



# Requiem for a Whale Rider

*By E. Michael Jones*

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## **Requiem for a Whale Rider** By E. Michael Jones

SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau died from drowning at SeaWorld Florida's Shamu Stadium after the 12,000 pound bull killer whale she was working with grabbed her from a feeding platform and dragged her underwater.

The only thing anyone could say about Brancheau was: "she died doing what she loved." After saying exactly that, Diane Gross, her sister, assured a reporter that "Dawn wouldn't want anything done to the whale now blamed in her death."

The reason women are willing to risk their lives by riding whales goes deeper. Riding whales in Florida, like riding bulls in Minoan Crete, is a religious ritual. If we take Free Willy and Whale Rider as expressions of the same religion James Cameron draws on in Avatar, whale riding can be seen as the ultimate sign of election; whales are the ultimate animals in terms of size. The iconic expression which joins Minoan bull riders and Dawn Brancheau's whale riding, is the myth of the Abduction of Europa.

If nature worship is a religion, then Jean-Jacques Rousseau is its theologian. Rousseau conflated the two senses of "nature" into something congenial to both Capitalists and Treehuggers, the materialist twins in the dialectic that dominates any discussion. Sexual guilt, festering in the soul of those who refuse to repent, invariably finds solace in the innocence of animals. Those burdened by the guilt of a life devoted to appetite are drawn ever closer to animals that possess the innocence they crave. Drawn to animals, they feel compelled to seek the animals' approval. And how do those animals confer approval? By letting the bearer of that troubled soul ride them. As the image of Europa on the Bull shows, riding an animal is a vaguely sexual act which bespeaks approval, but also union, a fusion of two beings, which confers on the troubled rider the innocence of the ridden animal. Finding only momentary relief from guilt, those burdened with an uneasy conscience force themselves more and more intrusively on the animals whose innocence and approval they crave until an unpredictable mechanism goes off in the animal and the animal kills the human who sought its approval.

A masterful analysis and pungent cultural criticism by Dr. E. Michael Jones, editor of Culture Wars magazine.

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