ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

The Saddle: A Teen Age Boy in the Old West
Robert J. Gossett
978-1-4389-9181-8
Two Stars (out of Five)

Westerns have been popular with fiction readers ever since the days of the Gold Rush and the Pony Express. With this short but engaging novel, Robert J. Gossett has the makings of a heartwarming coming-of-age story. It's the saga of Jake Gage, born in Kentucky in 1850 to Will Gage, a freight hauler, and his wife Spring Bird, a young Cherokee woman half his age.

Gossett traces the family's journey to Arkansas, where they are forced to move after Will kills two robbers and rapists—part of a family of five murderous brothers known to lawmakers far and wide. Knowing that the remaining thugs will seek revenge, Will relocates the family to a two-room cabin on a farm near Arkadelphia, where they live in peace until 1865, shortly before the end of the Civil War.

At this point Jake's extended journey begins—one which takes him far from this bucolic life with his parents. Jake finds a cow in agony with a broken leg, shoots it, and brings home the meat. Now in danger of being arrested for cattle rustling—an offense punishable by hanging—Jake takes off for Texas. He rides shotgun for Wells Fargo Stage Lines and later moves on to safer work on a cattle ranch, where the owner, sympathetic to Jake's plight, teaches him to castrate bulls, mend fences, and brand newborn calves in the spring. But more importantly, Jake learns whom he can trust and why, and that one's deeds and words live long into the future.

Gossett lived and worked in Texas for thirty years. To prepare for writing this novel, he says he spent several days talking to present-day cowboys. Although his novel draws the reader into Jake's story, and Gossett surrounds his protagonist with several well-drawn characters, he leaves some plot lines under-developed, and the story ends quite abruptly. In addition, numerous typographical and grammatical errors appear throughout the work, including the dedication and the back cover.

Consequently, in its present state, *The Saddle* is not ready for general audiences. At its core, however, it is a charming story of the West in the mid-1800's which would benefit from further plot development and the help of a professional editor.