Gene Autry: His Life and Career

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obviously, the shift to a system of mass production. An increasingly urban society no longer had to depend on a home economy of handmade, locally grown and domestically preserved. The other major cause, ironically, is the growth of sanitary engineering itself. Garbage-eating pigs did indeed run in New York City’s poorer streets in the 1840s, much to Dickens’s well-publicized disgust. Offal was beyond hazardous. The rise of city-regulated street cleaning and regular trash disposal (sewers before that customarily let slum runoff into the streets) was a landmark in the Progressive era in disease control. In the decades to come, new salvaging and water treatment plants were widely and justly praised.

Yet, remarks Rogers shrewdly, “wasting and waste were politically cleansed, thereby cleansing the system that produced so much waste” (74). For the average consumer, garbage out of sight was also out of mind. One question about this fine book is why the author lays these sins at the door of capitalism alone. To be sure, from the “low-cost depositories of society’s discards” (80) that became the Ohio River on fire with chemicals in 1969 to the Love Canal environmental disaster in 1980, taking out the industrial trash has been driven by tunnel vision and greed. But Rogers might also have speculated on the characteristics of the American mind that have fostered a near-apocalypse of dross.

From the Industrial Revolution onward, did the heedless majority discard because it believed there was no economic or mental time to do anything else? Was a restless upward mobility, or at least the wish for it, somehow tied to throwing out the detritus of the past? But perhaps these and other speculations belong to new studies of how the nation trashes its own quality of life and demeans its moral legacy. In any case, this book will be useful in courses on the environment or urban studies.

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Reading in Life magazine that “a quick game of bridge or canasta is really [Gene] Autry’s only frivolity,” one can appreciate why Music Professor Don Cusic “stopped writing several times, convinced [he]
should forget” his biography of the Singing Cowboy (1). Aside from the dwindling 1940s and 1950s “Giddyap’ generation” and devotees of Autry’s “Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer,” most readers will likely also soon “forget” this biography.

To be sure, Cusic has done his homework, discovering release dates and places for hundreds of Autry’s movies, television programs, and rodeo appearances, providing sales figures for dozens and dozens of songs (both recordings and sheet music), and even tallying runs scored by Autry’s baseball team, the Los Angeles Angels. But like the books Dylan Thomas recalled receiving as Christmas presents—“books that told everything about the wasp, except why”—Cusic’s amassed facts never actually explain why readers should care about Gene Autry (1907–98).

Presumably, Cusic had in mind people of a certain age (like me), whose childhood photos display us in cowboy hats and bandana neckerchiefs, holstered six-guns at the ready in emulation of Gene Autry, prepared to round up cattle stampeding all across Brooklyn. For sentimentalists who can still remember the lyrics to “Back in the Saddle,” song titles alone may suffice. Even then, however, no book about movie stars like Autry is complete without photographs—here inexplicably absent.

Nostalgia aside, this book provides little insight into its subject’s psychology. Except for passing references to contract disputes, we get only the occasional glimpse of the driving force behind Autry’s life-long quest for fame and fortune. Nor does Cusic probe the implications of Autry’s remarkable gift for self-invention. Thus, although “Gene Autry was no cowboy by a long shot” but “a modern man . . . who liked living in the current world” (127), Cusic never questions why Autry always insisted on living “in character”—right down to the cowboy clothes he wore daily (134). Glaring contradictions are likewise ignored, as when Autry repeatedly proclaims, “Money doesn’t mean anything to me,” yet greatly resents military service because “One day you’re making good money and the next day you’re on Army pay” (146).

Cusic does analyze the cultural appeal of Autry’s traditional Westerns for rural, working-class audiences who “embraced traditional values, a clear right and wrong, and the idea that true justice will ultimately prevail” (152). Autry also shared his generation’s impatience with disrespect for authority that characterized the 1960s. He was, in every regard, Clean Gene: “a clean-cut cowboy hero,” whose outfits were “always immaculately cleaned and pressed” (134); a millionaire
many times over who rejected ostentation; and although he “once slugged a man for calling him a name” (152), someone who almost “never ‘blew his stack’” (155).

Nothing in the book is designed to titillate—not even Autry’s marriage at age seventy-two to a woman thirty-three years his junior, just fourteen months after the death of his first wife. Whether nearly killed in a car accident, or narrowly escaping a charging bull, Autry’s passive response was always the same: “Well that’s the way the old ball bounces” (146). Such an accepting attitude may have much to recommend it, but as a way to generate reader engagement it is somewhat problematic. Like a Horatio Alger hero, Gene Autry triumphed through a rare combination of luck and pluck. Yet as Cusic acknowledges, it is “difficult to convey how your heart would jump into your throat when you saw this cowboy” on the screen (195). Despite meticulously detailing Autry’s professional career, this book offers little genuine insight into Gene Autry the man. Successful biographies do more than suggest you really had to be there.

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Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1990) explored many interesting relationships in his films both conventional, like Jeffries and Lisa in _Rear Window_, and shocking, such as Scottie and Judy in _Vertigo_. Critics of popular culture still debate whether Hitchcock’s films are intended to affirm conventional ideas of romance or whether they, in fact, subvert such relationships, particularly by making perverse human relationships acceptable to the audience. Richard Allen, who teaches cinema studies at NYU, enters this debate by arguing that Hitchcock is intentionally doing both. Allen argues that romantic irony, which “describes the both/and rather than the either/or logic that governs the universe of Hitchcock’s films” allows the films to “work both as an affirmation of the ideal of heterosexual romance and as a critique of that ideal” (xiv).
Childhood And Early Life. Gene Autry was born in Tioga, Texas on 29 September 1907 as Orvon Grover Autry. His parents were Elnora Ozment and Delbert Autry. While still young Autry’s mother died and the family moved to Oklahoma. He helped his father on the ranch he owned there as well as attending school.

Career. In 1928, Gene Autry was rejected by the RCA Victor record label, he was given a letter of introduction and advised to build his profile. Autry then began appearing on a local radio station in Tulsa as 'Oklahoma’s Yodelling Cowboy.' In 1929, Autry got his first record deal when he signed with Columbia Records. He also received his show on a Chicago radio station which would run for four years. Autry mostly recorded covers during this early period of his career. See a detailed Gene Autry timeline, with an inside look at his albums, marriages, awards & more through the years.

Annie Oakley is an American Western television series that fictionalized the life of the famous sharpshooter Annie Oakley. Featuring actress Gail Davis in the title role, the weekly program ran from January 1954 to February 1957 in syndication. A total of 81 black-and-white episodes were produced, with each installment running 25 minutes in length. The life of Gene Autry reads like a chapter from the American Dream. Rising from classically obscure roots on a Texas ranch, Autry became the personification of the Singing Cowboy as well as one of the most financially successful entertainers of this century. In addition to being the Number One country music star of the 1930s, Autry numbered among the Top Ten popular actors from 1940 to 1942, eclipsing film legends Tyrone Power, James Cagney, Judy Garland, and Bette Davis in box-office appeal. During his career, Autry sold more than 50 million recordings. The Red-Nosed Reindeer Gene Autry was the first of the wildly popular “singing cowboys” of the thirties and forties and the man who carried the flag for “western” in “country and western,” popularizing the genre’s marriage of seemingly disparate western and hillbilly influences. Beyond his highly successful recording career, his on-screen persona influenced an entire generation of American boys. Autry, an accomplished investor and businessman, was a longtime owner of Major League Baseball's Angels franchise. This meticulously researched biography takes the reader from Gene Autry's childhood in Oklahoma through his p