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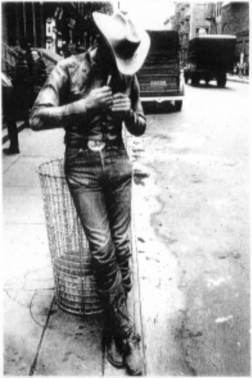

New York City

Robert Frank, *Les Américains*, Paris : Delpire, 1958.

B

The cowboy, it is popularized, loved his horse far more than he loved any woman. Andy Adams called that affection "almost human." At least from the days of the Middle Ages, knights and crusaders have been lifted to the heights of bravado on the backs of their steeds. The horse gave the cowboy a boost in the pantheon of masculine heroism. Some analysts of the cowboy have wondered about homosexuality among these young men. Undoubtedly it existed, given the nature of the situation, but one fact is certain: the lasting appeal of the cowboy to Americans can be associated with a cult of masculinity. One of the most interesting followers of this cult was a future president of the United States who became enamored of the West, and especially of the cattle kingdom.

Theodore Roosevelt had been an asthmatic, nearsighted child living in a wealthy household in a New York City brownstone. In his mid-twenties, frustrated by the pressures of the establishment, saddened and shaken by death in his family, and deeply disappointed in his desired political career, he faced what a psychologist might call an identity crisis. In 1883 he invested a fifth of his fortune in a cattle ranch in the Dakota Badlands near Medora, and by June 1884, seeking escape from his bundle of troubles, he had set himself up in a cabin on his Elk Horn Ranch and begun a new kind of life. He supervised the building of a herd and with his partners bought a second ranch, which he called the Maltese Cross, some twenty miles down the Little Missouri River. He loved these ranches – the smell of sage from the prairie, the pines, the river running near his porch. His nearest neighbor was ten miles away. His release from New York would seem to have been complete.

The cowboys laughed at his thin boyish face, his big teeth, thick glasses, and greenhorn vocabulary. It is hard to believe that he once purportedly yelled to his workmen, "Hasten forward quickly, there!" We can imagine his cowhands' reactions to the books on history and puritanism that he gave them. He stayed in the saddle, sometimes for thirteen hours a day, and slept soundly at night as he had not done in New York. Within a few months he was brown as the pine bark and thirty pounds heavier. He wrote home, "This country is growing on me more and more; it has a curious, fantastic beauty all its own."

For Roosevelt the rifle and the saddle were inseparable. "I am very fond of hunting," he wrote, "and there are few sensations I prefer to that of galloping over these rolling, limitless prairies, rifle in hand, or winding my way among the barren, fantastic and grimly picturesque deserts of the so-called Bad Lands." Killing a deer provided the greatest excitement until he shot an elk, and that sensation was in turn superseded by the killing of buffalo. A ritualistic climax came with the slaying of grizzly bear – one brought down at some distance with two shots and another dropped with one shot at eight paces. His companions remembered his shouts of exultation ringing through the woods. When he returned to the East, he had crates of stuffed heads to adorn the hall of his house, and many of these trophies accompanied him to the White House where they vied for attention with the crystal chandeliers. His favorite shooting companions were "fearless and reckless," to him the manliest of virtues. The accolade was complete when he wrote, "The hunter is the archetype of freedom."

For Roosevelt the cowboy was everything the image said he was – independent, bold, "fearless and reckless." He discerned a certain harum-scarum quality, but behind that was good fighting stuff, which he hoped to encourage. He obviously did not see cowboys as potential strikers. With reference to the Haymarket Riots, which occurred in Chicago in 1886 during an anarchist demonstration against police brutality, Roosevelt wrote, "My men here are hard working, labouring men, who work longer hours for no greater wages than many of the strikers; but they are Americans through and through; I believe nothing would give them greater pleasure than a chance with their rifles at one of the mobs." To Teddy Roosevelt straight shooting and fearlessness were American through and through and a defense, violent if necessary, of the status quo.

The West for Roosevelt was the truest America. The East would be saved only if it turned toward the West. If it, like expatriate Henry James, turned toward England, it would be effete, snobbish, and above all servile in its "dread of war." In the Spanish-American War Teddy Roosevelt, leading his band of Rough Riders up San Juan Hill, was fearless and reckless, neckerchiefed and armed with a rifle, reveling in "the victory and gore" of the bully fight. He and his men were "the cowboy regiment" in full masculine array.

Robert V. Hine, *The American West. An Interpretive History*, Boston : Little, Brown and Company, 1984.

C

I have a picture in my mind of a tiny ranch on the edge of a stand of pine trees with some horses in the yard. There's a woman standing in the doorway in cutoffs and a blue chambray work shirt and she's just kissed her tall, bearded, and soft-spoken husband goodbye. There's laundry hanging outside and the morning sun is filtering through the tree branches like spiderwebs. It's the morning after a full moon, and behind the house the deer have eaten everything that was left in the garden.

I

If I were a painter, I'd paint that picture just to see if the girl in the doorway would turn out to be me. I've been out west ten years now, long enough to call it my home, long enough to know I'll be here forever, but I still don't know where that ranch is. And even though I've had plenty of men here, some of them tall and nearly all of them bearded, I still haven't met the man who has just walked out of the painting, who has just started his pickup truck, whose tire marks I can still see in the sandy soil of the drive.

The west isn't a place that gives itself up easily. Newcomers have to sink into it slowly, to descend through its layers, and I'm still descending. Like most easterners, I started out in the transitional zones, the big cities and the ski towns that outsiders have set up for their own comfort, the places so often referred to as "the best of both worlds." But I was bound to work my way back, through the land, into the small towns and beyond them. That's half the reason I wound up on a ranch near Grass Range, Montana; the other half is Homer.

II

I've always had this thing about cowboys, maybe because I was born in New Jersey. But a real cowboy is hard to find these days, even in the west. I thought I'd found one on several occasions, I even at one time thought Homer was a cowboy, and though I loved him like crazy for a while and in some ways always will, somewhere along the line I had to face the fact that even though Homer looked like a cowboy, he was just a capitalist with a Texas accent who owned a horse.

III

Homer's a wildlife specialist in charge of a whitetail deer management project on the ranch. He goes there every year to observe the deer from the start of the mating season in late October until its peak in mid-November. It's the time when the deer are most visible, when the bucks get so lusty they lose their normal caution, when the does run around in the middle of the day with their white tails in the air. When Homer talked me into coming with him, he said I'd love the ranch, and I did. It was sixty miles from the nearest paved road. All of the buildings were whitewashed and plain. One of them had been ordered from a 1916 Sears catalogue. The ranch hands still rode horses, and when the late-afternoon light swept the grainfields across from headquarters, I would watch them move the cattle in rows that looked like waves. There was a peace about the ranch that was uncanny and might have been complete if not for the eight or nine hungry barn cats that crawled up your legs if you even smelled like food, and the exotic chickens of almost every color that fought all day in their pens.

Homer has gone to the ranch every year for the last six, and he has a long history of stirring up trouble there. The ranch hands watch him sit on the hillside and hate him for the money he makes. He's slept with more than one or two of their wives and girlfriends. There was even some talk that he was the reason the ranch owner got divorced.

When he asked me to come with him I knew it would be me or somebody else and I'd heard good things about Montana so I went. There was a time when I was sure Homer was the man who belonged in my painting and I would have sold my soul to be his wife, or even his only girlfriend. I'd come close, in the spring, to losing my mind because of it, but I had finally learned that Homer would always be separate, even from himself, and by the time we got to Montana I was almost immune to him.

Pam Houston, *Cowboys are my Weakness*, 1992.

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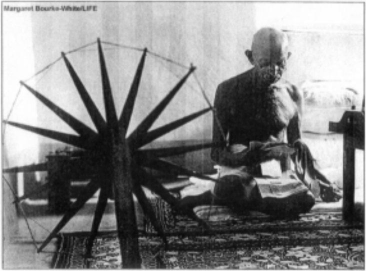
Margaret Bourke-White/LIFE

Mahatma Gandhi, 1948
Margaret Bourke-White, *Life*.

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'There's nothing in India but the weather, my dear mother; it's the Alpha and Omega of the whole affair.'

'Yes, as Mrs McBryde was saying, but it's much more the Anglo-Indians themselves who are like to get on Adela's nerves. She doesn't think they behave pleasantly to Indians, you see.'

I

'What did I tell you?' he exclaimed, losing his gentle manner. 'I knew it last week. Oh, how like a woman to worry about a side-issue!'

She forgot about Adela in her surprise. 'A side-issue, a side-issue?' she repeated. 'How can it be that?'

'We're not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly!'

'What do you mean?'

'What I say. We're out here to do justice and keep the peace. Them's my sentiments. India isn't a drawing-room'.

'Your sentiments are those of a god', she said quietly, but it was his manner rather than his sentiment that annoyed her.

II

Trying to recover his temper, he said, 'India likes gods'.

'And Englishmen like posing as gods.'

'There's no point in all this. Here we are, and we're going to stop, and the country's got to put up with us, gods or no gods. 'Oh, look here, he broke out pathetically, "what do you and Adela want me to do? Go against my class, against all the people I respect and admire out here? Lose such power as I have for doing good in this country because my behaviour isn't pleasant? You neither of you understand what work is, or you'ld never talk such eyewash. I hate talking like this, but one must occasionally. It's morbidly sensitive to go on as Adela and you do. I noticed you both at the club to-day –after the Collector had been at all to amuse you. I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force. I'm not a missionary or a Labour Member or a vague sentimental sympathetic literary man. I'm just a servant of the Government; it's the profession you wanted me to choose myself, and that's that. We're not pleasant in India, and we don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important to do.'

III

He spoke sincerely. Every day he worked hard in the court trying to decide which of two untrue accounts was the less untrue, trying to dispense justice fearlessly, to protect the weak against the less weak, the incoherent against the plausible, surrounded by lies and flattery. That morning, he had convicted a railway clerk of overcharging pilgrims for their tickets, and a Pathan of attempted rape. He expected no gratitude, no recognition for this, and both clerk and Pathan might appeal, bribe their witnesses more effectually in the interval, and get their sentences reversed. It was his duty. But he did expect sympathy from his own people, and except from newcomers he obtained it. He did think he ought not to be worried about 'Bridge Parties' when the day's work was over and he wanted to play tennis with his equals or rest his legs upon a long chair.

He spoke sincerely, but she could have wished with less gusto. How Ronny revelled in the drawbacks of this situation! How he did rub in it that he was not in India to behave pleasantly, and derived satisfaction therefrom! He reminded her of his public-school days! The traces of young-man humanitarianism had sloughed off, and he talked like an intelligent and embittered boy. His words without his voice would have impressed her, but when she heard the self-satisfaction lilt of them, when she saw the mouth moving so complacently and competently beneath the little red nose, she felt, quite illogically, that this was not the last word on India. One touch of regret –not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart- would have made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution.

'I'm going to argue, and indeed, dictate,' she said, clinking her rings. 'The English *are* out here to be pleasant.'

'How do you make that out, mother?' he asked, speaking gently again, for he was ashamed of his irritability.

'Because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant for each other. God…is…love'. She hesitated, seeing how much he disliked the argument, but something made her go on. 'God has put us on earth to love our neighbours and to show it, and He is omnipresent, even in India, to see how we are succeeding.'

He looked gloomy, and a little anxious. He knew this religious strain in her, and that it was a symptom of bad health; there had been much of it when his step-father died. He thought, 'She's certainly ageing, and I ought not to be vexed with anything she says'.

'The desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God…The sincere if impotent desire wins His blessing. I think every one fails, but there so many kinds of failure. Good will and more good will and more good will. Though I speak with the tongues of…'

He waited until she had done, and then said gently, 'I quite see that. I suppose I ought to get to my files now, and you'll be going to bed'.

E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, first published 1924, Penguin Books 1936, p. 49-51.

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Renaissance or Continuity

Gandhi lived too long. Returning to India from South Africa in 1915, at the age of forty-five, holding himself aloof from the established politicians of the time, involving himself with community and groups hitherto untouched by politics, taking up purely local causes here and there (a land tax, a mill strike), he then very quickly, from 1919 to 1930, drew all India together in a new kind of politics.

Not everyone approved of Gandhi's methods. Many were dismayed by the apparently arbitrary dictates of his 'inner voice'. And in the political stalemate of the 1930s –for which some Indians still blame him: Gandhi's unpredictable politics, they say, his inability to manage the forces he had released, needlessly lengthened the Independence struggle, delayed self-government, and wasted the lives and talents of many good men –in the 1930s the management of Indian politics passed into other hands.

Gandhi himself, like Tolstoy, his early inspiration) declined into a long and ever more private mahatmahood. The obsessions were always made public, but they were personal, like his –again almost Tolstoyan- sexual anxieties in old age, after forty years of abstinence. This period of decline was the period of his greatest fame; so that, even while he lived, 'he became his admirers'. He became his emblems, his holy caricature, the object of competitive piety. Knowledge of the man as a man was lost; mahatmahood submerged all the ambiguities and the political creativity of his early years, the modernity (in India) of so much of his thought. He was claimed in the end by old India, that very India whose political deficiencies he had seen so clearly, with his South African eye.

What was new about him then was not the semi-religious nature of his politics; that he was in the Indian tradition. What made him new was the nature of the battles he had fought in South Africa. And what was most revolutionary and un-Indian about him was what he left unexpressed and what perhaps, as an Indian, he had no means of expressing: his racial sense, the sense of belonging to a people specifically of the Indian subcontinent, that the twenty years in South Africa had taught him.

The racial sense is alien to Indians. Race is something they detect about others, but among themselves they know only the subcaste or caste, the clans, the gens, the language group. Beyond that they cannot go; they do not see themselves as belonging to an Indian race; the words have no meaning. Historically, this absence of cohesiveness has been the calamity of India. In South Africa, as Gandhi soon saw, it was the great weakness of the small Indian community, embattled but fragmented, the wealthy Gujarati Moslem merchants calling themselves 'Arabs', the Indian Christians claiming their Christianity, both separating themselves from the indentured labourers of Madras and Bihar, all subjected as Indians to the same racial laws.

If it was in London as a law student that Gandhi decided that he was a Hindu by conviction, it was in South Africa that he added to this the development of a racial consciousness, that consciousness without which a disadvantaged or persecuted minority can be utterly destroyed and which with Gandhi in South Africa was like an extension of his religious sense: teaching responsibility and compassion, teaching that no man was an island, and that the dignity of the high was bound up with the dignity of the low.

"His Hindu nationalism spoils everything', Tolstoy had said of Gandhi in 1910, while Gandhi was still in South Africa. It is obvious in Gandhi's autobiography, this growing, un-Indian awareness of an Indian group identity. […]

He had no means, in India, of formulating the true racial lessons of South Africa; and perhaps he couldn't have done so, any more than he could have described what he had seen as a young man in London in 1888. The racial message always merged into the religious one; and it involved him into what looked like contradictions (against untouchability, but not against the caste system; a passionate Hindu, but preaching unity with the Moslems). The difficult lessons of South Africa were simplified and simplified in India: ending as a holy man fad for doing the latrine-cleaning work of untouchables, ending as a holy man's plea for brotherhood and love, ending as nothing.

In the 1930s the Moslems fell away from Gandhi and turned to their own Moslem leaders, preaching the theory of two nations. In 1947 the country was partitioned, and many millions were killed and many more million expelled from their ancestral land: as great a holocaust as that caused by Nazi Germany. And in 1948 Gandhi was killed by a Hindu for having undermined and betrayed Hindu India. Irony upon irony; but the South African Indian had long ago been lost in the Hindu mahatma; and mahatmahood in the end had worked against his Indian cause.

V.S.Naipaul, *India, A Wounded Civilization*, Hazell Watson and Viney ltd, 1977, p. 152-154