

**D. L. Crockett-Smith. *Cowboy Amok*. (Oakland: The Black Scholar Press, 1987) 30 pp., \$6.95 paper.**

Politically-oriented poetry is difficult to do well. Many politically oriented writers resist displaying a certain type of passion, the type of intense commitment that helps a writer convey ideas without being didactic, because displaying such intensity may make the writer feel vulnerable or weak in public. Conversely, many poets and artists use their art to grasp and convey what they see as profound dichotomy need not hold firm, however. Art, including poetry, has shown itself to be an effective way to convey important ideas, and the political struggles that surround issues of racial violence, oppression, war, famine, and the destruction of human freedom and potential are as profound as any other subjects for artistic expression.

Alabama, Florida, and Chicago-educated D. L. Crockett-Smith has produced a collection of thirteen poems that expresses his rage at this continuing destruction and its smug cultural milieu that engulfs much of U.S. society today. It is an anger shared by millions. He refers not merely to Reagan, but also to that segment of the population that enthusiastically supports this oppression that takes its self-esteem from brutality itself. Finally, and most intensely, *Cowboy* is a foundation of contemporary U.S. culture itself, the “pulp/silver screen Cowboy, who inhabits our collective imagination and sometimes manifests himself as a seductive malignancy in our public lives.” The poet is careful to distinguish between the “Cowboy” of aggressive fantasies and the real cowboys of the West, which is important, especially given the oft-hidden truth that cowboys were actually a miserably oppressed lot, and that upwards of one third of them were black ex-slaves or their children.

The poems are powerful, difficult to dismiss. I might wish for less rage and despair, more struggle, confidence, and solidarity, and I might not share all the political viewpoints expressed in the poems. Similarly, the tone sometimes seems to be blaming the oppressed (“we,” “us”) for buying into the “Cowboy” fantasy, and this can blunt the intensity of rage against those primarily responsible. On the other hand, the tone has a kind of contemptuousness that reveals a confidence that “Cowboy” is fundamentally weak, a “phantasm” of imagination that we do have the strength to defeat. And it is also true that “we” do sometimes buy into the myths that sustain oppression, even our own, and it is important to be reminded, chided about that. The book is illustrated by Maceo (Ty dePass), a New York City artist whose pictures capture the sinister side of “Cowboy” civilization.

The book is reasonably priced and gives its readers much to ponder, whether used in courses or read casually. It might also be used as an example for developing poets. At a time when the main artistic alternatives to “Cowboy” and Rambo seem only to be the non-committed, Art Deco, soft-pastel of deconstructionism and detachment, U.S. culture

cries out for more artists who will challenge and confront “Cowboy” rather than defer. As the experience in Nazi Germany has shown, the most aggressive of “Cowboys” can co-exist nicely with a seemingly opposite culture saturated with detachment, passivity, and a pre-occupation with the moment which sustains the illusion that the immediate moment is disconnected from the past and future and has no important consequences. Rather than obscure reality, *Cowboy Amok* is part of the challenge.

—Alan Spector  
Purdue University Calumet

**W. Grant Dahlstrom, David Lachar, and Leona E. Dahlstrom.** *MMPI Patterns of American Minorities.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) xxi, 440 pp., \$29.50.

This anthology bobs out of the stormy sea of psychological research centered on minorities. The relationship between psychometrics and American minorities such as blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics, is a long and troubled one. Prior to World War II standardized psychological instruments were used mostly to assess and compare educational performance or “temperament” of whites and blacks or other racial minorities. But criticism emerged which questioned the reliability of such psychological tests. The tests seemed to find that, first, blacks and other minorities were inferior educational achievers compared to whites; and, second, severe psychosocial deficiencies of these minority group populations were the basis for their lower achievement. Since the Second World War the use of psychological tests or “inventories” has undergone explosive growth beyond the field of education. Psychological assessment instruments—scales of symptom categories as their users view them—have become a common fixture in the research and operations of mental health programs, penal institutions, and industrial personnel fields. One feature of this phenomenal growth in modern psychometrics has been the popularity of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), now considered internationally as one of the most objective and reliable personality tests.

This book represents some of the latest and most thoroughly researched scholarship on the issue of the reliability of MMPI tests for psychiatric and personal assessment of minority group members. Since the 1960s psychologists, educators, counselors and sociologists have