala Muniz turned a reminiscent and realistic eye upon the lives of his own ancestors in three *Chronicles*, which alternate between savage battles and pungent countryside. The younger Acevedo Díaz, renouncing the sanguinary manner of his father, composes conscientious evocations of gaucho plus Indian—*Ramón Hazaña*, *Cancha Larga*—with a certain ingenious and niggling psychological verity. Other less ambitious tales are equally successful. The weakest of them is superior to the best of our "westerns."

Our inferiority may be due to a number of reasons. I am unwilling to admit that North America has no novelists equal to those of Argentina and Uruguay. The good ones simply do not consider the cowboy worthy game. I think he is worthy game, and I can adduce two arguments for his being better game than the gaucho for a novelist. First, the tough climate with which he had to contend. The gaucho lived in a sort of earthly paradise, if paradise consists in benign natural

surroundings. His hardships resulted from human weakness and hazardous occupation, not from environment. To cite an Argentine author:

The pampa has a fertile soil, plenty of water, a climate where winter brings nothing lower than 40°, and summer nothing higher than 85°; where snow is unknown, and storms, winds and rains, with rare exceptions, are never violent. This environment is not of a sort to produce such a toughened character as Don Segundo Sombra.

But the North American cowboy fought against Texas northers and the snows of the Rockies. Nature was his bitter enemy. And the magnitude of his undertaking was vastly greater. The gaucho drove his herds from estancia to estancia, following the petty needs of the ranchers. It is only five hundred miles from Buenos Aires to the Andes. Nothing in his efforts was comparable to the tremendous drives from Texas north over the Chisholm trail or the Goodnight-Loving trail. To herd three thousand cattle a distance of twelve hundred miles in five months and deliver them safely was an epic feat. The foreman faced hostile Indians, rustlers, flooded rivers, stampedes, and storms. He counted the beasts at regular intervals. He kept his men contented and in health. He was a manager and a fighter, a captain as well as an expert roper. He deserved better of the writing fraternity than a few thousand two-gun pulps.

In cowboy fiction, the contrast between North America and South America is as sharp as possible. On the one side you find snappy narrative and juvenile psychology; on the other, the studied writing of masters of the novel who have learned their art in the European tradition. Perhaps the carry-over of that same tradition explains the still more marked contrast in the underlying spirit. In these United States, whether one reads a tawdry thriller or an authentic account of the cowpuncher's daily feats, one receives a sense of abounding strength, of optimism for the future. This cowboy never doubts that he is in a splendid profession. He can leave it if he likes, but he doesn't like. He may be a hired hand, but he is the master of his soul. He is not a victim, either of fate or circumstance. He embodies a healthy pioneer energy—the same force that carried the emigrants to California. He does not spend his hours in voluble self-pity, like Martín Fierro, bewailing his misfortunes (certainly great), or, like the lad in *Don Segundo Sombra*, pondering the mysterious ways of fate. Gaucho novels terminate on a note of stark tragedy, excepting only *Don Segundo Sombra*, which moves on a calm and even level throughout, and Benito

Lynch's absurd parody of melodrama, *Raquelita*. In *El gaucha Florido*, the heroine is shot on her bridal night, for no particular motive, by an unknown party, who catches her and the plot quite unprepared, and the hero takes to a life of banditry. In Viana's *Gaucha*, the villain, a very wicked "western" bad man, murders the hero and with his gang rapes the heroine and leaves her to die, naked, bound to a tree. In Lynch's *Romance of a gaucha*, the hero commits suicide on the pampa, and his body is devoured by buzzards. In the same author's *Los caranchos*, father and son kill each other. In Zavala Muniz's *Crónica de una reja*, the hero, a harmless shopkeeper with no enemies, is unexpectedly shot in a skirmish by a man he hardly knew. If the "western" runs to an infallible wedding in the last chapter, the gaucha novel goes as far in the other direction. As a matter of faithfulness to life, marriage is at least as real, and more frequent than suicide, rape, and murder.

No one can object to tragedy, with which we must all soon or late make friends, but it is a source of wonder to me that in new countries, undeveloped, peopled by vigorous explorers, their descendants are always victims of something. Tragedy pursues them; they have no confidence in the future. Even the confidence of Don Segundo, who knows not fear, is that of a stoic, not of an adventurer. Is this an element of the unhappy inheritance of Spain, a nation that exhausted its immense energy and aspiration in futile warfare? Is it due to the turbulence of the early colonial years or to a mixture of races that never were quite fused?

In seeking an explanation, we must not forget that the gaucha was a political being, and not merely a social being. Since his sphere of action was more ample than that of our cowboy, he had to pay the inherent penalty. Politics ruled his existence. The dictator Rosas was the most powerful of the gaucha chieftains, and when he fell in 1852, he dragged his supporters down with him. The new policy of education necessarily entailed the persecution of the gaucha, and his ultimate disappearance. Thrown on the defensive, he and everything associated with him received the brand of suffering.

These, it appears, are the elements that combine to produce the melancholy tone, now severe, now plaintive, of the gaucha novel.

The fact is that the United States cowboy was hardly even a citizen of our social order. Did he vote? Did he care who governed the states that he drove cattle through? Certainly he never joined a union. He was in no way caught in political cogs. The police never touched him

unless he shot up a town. The army was outside his ken. Why should he worry? His pioneer spirit could function freely.

In the last analysis, the spiritual difference between the gaucho and the cowboy reflects the society from which they came. The tradition of Spain springs out of lengthy political coils that tangle feet and cramp minds. They lassoed the wild roamer of the llanos. But in the free atmosphere of this young democracy, the cowboy cracked his heels in the air, waved his hat, and let life buck. When it finally threw him, he landed on his feet, with no regrets, qualms, or philosophies.