

LEAVING CHEYENNE: A STUDY OF THE
EVOLUTION OF THE COWBOY IN LARRY
MCMURTRY'S WRITINGS

THESIS

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PREFACE

If the general American public knows of Larry McMurry, it is probably because of the movies that have been made from his first three books: Hud, from Horseman, Pass By; Loving Molly from Leaving Cheyenne; and The Last Picture Show. However, McMurry is popular as an author in his native state, Texas. Here he is admired not only for his fiction but also for his book of essays on Texas, In a Narrow Grave. All of his books so far are set in Texas, and it is his depiction of this area and its indigenous characters for which he has received the most critical praise. His first three novels are set in rural West Texas; Moving On and All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers, his last two novels, are set, at least primarily, in Houston. Both settings reflect his background. He grew up with ranchers and cowboys in West Texas, and he studied and taught at Rice University in Houston. However, few other details of his personal background are available in standard references or sources, partly because he has assiduously guarded this information. Dr. Charles Peavy's book on McMurry for the Twayne authors series may include some personal details when it appears in late 1975 or in 1976, but the information is not presently available. Therefore, this study does not deal with McMurry's personal life but rather with the content of his works and specifically with the evolution of the cowboy.

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Chapter I

The Beginnings: The Blood's Country

The word "cowboy" is used loosely and carries different concepts for the user of the term. It includes real people such as Billy the Kid, Charles Goodnight, Teddy Blue Abbott, and Larry Mahan. But it also includes concepts developed in movies and fiction and embraced by audiences as a broad mythology, one that represents history, adventure, romance, and solid virtues. That this mythology is occasionally exaggerated and historically inaccurate is relatively unimportant; the basic ideals and characteristics of the archetypal cowboy, who was Texan in origin, Western in flavor, and American in spirit, have universal appreciation. On a superficial level Western movies, television shows, books, clothes, historical sites, scenic wonders, and postcards appeal to both Americans and foreigners; Western jeans are so highly valued abroad that they are often available only through the black market at exorbitant prices. Many people in the United States play cowboy through their manner of dress, their participation in colorful frontier celebrations and rodeos, and their expression of what they conceive to be cowboy attitudes through bumper stickers plastered on the chrome of their pickups.

Some interpreters accept and perpetuate this generalized modern cowboy concept. Movie makers in the past have portrayed the action and violence of the West, with a heavy emphasis on guns and bad guys because they are colorful and provide dramatic conflict, however simple. Historians, however, even those under the spell of the mythology,

religiously point out that the cowboy's life was really not always exciting, immoral, and colorful; the cowboy's work was difficult, tedious, and lonely. Fiction writers who have changed with the times have demonstrated split attitudes, some writing books that could be exciting movie scripts in the Zane Grey tradition, and some, especially the more recent ones, writing of the historical and often unpleasant realities of the cowboy's life.

Certainly, the cowboy exists today, but the times and the cowboys have changed. In a book of essays, In A Narrow Grave, one recent Texas writer, Larry McMurtry, analyzes the conflicts of values and ways of living caused by a change from rural to urban environments, from traditional to modern values, from work and a way of life rooted in the land to work and a way of life apart from the land. In his novels, Horseman, Pass By, Leaving Cheyenne, Moving On, The Last Picture Show, and All My Friends Are Going To Be Strangers, he deals specifically with the evolution and decline of the twentieth-century cowboy in several roles. Parallel to the cowboy's evolution from his original or mythical characteristics to modern imitations or corruptions of that archetype is his movement away from the land, the work, and the old values as dictated by twentieth-century pressures of technological and social change.

McMurtry utilizes his personal acquaintance and experience with ranches and ranch people, interpretations by historians, and published recollections of old-time cowboys to portray cattlemen and cowhands authentically in his fiction. He uses personal observation and interpretation to portray the rodeo cowboy and the symbolic cowboy of more

modern times. While realistically delineating the evolution and characteristics of the different cowboy roles, he also reveals the characteristics that they have in common and that have made the cowboy an appealing figure in fiction and in tradition.

Because McMurtry draws heavily on the cowboy myth and its appeal, an examination of the myth is both desirable and necessary for this study. Interpreters agree that the cowboy as a national folk hero and part of our culture is a composite, a mythological archetype, rather than a specific individual. Joe Frantz and Julian Ernest Choate state that the American cowboy is a general symbol for all the frontiersmen of the Great Plains of the late 1800's.¹ Another pair of interpreters defines the merged image of the generalized cowboy and his work:

The cowboy's personal identity--in the sense that George Washington and Ben Franklin and Kit Carson and Mark Twain have identity--dissolves into the myth, into the generality. Above all it merges into his vocation. He was a man of action and therefore a man of acts. He was precisely defined, not by what he thought or believed but by what he did.²

It is this characteristic of being a "man of action" that partially accounts for the cowboy's wide appeal, and the fact that his day is gone makes his passing a poignant one for those who have admired him. Paul Horgan's chapter "The Last Frontiersman" describes the cowboy's demise.

In him, the last American to live a life of wild freedom, his domesticated compatriots saw the end of their historical beginnings, and paid him nostalgic tribute in all their popular arts. Soon, like them, he would lose his nomadic, free, and

¹Joe B. Frantz and Julian Ernest Choate, Jr., The American Cowboy: The Myth and the Reality (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. 8, 67.

²Lon Tinkle and Allen Maxwell, editors, The Cowboy Reader (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), p. 2.

rough form of life before the westward sweep of machine techniques by which Americans made their lives physically more easy--and socially less independent and self-reliant. . . . The cowboy in his choice of solitude held onto his whole liberty as long as he could. But domestication of his West by machine techniques began in the 1860's and, once started, went fast.³

Although the actual days of the Drive were over, Philip Ashton Rollins wrote in 1922 that the code or spirit of the West was unabated.

What was the spirit of the West, of the Old West? It was a spirit that begat personal service and extreme self-reliance. . . . It was a spirit that offered a contempt for distance or danger as an impediment to duty or pleasure. It was a spirit that gave to a man an intense individualism, and not only a hatred of class distinction save such as the West itself created, but also a bitter antipathy to all social usages, in limitation of personal action except those which either were prescribed by universal fundamental law or were in the Western code. It was a spirit that nurtured an undying pride in the country of the West, a devoted loyalty to its people as a class, a fierce partisanship in favor of that country and its people, and a complete silence about and very generous forgiving of whatever wrongs any of the latter might have done.⁴

Fifty years later this same idea is echoed in nearly the same words by rodeo chroniclers. Thus, the general philosophy and the myth of the cowboy continue to flourish.

Walter P. Webb attempted to explain the popularity of the Western story by surveying editors of popular Western magazines. They replied that its popularity was due to several things: the West itself is a great American tradition still in the making, a land of romance and adventure, and a place where men of action accomplish many deeds of

³Paul Horgan, Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History, Vol. II: Mexico and the United States (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1954), pp. 884-885.

⁴Philip Ashton Rollins, The Cowboy: An Unconventional History of Civilization on the Old-Time Cattle Range, revised and enlarged ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. 345.

valor that other men dream of.⁵ In the rush to create an appealing legend many fiction writers and movie makers have strayed from the facts. J. Frank Dobie is one observer who believes that the cowboys in moving pictures, television, books, and magazines have not been true to life.⁶ E. C. "Teddy Blue" Abbott, an old-time cowpuncher, observed that it was "movie stuff" to show the cowboy with two guns because only the professional gunmen carried two guns.⁷ Several observers note that other specifics are in error. There were not many women or romances in the West, and the cattle on the trail drives were not run to market at the rapid pace depicted on the screen. There is also belief that the classic fist fight which ends in the destruction of a saloon may not have occurred so frequently as shown in movies. Dobie and others note that using fists was demeaning and that a cowboy preferred to use his gun, remaining mounted. In addition, Jules Verne Allen, "the singing cowboy," quoted Frank S. Hastings who wrote in Some Glimpses of Ranch Life that the movies have erred in that only a small part of the early cowboys were wild drunks who shot up the town and that most were hard-working and had a "strict sense of right and wrong."⁸ Although Larry

⁵Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1931), pp. 446-468.

⁶J. Frank Dobie, Cow People (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. ix.

⁷E. C. ("Teddy Blue") Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher, 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 24.

⁸Jules Verne Allen, Cowboy Lore (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1971), pp. 23-24.

McMurtry believes that the Western does not have to be accurate and truthful, he feels that movies "fault the myth when they dramatize gun-fighting, rather than horsemanship, as the dominant skill."⁹ So, there are many interpreters who feel that the popular myth is inaccurate.

The inaccuracies in the legend, if they are indeed inaccuracies, may not all be due to the myth-makers' desire to present an attractive and colorful cowboy hero. Paul Horgan wrote that the cowboy's character held many contradictions. He was hard yet frequently sentimental, he needed love yet he hampered this need by idealizing women, and he romantically defended his style of living yet symbolically refuted it by his wild and notorious actions.¹⁰ His better qualities enabled him to do his work successfully on the trail and gain heroic status; his worse qualities offered him relief in town from his work and gained him a bad reputation which is appreciated as much as his admirable qualities.¹¹ In addition to the inconsistencies that existed within most cowboys, the myth is complicated by the fact that there were "good guys" and "bad guys," the noble ideal and the dastardly villain, Charles Goodnight and Billy the Kid. "From the outset, the range rider has embodied all of the virtues and vices of the Anglo-American in one folk type."¹²

Larry McMurtry, while using these inconsistencies within his characters and cowboy types, uses also some of the specific, standard

⁹Larry McMurtry, In a Narrow Grave (Austin: Encino Press, 1968), pp. 21, 150.

¹⁰Horgan, Great River, pp. 878-879.

¹¹Frantz and Choate, American Cowboy, p. 47.

¹²Ibid., p. 71.

characteristics of the cowboy. One category of attributes is connected with the cowboy's work. Since the horse was probably the most essential requirement of his work and since there are many tales of extraordinary horses and their owners' affection, nearly all historians and interpreters pay tribute to the cowboy's horse. McMurtry calls the horseman the "master symbol" for handling the cowboy. "The cowboy realized himself on a horse, and a man might be broke, impotent, and a poor shot and still hold up his head if he could ride."¹³ Because he was proud of being a horseman, he looked down on and merely tolerated those who walked: "Farmers, mechanics, and tradesmen were drudges, stupid folk, and to be pitied."¹⁴ Even though the man-horse relationship is important, it should properly be called the horseman-cow relationship, for the man and the horse functioned as one in doing their work, which involved the cow as its main object. And, of course, the successful cowboy was expert, skillful, knowledgeable, and sympathetic with cows. One writer states that in working and living with horses and cows, he even came to resemble them in his physical and emotional nature.¹⁵

In carrying out his job the cowboy was hard-working, uncomplaining, and loyal in the face of hardship. Some of the hardships included carrying a "wardrobe all on my back," eating poor food, enduring bad weather, fighting

¹³McMurtry, In A Narrow Grave, p. 150.

¹⁴Douglas Branch, The Cowboy and His Interpreters, introduction by Harry Sinclair Drago (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 24, 123.

¹⁵Horgan, Great River, p. 874.

Indians or irate Missourians, and being banned from society.¹⁶ In spite of his troubles the cowboy did not complain much to other cowboys and never to an outsider: "if not cheerfulness, silence."¹⁷ The cowpunchers were loyal to their outfit and to each other, with the loyalty being most pronounced in those who were not ambitious for themselves.¹⁸ Through J. Evetts Haley, Charles Goodnight, the rancher of mythical proportions, might have praised his cowboys in these words:

'I wish I could find words to express the trueness, the bravery, the hardihood, the sense of honor, the loyalty to their trust and to each other of the old trail hands. They kept their places around a herd under all circumstances, and if they had to fight they were always ready. Timid men were not among them--the life did not fit them. I wish I could convey in language the feeling of companionship we had for one another. Despite all that has been said of him, the old-time cowboy is the most misunderstood man on earth. May the flowers prosper on his grave and ever bloom, for I can only salute him--in silence.'¹⁹

The cowboy was not so adept in his social life as in his work, but he possessed a paradoxical charm that made him admirable to writers like Owen Wister in The Virginian. His most noticeable social habits were those he revealed to dismayed citizens of the town at the end of the trail. The editor of the Topeka Commonwealth, August 15, 1871, after deploring the cowboy's ignorance, diet, gambling, and wildness with revolvers, deplored also his drinking, swearing, fighting, and "boisterous

¹⁶Allen, Cowboy Lore, pp. 73-75, and Abbott and Smith, We Pointed Them North, pp. 8, 24.

¹⁷Branch, Cowboy and Interpreters, pp. 157-158.

¹⁸Dobie, Cow People, pp. 209, 218.

¹⁹J. Evetts Haley, Charles Goodnight: Cowman & Plainsman, new ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), p. 466.

gayety and indulgence in sensual pleasure."²⁰ Many of his defenders state that his behavior in town was merely a "letting off steam" temporarily after long "dry" months in the saddle spent contemplating the pleasures he was doing without. That he was noisy, fun-loving, and rough-mannered is admitted by most. However, the tradition of the reticent cowboy, the strong, silent type, is nearly as common and probably as valid. Although cowboys were often long-winded in telling tales to each other, there are numerous stories of the cowboy's reserve, his laconic comments to strangers, and his resentment of men, to say nothing of women, who talked too much.

To say nothing of women seemed to be the safest course to most early cowboy chroniclers and historians who were too squeamish to write painstakingly of the frail birds who had "fallen low, alas." Dobie and McMurtry praised E. C. "Teddy Blue" Abbott for giving an honest, if not explicit, account of the relationships between the cowboys and their sporting women, an account which he said would probably shock respectable people. "But we wasn't respectable and we didn't intend to be, which was the only way we was different from some others."²¹ Abbott criticized the double standard for women and said that many cowboys were glad to marry a dance-hall girl, even though he wanted a nice girl for himself.²² Although the cowboy reserved his admiration for virtuous women, he was chivalrous and gallant to both kinds. Good women were idealized, and bad ones were defended because of their generosity and fair-dealing with cowboys.

²⁰Branch, Cowboy and Interpreters, pp. 11-12.

²¹Abbott and Smith, We Pointed Them North, p. 107.

²²Ibid., pp. 106-107.

His romantic sentimentality about women did not always cause him to marry them legally, however. Observers noted that most ranchers and nearly all cowboys were unmarried.²³ Marriage and family had little influence on cowboy society as a whole although it may have influenced individuals such as Teddy Blue to settle down to ranching. Several songs have the cowboy lamenting his vices and shortcomings and praising the love of a good woman, but another untitled cowboy song supports the thesis "Oh, love has been the ruin of many a poor man" by stating that when the cowboy was single, he was free to go all over the world doing what he pleased, but when he was married he lost all the joys of life.²⁴

McMurtry sees the cowboy's difficulty in dealing realistically with women as one of his major problems. His reluctance to accept women as part of his society is not necessarily a selfish motivation; cowboys have "a commitment to a heroic concept of life that simply takes little account of women."²⁵ He observes that the separatism is due to the masculine nature of the cowboy's work and that cowboys are more comfortable with each other than with women.

The tradition of the shy cowboy who is more comfortable with his horse or with his comrades than with his women is certainly not bogus. Cowboys express themselves most naturally, and indeed, most beautifully, through their work. . . . The cowboy's work is at once his escape and his fulfillment, and what he often seeks to escape from is the mysterious female principle, a force at once frightening and attractive.

The basic difficulty, I think, is that the cowboy lacks a style that would put him at ease with women and women at ease

²³Rollins, Cowboy, p. 32.

²⁴Branch, Cowboy and Interpreters, pp. 171-172.

²⁵McMurtry, In A Narrow Grave, p. 148.

with him. His code has prepared him to think of women not as they are, nor even as they were, but in terms of a vague nineteenth-century idealization to which not even the most proper plains-woman could really conform. The discrepancy between what the cowboy expected of women and what they needed of him accounts for a lot of those long rides into the sunset, as the drifting cowboy drifts away not so much from what he might want as from what he is not sure how to get. Women shook his confidence because it was a confidence based on knowing how to behave in a man's world, and even the West isn't entirely a man's world anymore.²⁶

Because of the changed social structure the cowboy who is committed to the myth of manhood today pays a high emotional price, and his women also become victims, sometimes assuming masculine traits for themselves as seen in the cowgirl.²⁷

The cowboy's personal or philosophical attitudes parallel his vocational and social characteristics. He is generally regarded as an independent and self-reliant individual who has little regard for authority and little tolerance for being bossed. Joseph G. McCoy, who was not a cowboy admirer, described cowboys with reluctant praise in Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest in 1874 as "a hardy, self-reliant, free and independent class, acknowledging no superior or master in the wide universe."²⁸ So it seems remarkable that he was able to take orders and do his job successfully. Dobie explains this paradox.

When any man who draws wages or salary gets so good that he can tell his employer to go to hell, he has realized the dream of independence in every hired man. In no occupation were bootlickers scarcer than in old-time ranching. They were as scarce among professional cooks as among cowhands and bosses.²⁹

²⁶Ibid., pp. 72-73.

²⁷Ibid., p. 148.

²⁸Tinkle and Maxwell, Cowboy Reader, p. 192.

²⁹Dobie, Cow People, p. 136.

Coupled with his independence was his confidence that his calling and his ways were superior to others; it did not matter to the cowboy whether or not he owned cattle. His occupational choice was determined by his personal characteristics and affected his social interaction. Because he was undomesticated, he preferred the society of men for the excitement, danger, primitive manners, and freedom which it brought.³⁰ Within this society he was generous, honest, unapologetic and loyal, often posturing as an "I eat humans for breakfast" bad man and frequently playing the part of official prankster who properly exposes the pretensions and hypocrisies of others.

A person who fancies himself a cowboy would probably laugh at anyone's attempts to analyze the cowboy's philosophy. The observers who have made the attempt are reluctant to call it a philosophy, labeling it instead a general attitude or outlook. Frederic Remington in Pony Tracks calls their minds uncomplicated; their simple and unembellished minds make them "children of nature and they never think one thing and say another."³¹ This romantic over-simplification is dear to many cowboy hearts. If there is indeed simplicity in his nature, it lies chiefly in his preference for the concrete rather than the abstract, the practical rather than the philosophical, the action rather than the intellect. This preference is manifested in the cowboy's attitudes toward government, education, and religion. While being generally indifferent toward governmental ideology, he becomes concerned only if government bears some local consequence or effect on him, personally, reserving for the most part a negative attitude

³⁰Horgan, Great River, p. 878.

³¹Tinkle and Maxwell, Cowboy Reader, p. 157.

about government just in case something might touch him. Joseph G. McCoy observed a hundred years ago that cowboys are "not public spirited in matters pertaining to the general good, but may justly be called selfish, or at least indifferent to the public welfare."³² While their attitudes toward education are not so negative as toward government, the cowboy's practical bent makes him indifferent toward higher education, and he generally evaluates himself as being not very intelligent. In response to a letter from McMurtry, his Uncle Jeff reveals a typical cowboy sentiment:

What does PhD stand for? to me its post-hole digger, guess that would be about what it would stand for with all the other old Texas cowpokes. . .

I never could understand why a man wanted to spend all his life going to school, ide get to thinking about the Rancho Grandy, and get rambling on my mind. . .³³

Even in his attitude toward religion the cowboy demonstrates an impatience with abstract or philosophical ideas. Teddy Blue Abbott states that he had quit going to church when his brother died and he had been told that since God was all-powerful, he could have prevented the death. He says further that nearly all the cowboys were "infidels" because they had all "that religious bull" knocked out of them when they confronted nature. He writes, "... hell, if I'd trusted in Providence I'd have starved to death."³⁴ McMurtry states that perhaps all cowboys were pantheists, recognizing nature as the deity.³⁵ If the cowboy had a religious philosophy, it was generally not in conformity with organized religion. Even the virtuous Charles Goodnight refused to go to church.

³²Ibid., p. 191.

³³McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 151.

³⁴Abbott and Smith, We Pointed Them North, p. 29.

³⁵McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 169.

Compared to the cowboy's attitude toward social institutions, his attitude toward his own image is more complex. Although he was realistically aware of his hardships and berated himself for his behavior, he still looked at his life romantically, seeing it as others saw it--a wild, free existence. He was as convinced as Owen Wister, author of The Virginian, that the cowboy was linked to "the Texas tradition, the code of personal dignity, personal liberty, personal honesty, of laconic speech and quick action that was demonstrated in Texas during the years of the Republic that attracted pioneers."³⁶ Dobie cited one example of the ambivalent workings of the code on the life and mind of one cowboy, a recently demoted ranch manager, who shot the new manager for talking to him as if he were a common hand and then shot himself in order to uphold the code of action.³⁷ Because their lives were involved with violence and hardship, there was little room left for gentleness and comforts. James Emmitt McCauley in A Stove-Up Cowboy's Story writes that although cow-punching was a good experience, he paid a high price and "wouldn't care to travel the same road again."³⁸ One explanation for the cowboy's choosing the occupation is offered in a description of Ed "Fat" Alford, who like most cowhands, had "a way of meeting life head on, with a recklessness and a wildness of spirit and a real relish for conquering it."³⁹ In spite of physical pain and injury, failure,

³⁶Branch, Cowboy and Interpreters, p. 149.

³⁷Dobie, Cow People, pp. 247-249.

³⁸Tinkle and Maxwell, Cowboy Reader, p. 130.

³⁹Fred Gipson, Cowhand: The Story of a Working Cowboy (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), pp. v-vi.

loneliness, and debt, cowboys consider themselves fortunate to have had their way of life and see themselves in the heroic myth, not in the tragic view.⁴⁰

Even the romantic cowboy of the 1880's saw that conditions were causing changes in their way of life. Teddy Blue Abbott detailed several developments that began the end of the day of the cowboy, "a prehistoric race": the decline of gun-wearing and the coming of fences, sheep, settlers, winter feeding, and modern methods of raising cattle.⁴¹ In 1888, Theodore Roosevelt wrote in Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail:

The best days of ranching are over. . . . The great free ranches, with their barbarous, picturesque, and curiously fascinating surrounding, mark a primitive stage of existence as surely as do the great tracts of primeval forests and, like the latter, must pass away before the onward march of our people; and we who have felt the charm of the life, and have exulted in its abounding vigor and its bold, restless freedom, will not only regret its passing for our own sakes, but must also feel real sorrow that those who come after us are not to see, as we have seen, what is perhaps the pleasantest, healthiest, and most exciting phase of American existence.⁴²

Later chroniclers, while insisting that the cowboy exists in the twentieth century, concede that he was forced to evolve into modern variations because of technological and social change.

An old song of two old cowboys who meet to drink and swap yarns with mist in their eyes contains the line, "Them was good ol' days an' good ol' ways--Now I'm telling you!"⁴³ It expresses the cowboy's sentimental

⁴⁰McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 147.

⁴¹Abbott and Smith, We Pointed Them North, pp. 209-210.

⁴²Tinkle and Maxwell, Cowboy Reader, p. 119.

⁴³Branch, Cowboy and Interpreters, p. xiv.

attitudes toward his way of life, and it contains the undeniable truth that his day is over. The passing of the cowboy's day, with its accompanying sense of loss and dislocation, is a major theme in Larry McMurtry's fiction and in his essays. Taken from a line in an old cowboy song the title of his second book, Leaving Cheyenne, like the titles of his other books, expresses this sense of passing and is explained in the note, "The Cheyenne of this book is that part of the cowboy's day's circle which is earliest and best; his blood's country and his heart's pastureland."⁴⁴ McMurtry's description of his uncle reflects his affection for his blood's country, the land of his youth. Of all his cowboy relatives Uncle Johnny was his favorite. All were hard workers, but Uncle Johnny seemed to possess the most wiry endurance, having something youthful about him until he died.

Of them all he fought the suburb most successfully, and hewed closest to the nineteenth-century ideal of the cowboy. He was the last to be domesticated, if indeed he ever was domesticated, and at one point he almost abandoned the struggle to be a rancher in order to remain a free cowboy.⁴⁵

Uncle Johnny's departure from his last family reunion is an eloquent tribute to the people who saw the coming and going of the myth. Suffering from cancer, many old injuries, and seventy-five years of life and yet personifying the myth of the horseman, Uncle Johnny, framed by the plains and his white Stetson, kisses his wordless sisters goodbye before getting into his Cadillac to disappear behind the ridge for the last time.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Larry McMurtry, Leaving Cheyenne (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Popular Library, n.d.), p. 5.

⁴⁵McMurtry, Narrow Grave, pp. 160-161.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 171-172.

McMurtry's admiration for the myth of the horseman is not limited to his family nor does his admiration prevent him from detailing the sad effects of the passing of that horseman-god, whom he sees as Old Man Goodnight, Teddy Blue, or Uncle Johnny, all personifying the masculine ideals of the frontier.⁴⁷ Many of his fictional characters embody some of those ideals in various degrees and roles, but they have to combat the present and the suburb in order to preserve even a corrupted myth. One source of his fiction is the tragic defeats suffered in the victory of urban traditions over rural and soil traditions.⁴⁸ His characters demonstrate, however, that it is chiefly the cowboy's world that has changed rather than his characteristics.

Along with the asceticism go pride, stoicism, directness, restlessness and independence, all characteristics which the cowboy expresses through his own astringent humour. . . . The cowboy's temperament has not changed much since the nineteenth-century; it is his world that has changed, and the change has been a steady shrinkage. . . . If the modern cowboy is footloose, there is only the rodeo circuit, for most a very unsatisfactory life. . . . The effect of this has been to diminish the cowboy's isolation, his sense of himself as a man alone. From solitude and the clarity solitude sometimes brings he is being drawn toward the confusion of the urban or suburban neighborhood.⁴⁹

On a broader level McMurtry sees this metamorphosis applied not just to cowboys but to all the folk. While attending a fiddler's reunion and contest in Athens, Texas, he observed that the folk, who were once related to the soil, are now "drifting, surely, toward the same suburbs and television swamps in which the cowboys were bogged," and he sees the

⁴⁷Ibid., p. xvii.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. xv.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 26.

American West as possibly the only place one can still experience the excitement of the frontier emotion.⁵⁰

McMurtry's critics generally agree that he is skillful in handling the myths of the past and his region. Thomas Landess praises this accomplishment in using the myth in serious fiction and emphasizes its significance:

It is through the myth, for example, that the reader is able to understand the historical implications of his narratives, for many of his principal characters are meant to be understood as typical cowboys, imperfect incarnations of the ideal who are modified and altered as a result of the changing nature of the country in which they live.⁵¹

Dr. Charles Peavy and others state that McMurtry avoids the stereotype in portraying these "imperfect incarnations of the ideal." Most of the critics' attention and admiration to date has been directed toward his earliest two novels, those most cowboy in nature: Horseman, Pass By and Leaving Cheyenne. There have been mixed opinions about his later and more urban novels, The Last Picture Show, Moving On, and All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers, as well as his book of essays, In A Narrow Grave. William Pilkington and Larry King are two who especially admire these essays dealing with the conflict between soil and city traditions. Pilkington states that this book will endure, perhaps longer than the fiction.⁵² Extensive and detailed analysis of critical appraisals will

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 105, 108.

⁵¹Thomas Landess, Larry McMurtry (Austin, Texas: Steck Vaughn Company, 1969), p. 2.

⁵²William T. Pilkington, My Blood's Country: Studies in Southwestern Literature, (The Texas Christian University Press, 1973), p. 180.

not be developed in this study; however, specific critical comments from interpreters and McMurtry himself will be considered within the individual chapters.

The organization of this study is based upon the types of twentieth-century cowboys seen in McMurtry's fiction. The first cowboy type is the cattleman, the role holding the characteristics and values closest to the archetype. The cowhand, who evolved at the same time as the cattleman or perhaps even before, will be treated in the second chapter; in many of McMurtry's cowhands the old values still exist, but the cowboys are not so committed to the work and the land as are the cattlemen. Although rodeo has a history of its own, the rodeo cowboy is chiefly a modern or twentieth-century type, and in a modern role the rodeo cowboy possesses most of the outward trappings of the cowboy myth, a few of the personal characteristics, and little or no commitment to the land or actual cowboy work. The symbolic cowboy or frontiersman cited by McMurtry in his essays and embodied in his fiction is, like the rodeo cowboy, attracted by the outward ritual of the myth, but he is predominantly a drifter who sees the power of that way of life but is not involved in it, although he may long to dedicate himself to the land and the old values.

One interpreter presents a rationale that supports the formulation or analysis of the cowboy in these continuing and evolving roles:

. . . the cowboy has appeared under such a variety of guises that he is inextricably entangled in the whole Western complex. Not only the cattleman's frontier but the other contemporary

frontier enterprises must be considered, because as a legitimate folk hero the cowboy was not to be limited by space, distance, or occupation.⁵³

Perhaps because McMurtry does not feel limited by occupation, he places himself in the fourth category, the symbolic frontiersman or cowboy, as he covers the distance between the nineteenth-century cowboy and the modern cowboy in his books as "a form of parting, a wave of the hand at Old Man Goodnight, Teddy Blue, Uncle Johnny and all they stood for."⁵⁴ And in spite of the distance, paper rider Larry McMurtry has still not permanently left Cheyenne, "his blood's country and his heart's pasture-land."

⁵³Frantz and Choate, American Cowboy, p. 7.

⁵⁴McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. xvii.

Chapter II

The Cattleman

In comparison to other cowboys, the cattleman has not received much glory in fiction. His nature reflects virtues such as sobriety, industry, and maturity. His main concerns are his work and the land. The moral settler, no matter how powerful, can hardly compete with the image of the mythological and romantic drifter in capturing an audience's imagination. However, it is the cattleman who has retained most of the original ideals of the realistic cowboy figure for the longest period of time, at least he appears so in Larry McMurtry's fiction. And even the cattleman has had to adapt to twentieth-century pressures.

Although the cattleman and the cowhand have similar work interests and historical backgrounds, there is a definite distinction between the two roles. In Leaving Cheyenne and Horseman, Pass By it is the rancher who is closer to the nineteenth-century ideal in his values, demonstrating more concern for responsibility, fair-dealing, hard work, and other mythological cowboy virtues. Charles Goodnight was a famous Texas cowhand, Indian fighter, trail blazer, and scientific cattleman who left a legend that is equal or superior to any cowboy's reputation. Although he does not appear as a character by name in McMurtry's novels, he is mentioned as a standard for comparison in In a Narrow Grave, and he does serve as the ideal cattleman after whom McMurtry's ranchers are patterned in various stages of evolution.

In In a Narrow Grave McMurtry describes the Charles Goodnight legend that has been praised by others such as Dobie and Haley. He thinks of Goodnight, like the McMurtrys, on the plains of the Panhandle, which he so affected with his personality that many old-timers still exchange

stories of the legend in domino parlors,¹ Both Dobie and Haley emphasize Goodnight's insistence on good behavior from his hands, his own moral uprightness, and his aversion to hypocrisy and organized religion.² Not even his larger-than-life deeds and adventures overshadow the force of his character, which represented courage, fairness, honesty, loyalty, generosity, individualism, responsibility, and maintenance of a code seen in his fights with renegade Indians, dishonest men, outlaws, nature, state government, and public opinion. While building an empire, he furthered the cause of the public good and still managed to adapt to the changes that time brought to the cattle industry itself, to government, and to the social structure which drew closer around him. Although McMurtry's cattlemen have enough flaws and twentieth-century problems to disqualify them from membership in the ranks of the almost-too-good-to-be-true example, they do possess some or most of the essential mythical qualities of a Charles Goodnight cattleman.

McMurtry's cattlemen express the most admirable qualities of the old-time cowboy. They are durable, moral, hard-working, non-materialistic, and dedicated to their work and the land. This dedication, in fact, is partially responsible for the frustrations and problems that the drifter never experiences. Even the most successful rancher-characters have to struggle with the weather, finances, governmental and industrial intrusions, and moral dilemmas. They are more complex than cowhands or rodeo cowboys,

¹Larry McMurtry, In a Narrow Grave (Austin: Encino Press, 1968), pp. 5, 19.

²J. Frank Dobie, Cow People (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. 289; J. Evetts Haley, Charles Goodnight: Cowman & Plainsman (new ed.; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), pp. 110, 351.

for they desire their freedom as much as anyone, yet they commit themselves to responsibilities and to a way of life that is becoming an anachronism and that usually has an inherent negation of the freedom they desire. It is the cattleman that McMurtry has been associated with most, and it is this type for which he has the most sympathy and respect. In a recent essay he states that the small ranchers and farmers are the "true holdouts against the system."

These are men for the most part, who have lived in one place, loved the West and its ideals, and increased only in despair-- as the oil industry ruined their grass, as the air and water grew foul, as the land taxes rose so high they could not afford to stock their acreage, as their life-styles were scorned and then parodied, their children drawn away to the cities and there subverted. In these men one finds a love of the Old and a hatred of the New³

Although they sense their doom, they possess nobility, wit, grace, and playfulness within their element of remoteness and poverty and struggle, the environment that brings out their best qualities and separates them from "the mindless and tasteless suburbanized slobs."⁴ And though McMurtry himself parodies the cattlemen, the criticism in his novels is outweighed by his affection for the past and the way of life that gave birth to the myth of the horseman.

In his first novel, Horseman, Pass By, McMurtry's affection can be seen in the character of the grandfather, Homer Bannon, a character McMurtry later described as "a dreadfully sentimentalized version of the nineteenth century cattleman."⁵ Pauline Kael in her criticism of Hud, the

³Larry McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers and Groupies: A Requiem for a Rodeo," New York, November 27, 1972, p. 61.

⁴Ibid., p. 61.

⁵McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 16.

movie version of the novel, declared from a twentieth-century point of view, "the generalized pious principles of the good old codger belong to no body."⁶ However, McMurtry has observed that the nineteenth-century ideal is still strong in Texas, and men feel that Homer is the kind of man they should try to be.⁷ Regardless of whether or not those values still exist, Homer is an important character and type to consider in viewing the changes that have taken place in the Southwest in the last century. Thomas Landess states that each of the characters in Horseman, Pass By represents an important step in the evolution of the modern cowboy and that Homer Bannon is an embodiment of the old days of legendary cowboy life.⁸

Indeed, Homer shared in that life in his youth, working on the big ranches and on roundups, and later fondly recounted those days, the people, and his experiences to his grandson Lonnie as they frequently sat on the porch in the evenings.⁹ Echoing some of the physical characteristics of McMurtry's Uncle Johnny, Homer still had clear and steady eyes and thick hair at eighty and, true to the myth of the horseman, once had his cowboys wire him on his horse after he had been sick (pp. 9, 140). In spite of his numerous injuries, he still did chores with the younger cowboys and was the same observer of nature that he was in his early work with cattle.

⁶Pauline Kael, I Lost It at the Movies (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), p. 80.

⁷McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 16.

⁸Thomas Landess, Larry McMurtry (Austin, Texas: Steck Vaughn Company, 1969), p. 7.

⁹Larry McMurtry, Hud, paperback ed. of Horseman, Pass By (New York: Harper & Row, 1961; Popular Library, n.d.), p. 6. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

Halmea, the ranch's good-natured cook, said of Homer, "Dat man hurry himself too much. He ain't got no slowdown to him, whut's de trouble (p. 24)." And indeed, Homer did not slow down until the end, immediately after the destruction of his herd.

If his physical alertness and durability reflect the nineteenth-century cowboy, his social behavior and personality, given realism through flaws, reflect the myth even more. He was sentimental enough about the old way of life to keep some old longhorns he had raised to remind him of how times were, and he enjoyed reminiscing and talking about his old foreman and times past. However, also true to the myth, he was laconic and often hard in his dealings with his wife, his stepson Hud, and others around him who would not mind listening to his complaints and problems if he would ever verbalize them. He was not particularly concerned with women except to humor his wife with a fake operation to keep her relatively quiet. His philosophical attitudes or lack of them were like his cowboy predecessors'. He had always resisted religion, appearing in church only for his funeral. Although he may not have been so negative about education as he was about religion, he did fume and rave about "college fellers" and "school book diseases" when he was told that his herd might have to be destroyed (pp. 39-40). He also rebelled verbally against the government regulations and authority, although not so loudly as Hud, before he was forced to cooperate with them.

Homer's admirable behavior had its origins in several of the nineteenth-century cowboy's ideals. His pride, although carried to extremes in his personal relationship with Hud, gave him the strength and stubbornness needed to endure, if not to succeed, in the struggles with his work and with Hud. The cowboy's reputation for honesty and fair-dealing is one

of the characteristics that also set Homer apart from many of the younger characters. He was honest at his own expense, calling in the state live-stock inspector and refusing to sell the diseased cattle to an unsuspecting buyer as Hud suggested (p. 67). In talking to Hud about their personal difficulties, he candidly admitted that he had perhaps made mistakes in dealing with Hud too harshly (p. 66).

Homer's pride and honesty are characteristics that could be found in good men of any time period, but his values more specifically identify him with the American West of the later 1800's. His greatest love was reserved for his cattle, good horses, the land, and nature itself, an affection which manifested itself in a scorn for the oil industry and for other means of simply making money. When the state veterinarian tried to suggest that Homer compensate for his cattle loss by drilling for oil, Homer looked at his land and rejected the idea emphatically.

"If there's oil down there these boys can get it sucked up after I'm under there with it. Something about this sickness, maybe I can't do much about, but the oil-field stuff I can. . . . I guess I'm a queer, contrary old bastard, but there'll be no holes punched in this land while I'm here. . . . What good's oil to me," he said. "What can I do with it? With a bunch a fuckin' oil wells. I can't ride out ever day an' prowl amongst 'em, like I can my cattle. I can't breed'em or rope'em or chase'em or nothin'. I can't feel a smidgen a pride in'em, cause they ain't none a my doin'. Money, yes. Piss on that kinda money. . . . I want mine to come from something that keeps a man doing for himself (pp. 87-88)."

He had compromised with the twentieth century only in a few outward things--electricity, big cattle auctions, locker plants, a Lincoln, a pickup. He was dismayed and troubled by some of the changes in people and procedures he witnessed. But he was not defeated until his herd was slaughtered, and Lonnie observed, "I thought he might as well be dead with them, herd and herdsman together, in the dust with his cattle and Grandmother and his old foreman Jericho Green (p. 105)." Even after his grandfather's death,

Lonnie still saw Homer in connection with the land and his work.

I could see Granddad in my mind a thousand ways, but always he was on the ranch doing something, he wasn't in any loaf-around eternal life. I could see him riding, enjoying his good horses- or I could see him tending the cattle; or see him just standing in the grass, looking at the land and trying to figure out ways to beat the dry weather and the wind (p. 134).

The thought of burial did not bother Lonnie as much as it did previously because he began to think of Homer as staying in and holding as much of the land as he needed, and he was calmed in "thinking of the horseman that had passed (p. 140)."

Although Homer Bannon, the most romanticized of Larry McMurtry's cattlemen, does achieve some local status in his lifetime, he is basically a common man who helps preserve a heroic era in only a small sense through his commitment to his herd and the way of life. True to the myth he shot his old bull and his two longhorns himself in a sentiment reminiscent of the cowboy song, "The Last Longhorn." The narrator sings of a cowboy who stops to pay tribute to a dying longhorn, "the last of a noble race," who mourns to the cowboy about the loss of grass and water and the coming of the nester with his wife, kids, dogs, and barbed-wire fence, all indications that "the time has come when longhorns and their cowboys are no use!"¹⁰ Landess agrees that Homer has "a set of values which have become outmoded and inoperable in a more sophisticated, materialistic world; and in adhering to this code he invites his own destruction."¹¹ And even though he is an example of the myth of the horseman operating in modern settings,

¹⁰Douglas Branch, The Cowboy and His Interpreters, introduction by Harry Sinclair Drago (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 178-179.

¹¹Landess, McMurtry, pp. 8-9.

he and the other McMurtry cattlemen are spectators and participants in the cowboy's evolution.

In Leaving Cheyenne Adam Fry, Gid's father, is another embattled cattleman. Although he is a relatively minor character, he is important in leaving the force of his personality and values on his son Gid to perpetuate, and he is also important in that he, like Homer Bannon, is a product of an earlier era gradually being forced to compromise with progress. Mr. Fry, too, is seen in terms of the idealistic horseman-myth--he never owned a car or a truck. But Gid's father, though dying thirty years before Homer did, is not so idealized as Homer. His personal flaws are more obvious than Homer's, and his difficulties are more realistically attributed to the conflicts evolving from stubborn and independent men fighting hostile physical and social environments. In Leaving Cheyenne there are no catastrophic dramatic disasters such as the slaughter of a diseased herd that bring about the struggles and defeats encountered by the small rancher. There are only the everyday problems of weather, crop failure, and creeping modernity.

The physical similarities between the two old cattlemen are noteworthy. Mr. Fry was not satisfied if he could not work personally, and he was capable of running the ranch by himself even in his later years. Molly, their neighbor and Gid's love, helped with the cooking when Mr. Fry finally became too ill to work much, and she commented to Gid:

If your dad had to die, I'd want him to do it working, wouldn't you? Just to go on working till it happens. That's all he loves to do. If he was to sit around in a rocking chair, he'd get to feeling useless, and that'd be worse than being tired.¹²

¹²Larry McMurtry, Leaving Cheyenne (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Popular Library, [n.d.]), p. 98.

And Mr. Fry never did occupy that rocking chair. While Homer's emotional shock and physical injury prompted him to realize his pitiful condition and ostensibly to ask Hud to end his misery, Gid's father had only a growing awareness and resentment toward becoming old and useless in suffering to prompt him to commit suicide. Both would have preferred to die "with their boots on," actively working at the life they dedicated themselves to, but the best alternative, at least to Mr. Fry, was "to turn my horses free," the wording in his suicide note coming from a cowboy song. In "Forty Years a Cowpuncher" the old cowpuncher's last request is to ride old Muggins to his grave, to have his spurs on his breast, and to turn his horses free.¹³

Mr. Fry is an example of the old-time rancher in his attitudes and social behavior, too. The stubborn drive that enabled him to keep working insisted that everyone who worked for him also work almost without ceasing, and it was probably responsible for his outspoken criticism of Gid's occasional lapses into laziness or reluctance and of Johnny's irresponsible indolence. His father's laconic perceptions about Gid's feelings for Molly often bewildered and embarrassed Gid. Mr. Fry knew, for instance, that the reason for Gid's haste to go to the election station was to keep "Johnny from getting in Miss Molly's pants"¹⁴ and that his later moods were due to Molly's unwillingness to marry Gid. Quite generous with advice to Gid, Mr. Fry, like the old-time cowboy, frequently expressed himself through

¹³Ibid., p. 107 and E. C. ("Teddy Blue") Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher, 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 232.

¹⁴McMurtry, Leaving Cheyene, p. 11. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

concise aphorisms. Molly had married worthless Eddie, and just before Mr. Fry died he consoled Gid with the words, "a woman's love is like the morning dew, it's just as apt to settle on a horse turd as it is on a rose (p. 107)." His sense of humor, displayed frequently in his salty remarks, was especially seen when he supported Gid and Johnny in a dispute with Molly's father Mr. Taylor over a coyote they had roped and that he had claimed as his own personal coyote. Mr. Fry pointed out his brand on the coyote's ear, calling Taylor's bluff, surprising the boys, and making three dollars by selling it to Mr. Taylor (pp. 40-41). He was again generous to Gid when he didn't scold his son or even comment on the fact that Gid had lost money in trying to deal with some slick cattle buyers in Fort Worth (p. 64). And although he was not consistent in his gruffness, neither was he demonstrative in his affection.

Mr. Fry, like the old-time cowboy, lived most of his life without a woman, his wife having died much earlier. His attitude toward women and marriage was also consistent with cowboy convictions. He obviously appreciated Molly, treating her well, complimenting her, and telling her that if he were "just ten years younger" Gid and Johnny would have to suffer (p. 175). But his regard for her notwithstanding, he was not so romantic as many of the earlier cowboys in their idealization of women. He advised Gid not to marry Molly at all nor anybody else until he was forty or fifty so he could use good judgment and marry a rich widow. He said, "A woman is a wonderful thing, goddamn them, but a man oughtn't to marry one unless he just absolutely has to have some kids. There's no other excuse (p. 70)." He also told Gid, "If I was young agin, I'd probably mess up even worse than I did," a pessimistic statement that saddens Gid (p. 71). His skeptical practicality is also evident in his

attitudes toward general living and working; he called himself a taker rather than a giver (pp. 174-175). Mr. Fry had always worked hard and he advised Gid to do the same, commenting that life was not for enjoyment and that a person should fight it. A man had to be able to do many different kinds of things to run a ranch, including the dull and degrading plow work, he told Gid. He was proud of the land he acquired and the ranch he had built, and he contradicted Gid's protests by saying that he ought to try for something big and profitable since being poor had no advantages. His pride in being a cattleman prompted him to note that Gid himself would never be happy as an ordinary cowboy working for someone else (pp. 25-27). His personal stubbornness made him successful, and the ranch was a comfort and satisfaction to him in the end. As salty and realistic as Mr. Fry was, Gid saw him after his death in mythical terms in connection with his land and his work, reminiscent of Lonnie's vision of his grandfather.

In September, after he [Johnny] was back, we had a kind of little funeral ourselves: we took Dad's old white saddlehorse that he called Snowman out on the hill and let him loose in the pasture; nobody ever rode him agin. We left Dad's saddle hanging in the harness shed. Sometimes when I'm doing the chores early in the mornings, I wonder if Dad and that old pony aren't still out there, maybe, slipping around through the misty pastures and checking up on the new calves (pp. 108-109).

So, Mr. Fry adds a measure of realism to the myth of the horseman seen in McMurtry's cattleman prototypes.

His son Gid, in many ways a reflection of his father, became a successful cattleman. But his character lacks the mythical proportions drawn for Homer Bannon and Mr. Fry. Covering a life span from the turn of the century to the 1960's, Gid encountered more of the evolution in the cowboy's life than his father saw, and he adapted to these changes perhaps more readily than Homer did. The adaptation was not easy or complete,

however, and his problems were complicated by the strife between duty and desire, a conflict which best represents his character. Because Gid's personal struggles are emphasized, his cattleman stature is not glorified. But unlike Homer and his father, he managed to die working, almost quixotically, fighting and fixing a windmill that did not need immediate repair, perhaps the same one his father asked him to take care of years earlier in his suicide note, and perhaps a broad symbol of his work and way of life.

In his attitudes toward work Gid is little different from his predecessors. The stubbornness that made them all successful is apparent in Gid's relentlessness. He was so determined to be active that as an old man he ran off from the hospital and started doing heavy work long before he was supposed to do any work at all (pp. 236-238). The inability to sit and relax that Molly noted in Gid extended to his demands on others like Johnny, who had a difficult time keeping up with his employer and his lists of things to do. Like other cattlemen, too, he was a horseman. On a cowboying trip to the Panhandle with Johnny, when they were younger men, Gid rode and broke eighteen wild horses in one day, soon returning home partly because he didn't make enough money (p. 93). Although he had the cowboy's typical contempt for farming or walking work, he was practical enough to plow the fields when his father told him to and later to fix fences, milk cows, and do other chores for himself and for Molly that many cowboys might have found demeaning.

Gid's practicality was a partner to his ambition. After he acquired several more sections of land, something which Gid truly enjoyed, Johnny said that Gid was "plain land-crazy (p. 138)." This attraction to the land was probably the most important factor influencing Gid's life. His

feeling for it was more than the bite of "the land bug"; he felt his land was as permanent as Molly, and he recognized that he could not leave it or sell it because he was so "tied up" with it that he felt that what happened to Archer County happened to him, even if he were not there and even if the county "might not be very nice and the people might be ornery (pp. 93-94, 129, 133)." His love for the land was what kept him at home and made him a cattleman. When he made a cattle-buying expedition to Fort Worth alone as a young man, he already recognized the ambition within himself.

Watching them big operators made an impression on me
I guess it was independence Dad had probably been
right about me. Johnny, he could go off and cowboy if he
wanted to; I might enjoy going along for a while, but it
just wouldn't suit me for long. I wanted to amount to what
all them big boys amounted to (p. 60).

In later life Gid was proud of his accomplishments and pleased that he had something to show for his hard work, unlike Johnny. But Gid's achievements as an ideal cattleman had a certain emptiness about them. After Gid's death Johnny had an imaginary conversation with Gid about who accomplished more and was more satisfied with his life. Gid replied in the fantasy that neither was satisfied since neither married Molly (p. 252).

And indeed, most of Gid's difficulties were caused by entangled personal relationships. He did not seem to loosen his reins on himself until the last part of his life when he teased Johnny about getting old and told long-winded stories about past incidents. But what he lacked in sense of humor, he compensated for in generosity, consideration, loyalty, and responsibility to others. With Johnny, for example, he had an ideal friendship, one that lasted a lifetime. They were loyal to each other as friends and as employer-employee, despite the fact that they loved and shared Molly. Willingly sharing a woman with a best friend would be

uncommon in any age, but their loyalty to each other is reminiscent of the fidelity demonstrated among the old-time cowboys. Gid was happier when Johnny was around, even though they frequently criticized each other. Even from before the time that Gid gave Johnny an expensive saddle for staying with him at a hospital while he recovered from a social disease, to the time when Johnny was driving the dying Gid to the hospital, they had a close relationship. Gid even denied himself a permanent relationship with Molly partially because of his regard for Johnny. And his loyalty and thoughtfulness were extended to others. He looked after Molly, helping with chores whenever he could. It was also his sense of responsibility that brought him back from the Panhandle to help his father with the ranch and that kept him from divorcing his wife Mabel or living with Molly.

It is Gid's attitude toward women and his code of morality that most distinguishes him from his father and Homer Bannon. While Homer's attitudes toward women are hardly developed (which is appropriate since the true cowboy was not much concerned with them) and while Mr. Fry saw a woman only as a necessary evil, Gideon Fry was committed to a woman with a fierce devotion that was thwarted only by his own moral code. Before and after their respective marriages he repeatedly declared his love for Molly, slept with her, and enjoyed her, while he was still occasionally shocked by her lack of concern about the rightness of things. Earlier he believed that whoever slept with Molly first should marry her, and he especially wanted to marry her himself because she "couldn't go running around single much longer, that was for sure," after she told him she would not marry until she had to because of a baby (pp. 31, 51, 56). Gid's moral certainty was confusing both to Johnny and Molly, as he told them, "There's a right way and a wrong." Johnny replied, "And you're the only man alive that can tell

them apart Or maybe just the only one that bothers to try (p. 240)."

Later, because his and Molly's son Jimmy, a homosexual, had been hurt by their relationship, Gid told Molly that their sexual relationship was over, and Molly said, "Gid kept his word. I knew he would. He never loosened the reins on himself agin (p. 187)." The moral conflict between duty and desire prevented Gid from loving Molly "whole hog" as she put it, and his love for her surely made his marriage difficult. But Gid and Mabel would have had problems even if there had been no Molly. He picked Mabel because she was available and he was lonesome after his father's death. He had misjudged Mabel in the first place as someone who would be so grateful just to receive a marriage proposal that she would be eager to please. It turned out that she not only had a high opinion of herself but also she was selfish and demanding, qualities that made Gid's life even unhappier (p. 113). Molly observed the heart of Gid's struggle. "With Gid it was sometimes awful hard because Gid was too honest; he never would fool himself or let nobody else fool him, even if it was for his own good (p. 146)." Like a true cowboy though, he remained polite and gentlemanly although he had trouble understanding and dealing with his women.

Gid adds several aspects to the evolutionary picture of the cattleman-cowboy through differences in his personal characteristics and in the external changes he weathers. Superficially, although he was still a skillful horseman, he adapted to twentieth-century technology by buying and using cars and pickup trucks, which he could barely operate. At Mabel's encouragement they had even left the old Fry place and moved to town to live in a big, new brick house on what was commonly called Silk Stocking Avenue or Mortgage Row, as Gid called it (p. 176). Gid and Johnny observed and criticized other changes in their surroundings. They agreed that

television got the picture show business because "they quit making good shows," and they both hated the drive-in restaurants and jukeboxes that had sprung up near their domino parlor (p. 219). They were even more dismayed that blister bugs, mesquite, and the government were taking over the country. This typical suspicion of government is partly due to the cowboy scorn they had for Gid's brother-in-law Willy, a politician. Gid commented on all these conditions when he said, "Ten more years like this and it will strain a man to make an honest living in this county (p. 197)."

The internal changes or personal characteristics are perhaps more important in viewing Gid as a part of the evolution of the twentieth-century cowboy. Characteristic of the mellowing softness that had crept under his tough cowman hide was his promise to Mabel to take their granddaughter Susie to see Snow White and to have a pair of boots made for her out of soft javelina skin so they would not hurt her feet (p. 198). His physical softening, although expected of old age, was emphasized to Johnny when Gid, who had once ridden eighteen wild horses in one day and who looked down on people who owned hounds or goats, fell off a goat he was trying to hold down (p. 207). Another important aspect in the picture is his emotional involvement with Molly. However typical he may have been in his moral code, his stoic self-denial, or his ineptitude in handling women, he was different from Homer and his father in his emotional need for and commitment to a woman, something apparently rare in the old-time cowboy.

A conflict between duty and desire that is equal or superior to that seen in his love for Molly is Gid's struggle between freedom and responsibility. Gid and Johnny frequently talked of going to the Panhandle and working for the JA's or the Matadors, and they both briefly experienced

the adventure of being old-time cowboys and mythological drifters. But Gid felt tied to the land, and in spite of his pride, frequently envied Johnny's freedom. The quixotic allusions throughout Leaving Cheyenne emphasize the poignance expressed through Don Quixote's and Gid's commitment to ways of life that were dying, and both books provoke gentle satire on those ways of life. As horsemen they began their mythological adventures: Don Quixote on a bony nag and Gid on horses and in trucks. Both were respected and stubborn gentlemen and adventurers whose friends tried vainly to keep at home to recover from illnesses or injuries. One of Don Quixote's misadventures occurred as he attacked and scattered a herd of sheep, whereas Gid's nemesis was scattering a herd of goats when his pickup tore up a fence. Don Quixote dedicated his quests to, and did penance in fasting for, the honor of Dulcinea, a peasant wench who was held in low regard by most of the populace. Gid's chivalry and penance was a tribute to the common but unconventional Molly. Don Quixote de la Mancha finally renounced knight-errantry without realizing that he, too, had been a romantic and chivalric gentleman in his high-minded and noble quests. Gid, too, lived according to the guidelines of the myth, and he, too, came close to a renunciation of that romantic way of life after he was mortally injured in fighting the windmill for a reason he could not explain to Johnny. Although his mind was in both the past and the present as he lay dying, his nostalgia and his skepticism are both seen in his frequently uttered cowboy sentiment to Johnny, "Let's me and you go to the Panhandle. I'm tired of this country (p. 246)." Thus, one of McMurtry's cattlemen saw evolution and sadness in his way of life, "his blood's country and his heart's pastureland."

In Moving On, a later and more urban novel set in the 1970's, Larry McMurtry injects a passing reminder of the cattleman's day in the character of Roger Wagonner, the rancher who is the uncle of one of the major characters, Jim Carpenter. He is Gid's contemporary, but possibly because his background is not developed, he seems pale in the comparison. Generally, Roger seems quieter, less successful, and more acquiescent than the other more mythical cattlemen, but his characteristics and his essence are part of the cattleman tradition. Indeed, he could have been poured from the same mold as Homer, Mr. Fry, and Gid in his strength and physical endurance, taking care of his cattle and his chores as an old man. Jim's wife Patsy admired everything about Roger, who was tall, white-haired, masculine. And Roger clearly had affection for the Carpenters, showing them his relaxed hospitality several times and even driving to Houston in his old truck to visit Patsy and her new son Davey. He felt protective about them and worried about them in the dangerous city.¹⁵ Roger had been loyal to his wife in spite of her ceaseless criticism and their good-natured nightly arguments about the Bible, and he exhibited mild amusement when Patsy brought chaos to his orderly kitchen and routine.¹⁶ Like a true cowboy he berated his own worthlessness, telling Patsy of his wife:

One nice thing about a wife, she keeps a man reminded of how good for nothin' he is. Mary used to let me know her low opinion of me every morning and I worked like a dog all day hoping I could change it. Never did. She bawled me out the morning she went and had the car wreck.¹⁷

¹⁵Larry McMurtry, Moving On (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1970; Avon Books, 1971), pp. 385-386.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 48, 186-187.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 51.

Although Roger claimed to be poor and unsuccessful as a cattleman, his attitudes toward education, cities, other kinds of work, and his own work are similar to the other cattlemen's ideas. When his nephew Jim told him that he was going back to school, Roger, echoing the words and thoughts of McMurtry's Uncle Jeff, said that nothing could have made him go back to grade school, adding, "Folks in my day couldn't take school like you young folks can."¹⁸ Claiming his own ignorance, he also wondered why Jim would travel all those miles to take pictures of bronc riders at rodeos, especially since rodeo cowboys did not have good sense, a mild but typical sample of the practical cattleman's criticism of the lazy rodeo hand.¹⁹ His professional pride is evident in his attitude toward his land. He told Patsy that he wanted to own even more land, not the whole earth, just land in the Southwest, and since he had no children to leave it to, he wanted to leave it to the Carpenters, someone in the family.²⁰ He clearly belonged to the land. Although he was out of place and uncomfortable in Houston, he seemed happy and skillful on his own land. Patsy witnessed an intense scene that suggests that Roger had skill as a mythical horseman. She saw "in the clearest evening sunlight, vivid and splendid as some great race in a movie, . . ." Roger on a red horse chasing a red cow. "Red cow and red horse converged toward each other, the red horse racing like a horse in myth, one red flowing line from neck to tail."²¹

¹⁸Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 59, and McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 60.

²⁰McMurtry, Moving On, pp. 494, 497.

²¹Ibid., p. 495.

Although he did not rage in his fights with the mesquite and the bankbook, he did quietly struggle in the tradition of the cattleman until his death.

McMurtry's The Last Picture Show, set in a small, dying town in West Texas, has no characters that are literal cowboys. Several are affected by the frontier ethic though, and Sam the Lion was even once a rancher. Although he moved from the ranch and his work to town where he owned the cafe, pool hall, and picture show, he still personified some of the cowboy's or cattleman's ideals. Like the other McMurtry cattlemen who lost some of their health and vitality, Sam the Lion resented getting old more than anything else, and he admitted being sentimental about the old times when he still did crazy things.²² Some of those crazy things were inspired by the woman he loved and appreciated, Lois Farrow, the richest, most attractive, and most vital woman in the town, and he never regretted his feelings and experiences with her. His marriage was hardly noted, except that his wife had gone crazy after the deaths of their three sons. Sam too was deeply affected by this personal loss; he had quit being a hell-raising cowboy, he drank a great deal, he quit the church, and he began looking after all the boys in town better than a father would.²³ However, the most important effect of the tragedies was the forced and symbolic evolution away from his original work. His first son was killed as he and his father were trying to drive a herd of yearlings across a swollen

²²Larry McMurtry, The Last Picture Show (New York: Dial Press, 1966; Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 123.

²³Ibid., p. 8.

river, and he was knocked from his horse and drowned. Sam then went into the oil business, which he left when his second son died in a fifty-foot fall off a derrick during a gas explosion. The transformation from country to town was complete when he put in the first Ford agency in Thalia only to have his last son run over by a deputy sheriff.²⁴ Even though Sam stayed in town then for the remainder of his life, there was something about him that made Sonny Crawford, one of the stray boys Sam befriended, think of him on the flats of the Pecos after his death rather than in Thalia, and thoughts of Sam the Lion, the horsebreaker, brought tears to Sonny's eyes.²⁵ In Sam the Lion some of the evolutionary forces and stages in the cattle country can be seen.

The evolution of the cowboy and the cattle industry can perhaps be seen better in another character from Moving On, Eleanor Guthrie. She is a representative of what were essentially masculine mores and enterprises, saying to Jim, "It's just my bad luck to be the last cattle queen."²⁶ She does not acquire masculine traits to become an abominable (to McMurtry) cowgirl, but she does successfully manage and perpetuate a cattle kingdom while pursuing a personal life characterized by feminine charm. Visitors to her ranch made both Eleanor and her cowboys uncomfortable because the ranch was a place to work, not to entertain.²⁷ Although a traditional cattleman in her attitudes toward work and land ownership,

²⁴Ibid., p. 7.

²⁵Ibid., p. 144.

²⁶McMurtry, Moving On, p. 109.

²⁷Ibid., p. 500.

she was chiefly a modern corruption or mutataion of the cattleman prototype in that she was female, she did no work herself, she took pills, she read urban fashion magazines and traveled widely, and she was mainly concerned with Sonny Shanks, "World Champion Cowboy." The fact that Eleanor was devoted, in her way, to a rodeo cowboy, even a world's champion, illustrates the distance that the cowboy has covered in his evolution as a cattleman.

In Larry McMurtry's latest novel, All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers, Danny Deck's Uncle Laredo is more than a final stage in the evolution of the cowboy; he is a caricature of the cattleman, an exaggerated perversion of the myth. Uncle Laredo was short in stature and in character, unlike most of McMurtry's cattlemen, and Danny observed that in his fiercer moods his uncle resembled Yosemite Sam, a cartoon figure.²⁸ He was even more durable than the other cattlemen, at ninety-two years of age still possessing his strength, his freckles, his clear, mean eyes, and all his teeth.²⁹ Nearly every physical aspect of his ranch is a parody of ranch life. The starving Mexicans who are his cowboys are such poor workers and ropers that they resort to throwing rocks at a sick goat they were supposed to capture for Uncle Laredo's supper, and the craziest cowboy, Antonio, has an insane passion for holes. Uncle Laredo hated cattle, so he had starving guineas, goats, camels, pigs, turkeys, antelope, and buffalo for his cowboys to tend. His grotesque ranch house reminded Danny of a black Russian

²⁸Larry McMurtry, All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972; Pocket Books, 1973), p. 154.

²⁹Ibid., p. 152.

church, and its turrets, marble bathtubs full of sand, and its ruined orchestra instruments once belonged to an Englishman who had flings with Mohammedanism and a Mexican woman. Incongruously stacked near the windmill were two or three hundred manhole covers, the only purpose for which seemed to be to serve as seats in Uncle Laredo's jeep. The ranch was appropriately named The Hacienda of the Bitter Waters.³⁰

Uncle Laredo's social (or antisocial) behavior and attitudes are as satirical in aspect as the physical characteristics of the ranch. He and his cook Lorenzo carped continuously at each other about who was older and who would last longer.³¹ Possessing the cowboy's aversion to marriage to an exaggerated degree, Uncle Laredo remained a bachelor for eighty-nine years, and then he married someone only to cook for him, a wooden woman who lived at a separate ranch and seemed destined to outlast both Uncle Laredo and Lorenzo. He was so mean that he ran over several of her goats, reluctantly paid for them at gunpoint and her insistence, and appropriated several more for himself on his way home; and his reputation for meanness was equalled only by his reputation as a poker player.³² Significantly, Uncle Laredo was obsessed with last things, a stuffed wolf that was the last in the Pecos county, and his dead horse that was the last he would ever ride. He was not even a horseman; since El Caballo died, he would ride only his jeep and camels.³³ Of greatest significance perhaps is

³⁰Ibid., pp. 153-156, 158.

³¹Ibid., p. 156.

³²Ibid., pp. 162, 165-167.

³³Ibid., pp. 156-157

Uncle Laredo's relationship to the land, so important in a true cattleman's existence. Danny observed that his uncle had dug over three hundred corner postholes all over the ranch because he hated the earth and wanted to scar it even if he could not beat it.³⁴ It is ironic that a man who had fought with the Seventh Cavalry at Wounded Knee, with the Texas Rangers, and with Zapata and Villa could behave so meanly as a citizen and cattleman. It is perhaps even more ironic that Danny is reminded of a Charles Goodnight story when he saw Uncle Laredo's buffalo herd since there was such a distance between the real and mythical Charles Goodnight and the real and caricatured Uncle Laredo. The story of Charles Goodnight giving some straggling Indians a buffalo, which they ran down and killed in front of his house, had haunted Danny as a significant story.

To me it was the true end of the West. A few sad old Indians, on sad skinny ponies, wearing rags and scraps of white man's clothes and carrying old lances with a few pathetic feathers dangling from them, begging the Old Man of the West for a buffalo, one buffalo of the millions it had once been theirs to hunt.³⁵

Thus, in his cattlemen characters Larry McMurtry covers the distance from the times and stature of Charles Goodnight, Homer Bannon, Mr. Fry, Gid, and Roger Waggoner to the times and stature of Sam the Lion, Eleanor Guthrie, and Uncle Laredo. The cattlemen who were committed to the old traditions were also committed to the land, their work, and the values of hard work and personal integrity. Dobie described this romantic version of the cowboy in Cow People:

³⁴Ibid., p. 152.

³⁵Ibid., p. 162.

Men you could tie to, honest, generous, open-natured, decent in all ways, unfailingly self-reliant, dependable wherever they went, represented the entire cattle country the word of a representative cowman has always been as good as his bond.³⁶

And indeed, many of McMurtry's cattlemen possessed some of these traits. They were strong and self-reliant, most of them not even expressing interest or concern with religion. They loved their land and their work. They were even moral for the most part. But even the characters closest to the archetype possessed flaws such as harshness, intolerance, narrowness, and an emotional sterility that reinforced their mythical masculinity. McMurtry specifies some of the technological and social changes of the twentieth century acting on the cattlemen's lives and carrying them from their land, their work, and their values. He would probably agree with Daniel G. Moore in Log of a Twentieth Century Cowboy that the changes have diminished the cattleman, who is not so helpful to his neighbor, not so friendly to strangers, and not so active in doing his own work as he once was.

I see no bright future in our Western country for the cowman of modern time. For a few more years he may survive, even make more money, but he has lost something never to be regained: the color, the romance and the satisfaction of making a hand.³⁷

McMurtry pays tribute to the horseman that has passed and criticizes, not only the problems and deficiencies of even the mythical horseman, but also of the evolution that has taken place in the cattleman's world.

³⁶Dobie, Cow People, p. 273.

³⁷Daniel G. Moore, Log of a Twentieth Century Cowboy (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1965), p. 207.

Chapter III

The Cowhand

Both the cattleman and the cowhand are products of the nineteenth century, sharing a dedication to their work with cattle and also sharing some attitudes and behavioral characteristics. Both are inveterate horsemen; their pride in their horsemanship skills is intricately and symbolically woven into their pride in their mutual occupation. They are men of courage, action, and honor, having little regard for government, religion, domesticity, or the intangible. Significantly, they are associated with what Theodore Roosevelt described as their "stern, manly qualities."¹

Their differences, however, warrant separate consideration. Many of the distinctions between cattlemen and cowhands are due to their particular jobs or roles within the cattle industry. The cowboys who chose to become cattlemen had personal characteristics that were different from those of ordinary cowboys, and these traits were intensified and reinforced by the cattleman role they assumed. Because cattleman-cowboys had more personal ambition than the cowhand-cowboys, they turned their work into profit: more cattle and, finally, land. Some cowhands, like Teddy Blue Abbott, were encouraged by their employers to start herds of their own; others whose bosses were not so generous, acquired their cattle illegally. But regardless of how the cowhand became a cattleman, the results were greater responsibilities and an increasing sense of responsibility, greater profits and increasing ambition, greater domesticity and increasing

¹Lon Tinkle and Allen Maxwell, editors, The Cowboy Reader (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), p. 116.

immobility, and greater ties to the land and increasing restrictions on his freedom. And in spite of the disadvantages of his role, the cattlemen generally felt somewhat superior to the ordinary cowhand.

The cowhand, however, was not concerned with status or profit or the future. Instead, he was interested in the present, doing his work well and making enough money to enjoy his spare time. He did not want family or financial entanglements to hamper his independence, always retaining the option of riding off into the sunset whenever his surroundings displeased him or threatened to "rein him in too tight." Consequently, fewer of the old-time values had time to grow on him, and he developed according to individual whim within the mythology of the romantic cowboy drifter, a legend that developed during the wildness of the trail-driving days along with the companion horseman myth of the romantic cattle baron. In his rejection of many of the cattlemen's or society's values, the cowhand felt morally inferior to the cattlemen; he could not relinquish his way of life, but he admired the qualities and values of the cattlemen. He may not have even been aware that the cattlemen of his day, as well as the wishful observers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, envied and desired the cowboy's freedom.

In the American imagination and in literature it is this part of the horseman myth that is most fondly idealized. Larry McMurtry states,

". . . the drifter has always been glorified at the direct expense of the settler. The drifter-figure has come to represent for us all that was romantic and free about the West, the settler all that is bourgeois, stable and dull."²

²Larry McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers and Groupies: A Requiem for a Rodeo," New York, November 27, 1972, pp. 60-61.

In spite of the cowboy's wild individualism, cowhands are alike in many of their characteristics. Generally they are noisy, fun-loving, hard-working, anti-intellectual, durable, and proud of their work, yet complaining of the accompanying hardships. In addition to these traditional characteristics, Larry McMurtry's cowhands show little love for the land, little sense of responsibility, and little concern for moral values. These traits show the cowhand to be further from the old-time cowboy in the evolutionary process than the cattleman, and the cowhand's diminished characteristics are a result of the split nature of the original cowboy prototypes and of the corrupting influence of the twentieth century.

Some of these influences of the twentieth century have taken him off his horse and put him in someone else's pickup and have taken him off the trail and put him on the road in search of work. The end of the trail drives in the last years of the nineteenth century was the beginning of this evolutionary process.

. . . its end was the end of a splendid chapter in the history of the cattle industry, the end of an economic system and the end of the cowboy as a craftsman and gentleman. Thereafter he was merely an employee of a corporation operating for profit.³

No one has been more aware of the cowboy's demise than the cowboy himself.

One cowboy song expresses his lament for the past.

Backward turn backward oh Time with your wheel,
Aeroplanes, wagons and automobiles.
Dress me once more in sombrero and flaps,
Spurs, flannel shirt and slicker and chaps.

³Douglas Branch, The Cowboy and His Interpreters, introduction by Harry Sinclair Drago (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 69.

Put a six shooter or two in my hand,
 Show me a yearling to rope and to brand,
 Out where the sage-brush is dusty and gray,
 Make me a cowboy again for a day.⁴

The cowhand, then, although different from the cattleman in some respects, is similar to the cattleman in that he personifies, perhaps even more vividly, the changes which time brought to the cattle country.

In Leaving Cheyenne Johnny McCloud, Gid Fry's employee and lifetime friend, is closer to the original cowboy archetype than any of Larry McMurtry's other cowboy characters. Johnny McCloud made no major compromises in his job and only a few minor concessions to external changes of the twentieth century. Like Gid, he adapted to the pickup without mastering it. And also like Gid, he criticized and raved at some of the corruptions of his beloved times past. But unlike Gid, Johnny was basically unaffected and unchanged by the evolution. Like the old-time cowboy, he always believed that the work of the cowhand was the best life he could have chosen for himself, a life that was superior to the cattleman's. Johnny repeatedly told Gid that he wanted only to be a cowboy and that he did not want to be a rancher because of the worries it brought, even though Gid thought that Johnny's working for wages was a disgrace. "But I got my pleasure out of doing what I wanted to, not out of owning no damn mesquite and prickly pear. I told him that a hundred times, but he never did understand it." ⁵ In trying to inspire his son, Gid's

⁴Jules Verne Allen, Cowboy Lore (San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1971), pp. 23-24.

⁵Larry McMurtry, Leaving Cheyenne (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Popular Library, n.d.), p. 194. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

father also criticized and evaluated Johnny as a cowhand,

He's a good cowhand and he ain't scared of nothing, I'll admit that. But that's the limitation of him, right there. He'll never be nothing but a damn good cowhand. When he dies he'll own just what he's got on and what he's inherited. And that saddle you gave him, if he don't lose it in a poker game first. He'll fiddle around his whole life working for wages, and never accomplish a damn thing (p. 26).

Mr. Fry's prediction and analysis turned out to be true; Johnny owned little except the land and pickup that Gid willed to him. But Johnny retained the old-time cowboy's pride in his role as a cowhand.

In addition to a general pride in his role and work, Johnny also had a special pride, perhaps overblown, in specific skills connected with his work as a horseman. But, a true cowboy, he had an intense aversion to farm work. The few times he was forced to plow or work with a harvest, his dignity was insulted by this "clodhopper work" (p. 20). In fact, any work that was not done on horseback was demeaning and difficult for Johnny. He was too finicky to milk the cows for Molly, even though he ordinarily liked to help her in a general way (p. 142). Even as an old man Johnny was not interested or skillful in working with tools when Gid needed help with the windmill (p. 252). When Johnny was supposed to help with butchering hogs, Gid observed, "When you took Johnny off of his horse he was the worst hand in the world (p. 84)." He was so dedicated (or limited) to cowhand work that he did not want to practice the specialty of breaking a horse, saying, "Hell no, I ain't no damn bronc rider I'm a cowboy. I like to ride a horse that already knows something, so I can get work done (p. 91)."

His other work characteristics were also pure cowboy. Gid could always rely on Johnny's loyalty, a traditional virtue with the old-time cowboys on trail drives and spreads. Johnny gave up his roaming in order

to help Gid for forty years. When Gid's politician brother-in-law Willy tried to get rid of Johnny while Gid was in the hospital, Johnny told Gid that they had been friends for sixty-five years and that nobody could run him off. And in order to protect Gid's interests, Johnny got rid of Willy by threatening to throw screwworm dope on him (pp. 229, 231). Even after Gid's death, Johnny tried to figure out what work Gid would want him to finish (p. 247). But because he was a true cowboy, he also did some good-natured griping about his work, without feeling sorry for himself. In addition to his complaints about having to do some "clod-hopper work," Johnny also complained about Gid's tightness with money and his endless lists of chores for him to do (pp. 228-229). However, not even a broken leg kept Johnny from his work as a loyal cowhand.

The often-repeated phrase, "I'm a cowboy," which accompanied Johnny's statements about his work, is also a key to his social behavior and his mental attitudes. Taking his social cues from the tradition of the trailhand, Johnny, too, was wild, free, rebellious, and fun-loving. His sense of humor sometimes showed itself in telling stories, in enjoying sex, or in playing practical jokes, such as throwing a shock of oats and a dead snake up at Gid (pp. 21, 23, 174). Some of the most humorous parts of Leaving Cheyenne occurred as Johnny and Gid as old men listened to each other's old stories and exchanged comments and insults, proof that Johnny's sense of humor had lasted a lifetime. Also typical of a cowboy, his behavior was characterized by wildness and recklessness, especially when he was young. Drinking seemed to be the starting place for his wilder exploits: once he was jailed for insulting a deputy; once he was jailed for fighting worthless Eddie at a dance and using nasty language in the sheriff's presence; and several times he lost his money in the pursuit of "lady

luck" and other ladies (pp. 20, 81-83, 89-90). Gid thought that hard work would have matured Johnny; "I thought working up on the big ranches might have given Johnny a little responsibility, but it never. He was just as wild and crazy as he'd always been (p. 37)." His characteristic wildness was a partner to his rebelliousness and independence, essential qualities for a cowboy. Not only did he resent taking instructions from a foreman on a harvest job and nagging from his father, but he also refused to take orders from Willy or Gid's wife, directions which he once challenged with the words, "You can take your orders and put them where the monkey put the peanut (pp. 22, 232)." Orders and pressures made him wander off into different areas to work as a cowboy when he was young and made him irritable and irreverent when he was older.

Johnny also adhered to the cowboy's social code in his ideas about masculinity, family responsibility, and women. Although he never intended to marry Molly, he loved her in his way, and he also loved their son Joe. He enjoyed visiting them whenever he could and talking to Joe about horses, baseball, and rodeos, and he was proud of his son, who was eventually killed in World War II (p. 140). He even encouraged Joe to defy his mother when she asked him to hoe some weeds when he was riding his stick horse, and Joe told her in typical cowboy terms, "I'm riding. Cowboys don't hoe (p. 142)." And even though he loved them, he did not commit himself to them or to family responsibility. Molly observed, "If there was ever a bachelor, it was Johnny McCloud (p. 139)." His cowboy characteristic of being responsibility-shy was a part of all his social behavior; he had the same boyish quality that McMurtry admired and noted in his own Uncle Johnny in his eighties. Molly too liked Johnny's talent

for enjoying himself.

He tickled me. I couldn't help loving Johnny, even when I wasn't much in the mood for him. Even when he was acting the soberest there was something about him that was like a boy; he never lost it, and it was one of the nicest things about him; when he was around I could have a boy and a man in the same person (p. 138).

The carefree nature seen in Johnny's behavior was an essential part of his mental attitudes. Because he refused to worry and assume responsibility, he had no internal conflicts and was not so complex as his cattleman friend, Gid. Both were heirs to a nineteenth-century cowboy mythology, but McMurtry drew heavily from the traditions of the romantic trailhand drifter for Johnny's cowboy attitudes. In addition to his occupation and personal loyalty to Gid, Johnny also had a proper amount of sentiment for the old days. The closing passage of Leaving Cheyenne has Johnny fondly and delightedly remembering the time in their youth when he got to be with Molly at the schoolhouse on election day and had later sent someone back to prevent Gid from courting Molly, who was "sitting in her blue and white dress on the schoolhouse steps (p. 253)." An even more typical cowboy attitude is Johnny's impatience with the intangible or philosophical. He told Molly that he would not worry about the war. "When the Japs or the Germans cross the county line, then I'll be interested (p. 143)." He had a general scorn for government and specific scorn for politicians, especially Gid's brother-in-law Willy, who was a state representative and "a fat-ass politician if there ever was one (p. 229)."

I wish there was some way to run him out of the country That is the trouble with democracy. You got to wait around and vote, and then the people are so stupid they put the scroungy sonsofbitches back in office (p. 238).

In keeping with the Western heroic ethos, however, he did not complain that his son was fighting in the army, saying that he would "rather have a dead hero for a son than a live coward (p. 140)." In some of his sentiments, then, Johnny is close to the nineteenth-century cowboy.

In his morals and values, however, he differs from the example of the nineteenth-century cattleman, the cowboy group to whom McMurtry attributes the greatest number of original cowboy values and realistic traits. The old-time cowboy rejected middle-class conventions yet felt ashamed of his behavior; he admired good men and was awed by good women. Johnny, however, showed no concern for the good or bad of people or the right or wrong of issues. Gid had quit coming to see Molly because he felt their relationship was wrong, and Molly asked Johnny if he too felt his relationship with her was wrong. He replied, "Well, it's enjoyable I ain't gonna bother to look no farther than that." In explaining himself he continued, "I never lost a night's sleep in my life from being ashamed, and I don't intend to start (p. 189)." He valued his happiness and freedom above everything else, and moral reflection could only be troublesome or unimportant for him.

The characteristic trait of being uncommitted and unattached, though fairly typical of a nineteenth century cowhand, is what most distinguished Johnny from the cattleman and his values and traditions. The only thing that prevented Johnny from wandering like his cowboy prototype was his loyalty to Gid. He had no attachment to the land in general or to Texas in particular. Gid observed, "He didn't feel like he belonged to any certain place and I did . . . me and him was a lot different (p. 93)." When Gid wanted to quit cowboying in the Panhandle, Johnny replied, "There ain't as much at home for me as there is for

you This here's the life for me (p. 94)." Earlier he advised Gid of his philosophy.

"What you ought to do," he [Johnny] said, "is to forget all that ranching. And forget about marrying, too. Then one of these days we could go up on the plains and really have us a time. When the ranch gets to be yours, you can sell it and not have it worrying you all your life."

"That's just like you." I [Gid] said, "You ain't got no more responsibility than a monkey. That ain't no way to amount to nothing."

"Responsibility ain't no valuable thing to have necessarily," he said. "Listen at you. It depends on what you want to amount to. I want to amount to a good cowboy (pp. 53-54)."

In order to be a good cowboy Johnny wanted to leave Archer County, for the plains or the Panhandle to do "some real cowboying" for one of the big ranches like the JA or the Matador, outfits that are almost legendary in cattle history (pp. 22, 90). He, like the nineteenth-century cowboy, was proud of his freedom as a cowhand, saying, "Boy, I'm glad I ain't no farmer. There ain't nothing that can compare with a cowboy's life, if you ask me. You don't have to worry about a damn thing (p. 53)." It is this carefree attitude that Gid noted in Johnny as a horseman in the tradition of the romantic drifter, observing that "him and old Jack-a-Diamonds went off along the Ridge west in a long easy lope, neither one of them carrying a care in the world (p. 128)."

In Horseman Pass By Jesse Logan is another example of the cowhand-drifter. However, he represents a later phase of the cowboy's evolution, a stage characterized by a loss of some of the more glorified cowboy traits and an increase in tribulations for the cowboy attempting to live by the traditions of the past. Like Johnny, Jesse valued his freedom as a cowhand, but unlike Johnny, he found much about his life to regret and criticize. As a younger and more realistically drawn character, Jesse also compromised with the twentieth century more than his romantic counter

part did. Although Jesse could and did ride a horse, he did not own one, and he was not unduly proud of his skills and role as a horseman; he even effected his drifting by hitchhiking in trucks. And perhaps as significant as this departure from the master symbol of the horseman is Jesse's sadness and recognition that his life as a cowboy was empty and unrewarding, a sentiment abhorrent to the mythological cowboy of an earlier time.

In his work habits and fortunes Jesse was not remarkably different from earlier cowboys. Like those cowboys, Jesse worked hard, doing more than was required of him. Once when Homer Bannon told him that he could sleep a little later the next day since there was no urgent work to be done, Jesse replied that he might get up and work a colt: "I couldn't sleep late if you paid me to."⁶ Even his physical appearance was true to type and a testament to his tribulations as a cowboy. His worn clothes, his "thin, hungry-looking face," and his injured leg were standard cowboy characteristics, and Homer's grandson Lonnie observed, "As cowboys go, he was in good shape (pp. 17, 18, 13)." The bad luck and hard times he seemed to encounter ineluctably were occupational hazards and consequences of his transient life (pp. 11, 121). However, part of Jesse's mobility had been due to his earlier pursuit of rodeo life, a life which any true cattleman or cowhand from an earlier time might have found disgusting and demeaning for a real cowboy. Jesse admitted that even though rodeoing was work, it was not like plain cowboying, and in spite of his criticism of the rodeo life that kept a cowboy on the road and caused him injury, it was clear to Lonnie that Jesse had enjoyed the excitement (pp. 55, 78-

⁶Larry McMurtry, *Hud*, paperback ed. of *Horseman, Pass By* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961; Popular Library, n.d.), p. 18. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

79). Jesse tried to explain his mixed sentiments to Lonnie and Lonzo, who both envied his travel experience.

I just wonder, when it's all said and done . . . who ends up with the most in this scramble. Them that go in for big shows and big prizes and end up takin' a bustin', or them that plug along at what they can kinda handle. Home folks or show people. They's a lot a difference in 'em (p. 79).

He said that he had missed out on the benefits of both lives because of his "loose-horsing" (p. 79). And as a "loose-horse," Jesse had arrived at the ranch owning only a saddle and a few clothes in a paper sack; after working hard and enjoying few pleasures during his short term of employment, he had acquired nothing else and left the unlucky ranch, looking "shivery and shakey, like he'd just fallen in a cold winter river and pulled out to a place with no fire (p. 121)." Still, according to tradition, he continued to drift in search of a job and better luck.

Jesse's "loose-horse" social behavior was also similar to that of his prototype, who avoided ties and restraints caused by personal involvements with other people. Like other cowboys, Jesse was free to indulge frequently in drunkenness, a state which once caused him to fall off a horse at a rodeo and later to wreck the trailer he was driving, killing the valuable mare (p. 118). Even later he had a chance to redeem himself by riding the Bannons' horse in the local rodeo; but he again got drunk and wasted both the entry fee and his self-redemption (p. 118). Jesse did not have much of the redeeming quality of loyalty which counter-balanced the earlier cowboy's irresponsibility, but he did have a quality of perceptive sensitivity. He knew, for example, that Lonnie probably wished that he could be temporarily free of Lonzo and Jesse at the drive-in so that he could be with his friends who were riding around looking for something to do, and he told Lonnie to go ahead the next time (pp. 33-34). Later he tried to help Lonnie by giving him

some "don't-make-the-same-mistakes-I-made" advice (pp. 120-121). He was also perceptive enough to stay clear of Grandma, Halmea, or anybody else who might be out of sorts. So in spite of his irresponsibility, Jesse had enough sense and sensitivity to enable him to get along with just about anybody.

Jesse's behavior with women and his attitudes toward family and femininity were as traditional as any cowhand's; he wanted someone to care for him, but he did not want the entanglements that marriage or family ties might bring. He was polite to Grandma, but, like a true cowboy, he was not comfortable around women, and he told Lonnie, "I never could get along with old women (p. 14)." In response to the cowboy gallantry inside him, Jesse tried to prevent Hud's rape of Halmea, the Bannon's black cook and housekeeper, even though she was black and even though he probably knew he could not stop Hud and would have to suffer Hud's wrath (pp. 93-95). In spite of his gallantry, though, Jesse did not want to be married. Observing Hank Hutch, Homer Bannon's neighbor and occasional hired hand, Jesse was depressed at how hard Hank had to work just to support his family, and Jesse said,

That's a hell of a way to live.... I hate to see an old boy scratchin at two or three jobs thataway, never knowin' nothin' but work and want. I believe I'd just as soon throw a life away as work it out like he's doing. Hard on him an' hard on his kids and women folk. Makes me glad I ain't married. Least there's one worry I ain't got (p. 16).

But the fact that Jesse did not feel that he had been lucky enough for himself, much less a family, did not hamper his optimistic and perennial pursuit of women who were no threat to his bachelorhood. His optimism, however, was tempered by realism and even self-pity. While listening to the song "Fraulein," he told Lonnie, "Only reason I go to rodeos is to chase after the prettiest tail I can find, and I know beforehand I ain't

gonna catch that." He added, "Ain't no fraulein ever looked down on me Not unless it was to ask for money. Some fellers just belong in whorehouses, I don't know why (p. 120)." This self-evaluation and this sadness at feeling unloved was typical of the cowhands that preceded Jesse.

Most of Jesse's other mental attitudes were also characteristic of the nineteenth-century cowhand. Like Homer, Gid, and Johnny, he enjoyed reminiscing about his good times, even though his memorable past was not so glorious or authentic as that of earlier cowboys. However, telling Lonnie about his days of rodeoing, square dancing, and girl chasing seemed to deepen his sadness and weariness (p. 19). Jesse shared other cowboys' indifference to intangibles and hostility to anything that threatened an individual's self-reliance and independence. He advised Homer just to let the longhorns go back in the brush instead of destroying them to prevent the spread of disease, saying, "Then if the government wants 'em, let the government go find 'em (p. 45)." Jesse possessed another cowboy characteristic to an extreme; the occasional melancholy of the trailhand expressed in sad songs was a persistent and brooding lonesomeness, depression, dread, and disappointment expressed in Jesse's general air and in frequent self-pitying complaints. Lonnie repeatedly observed that Jesse was sad and strange, always feeling sorry for other people and sorrier for himself (pp. 17, 25, 32, 42, 44, 79). However, the intensity and quantity of his self-pity were not so typical of a cowboy's mental attitudes as were Jesse's other attitudes.

Also, there were both similarities and differences between a typical cowhand's values and Jesse's values. He was like Johnny and other cowboys in that he did not want to work himself to death, like Hank Hutch, even

though he did not mind working hard enough to do his job well. And like other cowhands, he placed a high value on personal freedom. He told Lonnie that when he was about nineteen, he had to help his father work a cotton patch next to the highway that ran to Fort Worth and Dallas and "no tellin' where-all."

I spent all my time following a couple a work mules around the field, and all day long folks would whiz by in their cars, going places I wanted to go. Don't think I wouldn't give that whole run-down piece a land to a jumped in one a them cars and gone whizzing by some other poor bastard that had to work. I never could stand to be cramped up after that. I hate to see anybody in a cramp (p. 34).

Although the desire for freedom was a characteristic of the mythological cowboy-drifter, Jesse's statement has the flavor of a twentieth-century rodeo cowboy in his attraction to the car and the road as symbols of freedom and in his distaste for ordinary "clodhopper" work and sympathetic condescension for those who carried it out. Another important value or attitude was Jesse's desire for roots, a piece of land to grow with and build on. He envied Homer's ranch and wished that he too had something he could call an accomplishment (pp. 18-19). Jesse advised Lonnie to settle in one place.

It don't hurt to take a little look around Just don't turn into an old loose horse like me. You're better off to stop somewhere, even if it ain't no paradise I guess I was too particular, for too long, what's wrong with me. I went all over this cow country, looking for the exact right place an' the exact right people, so once I got stopped I wouldn't have to be movin' agin, like my old man always done. But that's going at it wrong. I shoulda just set down an' made it right wherever the hell it was (pp. 120-121).

Like Johnny, most cowhands would have disavowed any desire to settle down in one place; but Jesse was different, reluctantly resigning himself to a life of drifting. When Jesse was forced to leave again after the destruction of Homer's herd and the termination of work,

Lonnie regretted that Jesse had to leave with nothing and had nowhere to go. But with typical cowboy stoicism Jesse replied, "Oh, I guess I'll get by It's hard times and dusty roads (p. 155)." This statement reveals the characteristics that distinguished Jesse from earlier cowhands, his self-pity and his reservations about his life as a cowboy. Basically, however, he still held the traditions of an earlier stage in the evolution of the cowboy.

In Horseman, Pass By two minor characters, Hank Hutch and Lonzo, possess additional cowhand characteristics and corruptions. Homer employed Lonzo even though Lonzo was not a good cowhand.

. . . he didn't know beans about cowboying, and didn't show much talent for learning. Hud said right off that Lonzo only knew how to talk and eat and fuck and fist-fight and chop cotton, and that the only thing he was a top hand at was eating (p. 26).

Lonzo also possessed a lusty, cowboy sense of humor and braggadocio that Jesse did not reveal. Most of his boasting dealt with his home state of Oklahoma and his own questionable abilities. Like most cowboys, Lonzo was relatively uneducated, but he did not bother to try to conceal his ignorance as he sang loudly while failing to keep up with the bouncing ball at a movie (p. 32). He also revealed a working cowboy's contempt for the phony movie cowboy when he criticized and laughed at a chubby Gene Autry and his silver mounted saddle as Autry disposed of bad men in the movie Streets of Laredo (p. 32). The self-indulgence and hedonism of the early cowboy was also evident in Lonzo's single-minded pursuit of physical pleasure.

He claimed the only thing he'd ever got enough of his whole life was, work, and that when it came to food or pussy or beer he always came out on the short end. He was easily satisfied though, and if he couldn't get any of those other things, he would settle for lots of sleep (p. 26).

Another typical mental attitude was his hostility to anything related to government, which he blamed for Homer's difficulties and for his own father's problems as a cotton farmer (p. 44). Lonzo's most distinguishing trait as a cowhand, however, was his overall comic quality resulting from his lack of skill as a cowboy and from the caricature of the bombastic characteristics inherited from his cowboy archetype.

On the other hand, Larry McMurtry drew Hank Hutch sympathetically. Hank worked at several cowboying jobs for other people, but he was also forced to take odd jobs and pump an oil lease in order to eke out a living for his family (p. 16). This is significant in at least two respects: the cowboy deliberately tied himself to strangling responsibilities, and he worked for the oil industry that has been the object of traditional cowboy scorn and resentment. In spite of Hank's departures from the role of a cowhand, he possessed a large measure of the early cowboy's industry and good cheer. Lonnie observed, "Hank and Janine had a pretty hard time of it, all right, but they always seemed fairly cheerful, and acted like they got along pretty good. Hank was as jolly as the next man, poor or not (p. 42)." Hank was not developed as a meditative or philosophical character, but he revealed a perceptive quality when he viewed Homer's two remaining longhorn steers after the rest of the herd had been shot. "They make good animals to have around," Hank said. "They remind you of the time when the government didn't have to run a man's business for him (p. 103)." Hank, then, expresses some of the changes in the life of a twentieth-century cowhand.

The corrupting influences of the twentieth century on the life of the cowboy are most visible in the character of Hud Bannon, stepson of

Homer Bannon in Horseman, Pass By. It is difficult to classify Hud definitively as a cowhand because of these strong influences on his life and because of his disparate characteristics. However, Hud functioned as a cowhand almost to the end of the book, and to others he described himself as a cowhand, perhaps sarcastically, while making nebulous plans to become more than a cowhand. Hud was like Jesse in his desire to be something other than a cowhand, but Jesse's wishful thinking was pale in comparison to Hud's ambition for wealth and power, an ambition that would compare to the cupidity of any of the most ruthless cattle barons. Some of Hud's occupational characteristics, social behavior, and mental attitudes are attributable to typical cowhand-cowboy traditions, but much of his behavior and many of his attitudes were more related to the traditions of the bad man or gunfighter-cowboy, a mythology enhanced and partially created by movies. Larry McMurtry used these exaggerated myths in characterizing Hud as a corrupted twentieth-century cowboy, an image that is both attractive and repulsive to his contemporaries.

In the characteristics connected with his work Hud both fulfilled and exceeded the requirements of the cowhand role. One of the main reasons Homer tolerated Hud's behavior was that Hud had outstanding ability as a cowhand. Lonnie said that "when Hud was interested and cared to be, he was as good as the best and more reckless than the wildest of the thousand wild-ass cowboys in the Texas cattle country (p. 10)." In addition to his ability, Hud had the cowboy's traditional physical toughness and strength. He had rodeoed a good deal, and once he had continued to catch during a baseball game when his thumb had been nearly torn off (p. 69). In spite of his physical ability though, Hud showed little willingness to

endure unnecessary pain or hardship in connection with his work. An even more important difference between Hud and the nineteenth-century cowhand was his lack of loyalty to his role. Although he was fairly reliable in carrying out work instructions, and he frequently said he was "just a workin' from the shoulders down (p. 14)," he actually wanted to be the one giving the orders. He announced these intentions to Homer, Lonnie, Jesse, and Halmea, all of whom were victims of his ambition to be the boss. And he probably became at least partly successful after he shot the injured and dying Homer since he was able to escape his cowhand role and become a rancher, a businessman, or at least a boss over Homer's land. After the shooting Lonnie noticed that Hud "looked easy and peaceful some-way, like he was finally satisfied for the first time in his life (p. 129)."

This desire to dominate was an important part of the hostility and wildness that most characterized Hud's social behavior. Much of his resentment was directed at Homer, perhaps with some justification. After complaining that Homer had kept him out of college to drive a feed truck and then let him be drafted, Hud expressed his frustration and disillusionment to his stepfather.

But hell, you were Wild Horse Homer Bannon in them days, an' anything you did was right. I even thought you was right myself, the most of the time. Why I used to think you was a regular god. I don't no more (p. 66).

Hud also told Homer outright that he was old and senile, that he had made a mistake in buying the Mexican cattle against Hud's advice, and that he was going to lose the ranch and the control over it to Hud, one way or another (pp. 67-68). Hud also had a special hostility for Mexicans and Negroes, an abundant measure of the prejudice that was fairly common among

earlier cowhands. In addition to general statements about the inferiority of these minority groups, Hud directed specific comments toward a black voice on the radio and toward Halmea, whom he called a "nigger bitch" (p. 10). He was also critical of those who were his social equals and part of the family, frequently loosing his sarcasm on Granny, Jesse, and Lonnie. Lonnie said, "Everybody in the country, even Granddad, took a little of Hud's sourness, and nobody felt quite big enough to do anything about it (p. 10)." Hud demonstrated little of the goodnatured, cheerful sense of humor for which earlier cowhands were noted, perhaps because of his involvement in his own grievances and ambitions.

The wildness which was associated with the behavior of the nineteenth-century cowhand was surfeit in Hud's frequently malicious actions. Hud drank regularly enough that waitresses were familiar with him, but his drinking was more than a social or recreational activity. Once he returned home unshaven with his Hiram Walker bottle nearly empty, raving so loudly about Halmea's absence and no meal on the table that both Lonnie and Granny were afraid of him (p. 91). Hud's wild and fast driving was as well-known as his drinking; he became even more obnoxious when he acquired the new, cream-colored Cadillac. His behavior was so erratic that no one tried to predict him or stop him at every outburst.

Hud's hostility and wildness were also evident in his relations with women. True to the code of the cowboy, he made no entangling emotional commitments, but unlike the earlier cowboy, Hud expressed no desire for love or a good woman. He carried the code of masculinity to extremes in several instances. He expected both Halmea and his mother to wait on him, to serve his food whenever he decided he wanted it, and Granny was so

afraid of him that she did so, even though she had just returned from the hospital (p. 91). His abuse of women was not limited to verbal insults. Not even the efforts of Jesse and Lonnie prevented Hud's brutal rape of Halmea, an act which testified to his dominance. He told her, "You keep gallivantin' aroun' without tellin' me, I'll sure as hell do it agin. Cause now on, I'm the boss. Not Homer Bannon, not fantan there, not Ma. Me. Mister Scott. The boss (p. 95)." Hud's rejection of middle-class morals and standards was obvious in his unabashed flaunting of his relationship with Truman Peters' wife, Lily. Their frequent public and private proximity was not for emotional satisfaction or love, however. Lily provided a means of physical gratification and another way to "put one over" on Truman Peters, who had also been tricked into making an enigmatic deal with Hud for Homer's land (p. 109). Homer said, "Huddie's a wild one Ain't nobody ever got no rope on him (p. 111)." Jesse once speculated that even Hud could get lonely (p. 70), but Hud's wildness and hostility were the basis for most of his social behavior. Lonnie stated, "And Hud would always do the thing he wanted to do, whether it hurt anybody or not; Hud just did what he intended to do (p. 97)."

There was also a certain consistency in Hud's mental attitudes. No one really knew what went on in Hud's mind, but he was careful to leave the impression that he was not given to thought, meditation, or philosophy, or anything above the shoulders. He shared the typical cowhand's indifference and condescension toward the intangible and his antipathy toward government. Lonnie observed, "Hud plain hated the mention of government (p. 28)." And the arrival of the state veterinarian to inspect Homer's diseased cattle prompted many antagonistic comments and suggestions

from Hud, who said that Homer ought to sell the cattle to an unsuspecting party (p. 66). Earlier he said, "We oughta keep'em and let the fuckin' government go to hell (p. 82)." He cautioned Homer bitterly, saying, "they don't need you to agree to nothin'. They're the law. They'd just as soon do something you didn't agree to (p. 65)." Nothing other than government and his own schemes seemed to give him cause for reflection.

Hud's values and morals differed significantly from those of the cowboy archetype. The cause of Hud's corruption of the original was his ambition for wealth and power, values foreign to an ordinary cowhand. He told Homer directly that he was going to have Homer's ranch and give the orders on it, and Lonnie later observed that since Homer was dead he did not think anyone could stop Hud (pp. 67-68). Hud obviously valued profits more than honesty and fair-dealing, old-time values which had prompted Homer to keep the cattle and suffer the loss rather than to deceive and take advantage of someone else. Hud's rape of Halmea, his seduction of another man's wife, and his recalcitrant and unfeeling subterfuge in obtaining Homer's land was further evidence of his lack of moral values. Even his one act of ostensible gallantry, shooting the suffering Homer out of mercy, was suspect to Lonnie.

He grinned his old strange grin, and I didn't know at all. I had believed him. I thought at first that he shot Granddad to stop the hurting. But seeing that wild blood-smeared grin, I didn't know. It could have been for kindness or for meanness either, whichever mood was on Hud when he held Granddad in the ditch (p. 130).

Although Landess is one critic who believes that the shooting was an act prompted by the influence of an older generation, he also observes that the amoral Hud was a figure in the latter stages of the cowboy's evolution.

Hud, then, personifies a present generation more happy in town than on the range, utterly without scruples where money and sex are concerned, and apparently untempered by those feelings of honor and respect which were the cornerstones of an earlier piety. . . .⁷

Although Pauline Kael did not agree with Bosley Crowther's evaluation of the movie Hud, she quotes his New York Times review, which finds even wider significance in Hud's character.

Hud is a rancher who is fully and foully diseased with all the germs of materialism that are infecting and sickening modern man. . . . And the place where he lives is not just Texas. It is the soil in which grows a gimcrack culture that nurtures indulgence and greed.⁸

By any standards though, Hud departs from the traditional cowboy's values and behavior, and he represents a modern and corrupted stage in the cowboy's evolution.

Hud is more than a symbol of the cowboy's evolution, however. His character has a significant mythical dimension that connects him with the cowboys of the past and with the spectators of the present. Larry McMurtry writes, "Insofar as he has an archetypal or mythological dimension, he is not my creation but relates to that myth of the Westerner which the movies themselves have helped create."⁹ He further describes Hud's origins:

Hud, a twentieth century Westerner, is a gunfighter who lacks both guns and opponents. The land itself is the same--just as powerful and just as imprisoning--but the social context has changed so radically that Hud's impulse to violence is turned inward, on himself and his family. He is wild in a well-

⁷Thomas Landess, Larry McMurtry (Austin, Texas: Steck Vaughn Company, 1969), p. 9.

⁸Pauline Kael, I Lost It at the Movies (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), p. 84.

⁹Larry McMurtry, In a Narrow Grave (Austin: Encino Press, 1968), p. 19.

established tradition of Western wildness that involves drinking, fighting, fast and reckless riding and/or driving, and, of course, seducing. The tradition is not bogus. From the first the cowboy was distinguished for his daring and his cheerful indifference to middle-class values¹⁰

Even though Hud inherited the cowboy's wildness and actually used a gun in killing Homer, there are some important distinctions between him and his prototypes. Two differences are that Hud had more money than ordinary cowboys and that he was not a horseman or a man relating to animals.

Hud, of course, is not simply a cowboy--if he were he could never afford the Cadillac. The Cadillac is his gun, in a sense, and it is a well-chosen symbol. . . . We see Hud on horseback only twice; we think of him in the Cadillac, a machine which has a dual usefulness, just as the gunfighter's gun once had. It is both a symbol of status and a highly useful tool.¹¹

Ironically, McMurtry notes that although most men feel that they should have admired Homer, they secretly wish they were like Hud, "tough, capable, wild, undomesticated."¹² Pauline Kael and Dwight MacDonald agree that Hud represents actual rather than mythical American values and that his values are more popular than might ordinarily be assumed.¹³ It is then, perhaps, only somewhat ironic that McMurtry compares Hud to the cattleman-paragon, Charles Goodnight, who undoubtedly would have been disgusted by Hud.

The Old Man has become a local god, his legends recounted in a few ranch houses, a few courthouses, and the domino parlors of a few West Texas towns. The old-timers and the cowboys know about him, but the youngsters of Texas don't:

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 24-25.

¹¹Ibid., p. 25.

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

¹³Kael, I Lost It, pp. 92-93.

they know Hud, that keen, hard, attractive bastard who drives a Cadillac. Since the youngsters have never heard of the Old Man they don't know that Hud is his descendant, and the few who know both or [sic] are so partisan to the Old Man that they would adamantly deny that the two are related. But related they are, though they knew different times, and put their powers to different uses.¹⁴

McMurtry appropriately furthers the comparison between Hud and Goodnight in his observation of the evolution in the cattle industry and the cowboy's life:

. . . . the cowboy's life is umbilically joined to a dying mother: the American range-cattle industry If the Old Man were ranching now the frustration it would entail might cause him to waste his force in the same ways Hud wastes his. And Hud, given a frontier, might become a Charles Goodnight.¹⁵

In the comparison McMurtry gently parodies the values of the cattleman and portrays Hud somewhat sympathetically in the context of the myth and his altered times.

The cowhands in McMurtry's Horseman, Pass By and Leaving Cheyenne covered the distance from Johnny, whose roots were in the nineteenth century, to Jesse, Lonzo, Hank, and Hud, who were all outgrowths of twentieth-century influences. The cowhands shared a characteristic and traditional wildness and irresponsibility that distinguished them from the cattlemen. They were also at least somewhat connected to the mythical skills and work. But, unlike the cattlemen, McMurtry's cowhands did not hold the old-time values which had distinguished the earlier cowboy, whether cattleman or cowhand. In that light the effects of the

¹⁴McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 19.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 26-27.

twentieth-century evolutionary process on the life of the cowboy can be seen more clearly than on McMurtry's cattlemen, most of whom followed tradition. His pivotal portrayal of Hud is significant. Hud had once been a rodeo cowboy, he was predominantly a cowhand, and he had many of the characteristics of a cattle baron and perhaps was actually to become a rancher. Hud's multi-faceted existence is probably a good example of what two observers described as the fiction writer's realistic fusion of different processes in spite of the historian's insistence on their separateness.¹⁶ In all of his roles Hud accordingly displayed the corrupting effects of the evolution. McMurtry wrote, "Hud is one of the many people whose capacities no longer fit their situations. He needs more room and less company and is unlikely to get either."¹⁷ McMurtry predicted the fortunes of other cowhand-cowboys no less pessimistically: "The descendants of the trail-hands will be driving beer trucks in the suburbs of Ft. Worth, Dodge City, Cheyenne and a score of other cities whose names once held a different kind of promise."¹⁸ McMurtry's cowboys are leaving Cheyenne in their gradual loss of that fading promise.

¹⁶Joe B. Frantz and Julian Ernest Choate, Jr., The American Cowboy: The Myth and the Reality (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), p. 53.

¹⁷McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 27.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 27-28.

Chapter IV

The Rodeo Cowboy

The rodeo cowboy is the most commonly viewed and frequently glorified of the cowboy types existing today. One recent observer has noted that professional rodeo men now outnumber working cowboys.¹ It would seem natural, then, that rodeo hands receive more attention than their working counterparts and relatives. However, factors other than sheer plurality have contributed to the rodeo cowboy's prominence. Social and economic changes, for example, have made the role of the working cowboy almost obsolete and have resulted in the public's admiration of the popular rather than the original cowboy skills. Larry McMurtry has suggested further that one reason for the cultural phenomenon of rodeo as sport (albeit an unpopular one in comparison to professional football or golf) is what he once analyzed as a secret of the popularity of Western movies: "an acceptable orientation to violence."² He especially recognized the importance of historical and mythological influences in glorifying the cowboy drifter at the expense of the less colorful cowboy-settler, another factor which has enhanced the rodeo cowboy's image.³

¹Daniel G. Moore, Log of a Twentieth Century Cowboy (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1965), p. 209.

²Larry McMurtry, In a Narrow Grave (Austin: Encino Press, 1968), p. 24; "Goat-Ropers and Groupies: A Requiem for a Rodeo," New York, November 27, 1972, p. 60.

³McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 60.

In order then to view McMurtry's rodeo cowboys both in modern and historical perspectives, it is necessary to examine the sport or spectacle of rodeo itself, the work and the aspect of cowboy life which most distinguishes the rodeo hand from the earlier cattleman and cowhand. Originally an informal contest between cowboys from different ranches, rodeo assimilated some of the traditions of the Wild West Show, traditions which Larry McMurtry said conflicted with real and dignified cowboy work.⁴ This willingness, or even eagerness to change rodeo in order to please the changing public made the Madison Square Garden Championship Rodeo in 1972 the worst McMurtry had ever seen: "a sad little dribble of a show, pathetic in its relation to its own history and more pathetic still in its constant obsequiousness toward the hostile culture which engulfed it."⁵ Gary Leffew, a successful practicing rodeo cowboy, told an interviewer, however, that he thought that the public was entitled to a Wild West show in addition to rodeo art and the vicarious satisfaction of being close to death and danger.⁶ One fairly realistic rodeo observer-photographer-writer analyzes rodeo's appeal in more general terms:

Rodeo is a historical pageant that nostalgically carries us back to the basic values of a less complex yet strangely more civilized time, and of course, back to the uncomplicated folk hero who dominated that period. This last frontier of the old West corrals danger, thrills, and excitement, and colors them with a glow from a romantic era of America.⁷

⁴Ibid., p. 59.

⁵Ibid., p. 58.

⁶Douglas Kent Hall, Let 'Er Buck! (New York: Saturday Review Press, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1973), p. 124.

⁷Fred Schnell, Rodeo! The Suicide Circuit (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1971), p. 50.

A director of the Rodeo Cowboys Association expressed a sentiment that is common and endearing to many rodeo announcers and participants but disgusting to Larry McMurtry. The director wrote in a public letter that rodeo offered the cowboy the challenge of competition, the thrill of danger, the fellowship of true friendship, the possibility of rich financial reward, and the freedom of his own independence.

. . . the cowboy and his life have color, excitement and adventure. But more than that, the nature of the men who fought for and settled out West, the codes of living they established where there was no law, their fierce independence and their easy pride in a free life are the factors that continue to stimulate the admiration of, and undoubtedly envy from, the peoples of this land and many others as civilization tightens its restrictions on man.⁸

Other enthusiastic rodeo observers note that the cowboy in choosing "the suicide circuit" is also choosing "the last frontier of rugged individualism," behavior that is "the stuff of myths and legends."⁹ However, McMurtry wrote, "This view of the rodeo cowboy is, to put it crudely, horse manure."¹⁰

McMurtry and other rodeo observers are aware that the romantic image of rodeo life, although perhaps partially justifiable at one time, is somewhat ironic in view of some of the changes that the sixties and seventies have brought to the sport. One example of these changes can be seen in the rodeo cowboy's performance in his work. They now compare notes and methods of dealing with specific animals, and some cowboys, like Gary Leffew and Larry Mahan, improve their rides by positive thinking.

⁸ M. S. Robertson, Rodeo: Standard Guide to the Cowboy Sport (2nd ed; Berkeley, California: Howell-North, 1965), p. vii.

⁹ Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 122; Schnell, Rodeo, p. 50.

¹⁰ McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers", p. 60.

One cowboy commented, "This rodeo now is scientific. It's not just a plain old, hard, rough cowboy out there trying to make a living, trying to out-stout a bull. You're riding by thinking. Scientific."¹¹ About 1960 cowboy athletes started appearing, and with this shifted emphasis many rodeo cowboys today have experienced training in Junior Rodeo, high school rodeo, college rodeo, and even special rodeo schools.¹² Another difference is the rodeo cowboy's expansion into other financial enterprises such as investments and endorsements for advertisers. Hall states that the difference between the traditional rodeo cowboy and the "new breed" could be seen in the personalities of two cowboys who had won the honor of World-Champion All-Around Cowboy, Phil Lyne and Larry Mahan. After winning the title twice, Phil Lyne retired to his South Texas ranch to lead a quiet, traditional cowboy life. However, Larry Mahan, the winner of six titles, is part of the new breed that is associated with business, a rodeo career, and un cowboy like characteristics such as long hair, tie-dye chaps, private planes, and tolerance, or even acceptance, of outsiders and "freaks."¹³ A less attractive aspect of modern rodeo life concerns the cowboys' excessive use of pills to ease their pains and facilitate their travel, and their frequent association with rodeo camp followers known as "rodeo groupies" or "boogie mamas."¹⁴

¹¹Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 40.

¹²Schnell, Rodeo, pp. 8, 53; McMurtry, "Goat Ropers," p. 60.

¹³Hall, Let 'Er Buck, pp. 88-91; documentary movie, The Great American Cowboy, 1973.

¹⁴Gary Cartwright, "Rodeo Madness," Texas Monthly, March, 1974, p. 53; Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 211; McMurtry, "Goat Ropers," pp. 61-62.

Few rodeo enthusiasts will even admit that these are problems for the modern cowboy. In spite of McMurtry's general lack of admiration for rodeo life, he laments its recent corruption. During the Madison Square Garden Rodeo, for instance, he was sickened to see and hear the country singer Miss Judy Lynn, singing "America, the Beautiful" with a spotlight shining down on her yellow-sequined cowgirl outfit, her white horse, and a small boy carrying an American flag--all symbols of "Frontier Individualism" and "American Purity." He noted incidentally that the spotlight blacked out the "possibly horny men, who were just about to try to ride those demonstrably well-hung bulls" ¹⁵ McMurtry criticizes both the emasculated spectacle of modern rodeo and the rodeo cowboys who cater to the system, stating that since Casey Tibbs and Jim Shoulders in the fifties, the sport has lost some of its glory.

Except in the small town, and on a few of the classic stations, show business has had its way with the sport, and has done what could be done to make an essentially anachronistic spectacle amenable to people who, perhaps despite themselves, have become imbued with the modern temper. ¹⁶

The twentieth century has not only brought evolution to rodeo, but it has also brought changes to the rodeo cowboy himself, as it brought change earlier to the cattleman and the cowhand. However, the rodeo hand has inherited some of the characteristics of these earlier roles and is somewhat tied to his archetypal past. He is "heir to the way of life of the Western frontier, a way of life that is fiction to most mid-twentieth-century Americans. In these men the qualities of the

¹⁵McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 62.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 60.

American West survive with vibrant authenticity."¹⁷ This view, however dated and idealistic it may be, is shared by many rodeo observers and participants. In a recent poem or song entitled "Rodeo Life," Chris LeDoux, a cowboy artist and poet, portrays rodeo life in terms reminiscent of the trail-driving days. As a rodeo hand the narrator states that he wears his worn cowboy clothes and gets drunk with the other cowboys in the bar after his work is done; and even though his work is hard and unprofitable, he will not give up his roaming and his freedom in living a full and satisfying life, which may eventually include a wife and a son.¹⁸ Even rodeo fans "see themselves as nothing less than the True Descendants of the Heroic American Experience."¹⁹

However heroic the rodeo experience and its players may be in relation to their past, there are more differences separating them from regular cowboys and traditional cowboy heritage and showing them to be somewhat inferior in the comparisons. Old-time cowboys like Teddy Blue Abbott felt that rodeo cowboys just could not handle cattle well.²⁰ One rodeo analyst admitted that although specific rodeo events, such as roping and saddle bronc riding, originated in the American West, that events like bull riding were really just their own excuse.²¹ Another observer wrote that athletic skill was more important than cowboying ability in modern rodeo as a competitive sport and that most rodeo cowboys would

¹⁷Robertson, Rodeo, p. 135.

¹⁸Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 176.

¹⁹Cartwright, "Madness," p. 48.

²⁰E. C. ("Teddy Blue") Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 230.

²¹Cartwright, "Madness," p. 48.

not be able to function on the range.²² In reaction to criticism of the rodeo cowboy by working cowboys who felt more authentic, one rodeo cowboy defended his group, saying, "They weren't the survivors of the range that went into rodeo, they were a different bunch of fellows entirely."²³ Regardless of the origins of the rodeo cowboy, he has been criticized for his corrupted behavior as a real cowboy. The fact that rodeo cowboys will seldom work on a ranch because of the hard work, low pay, and lack of adoration from crowds is enough to make working cowboys suspicious of the rodeo hand.²⁴ In response to the movie-inspired image of the rodeo cowboy as "lovable screwup," Larry McMurtry says, "a simpler, contrary view is that held by most cattlemen, which is that rodeo hands are lazy and not-so-lovable screwups, men, essentially, who fear danger less than they hate work."²⁵ He further explains his view and that of the traditional cowboy:

The cattleman's not-so-latent contempt for the rodeo hand is based upon the knowledge that rodeo hands have been content to fiddle while the West burned. The rancher's view is the precise opposite of that one gets from the movies. As they see it, rodeo hands are pre-eminently accommodationists, modern men who hold themselves responsible only to the demands of their egos, men who take no care of the land itself and have no respect for the labors or the traditions of the herdsman. They are men, so far as the cattlemen are concerned, who have little patience, no love of work, and essentially crude skills; they are not very useful in intricate cattlework and are seldom willing to stay around and do the dull but necessary chores once the fun of the roundup is over.²⁶

²²Schnell, Rodeo, p. 9.

²³Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 150.

²⁴Moore, Log, p. 209.

²⁵McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 60.

²⁶Ibid., p. 61.

And although the cattleman's view of the rodeo cowboy may seem somewhat biased and harsh, McMurtry uses this basic portrayal in delineating his rodeo hands as cowboys who have evolved away from the old work and the old values.

Regardless of the varying opinions about the rodeo cowboy's worth and his origins, rodeo hands possess similar occupational characteristics, social behavior, and mental attitudes, which McMurtry used in drawing his rodeo people. In demonstrating their identity with their work role, rodeo cowboys all wear western clothes: blue jeans, long sleeved shirts, boots, and hats. They are even a bit suspicious of those cowboys who depart from the traditional standards by wearing fancy or colorful Western garb. One observer states that cowboys and spectators wear Western clothes because they are comfortable and practical and "partly because of the desire to share the spirit of the 'Last Frontier.'"²⁷ Rodeo cowboys share the cowhands' intense pride in their work in exclusion of any demeaning or common work that ordinary people are willing to do.

Naturally, some of this spirit of--it not out and out laziness--exclusiveness is inherited, a carry-over from another age, a perhaps grander and more austere age of western life. It is one of the few similarities between the cowboys of today and the cowboys of yesterday. But it is nonetheless a basic one.²⁸

Their pride extends to specific rodeo skills, one observer noting that riders and ropers seem to be different types of cowboys who delight in

²⁷Robertson, Rodeo, p. 54.

²⁸Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 16.

finding fault with each other.²⁹ Even the rodeo clowns are proud of their bullfighting and clowning skills.³⁰ The cowboys' motives for going into rodeo are varied; some go for the thrill of winning and receiving cheers, and some go for the money. Whatever his reason may be, the rodeo cowboy knows that success is not certain, and he, like the trail hand, enjoys describing his life in gamblers' terms. An awareness of the cowboy's hard times in rodeo prompted one observer to write, "Rodeo is an athlete's crap game. . .the last place in these bad-draw times where a man can live and die and win and lose on his own goddamn terms with just a little luck."³¹ McMurtry wrote that most true cowboys are not competitive and consider performers immodest and offensive,³² but there are many modern cowboys who have fit in both roles, their love for travel and their ability with animals enabling them to do so.

The rodeo cowboy's social behavior and mental attitudes bear more resemblance to the earlier cowhand's behavior and attitudes than to his work characteristics. Cowboy wildness, drinking, and practical joking seem to be an accepted aspect of modern rodeo. Rodeo hands are generally distrustful of outsiders and uncommunicative with them; however, cowboys are ostensibly helpful and comradely with each other.³³ They are also like earlier cowhands in that they generally have little or no family

²⁹Schnell, Rodeo, p. 54.

³⁰Hall, Let 'Er Buck, pp. 129-130.

³¹Schnell, Rodeo, p. 124.

³²McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 60.

³³Ibid., p. 58; Schnell, Rodeo, pp. 8, 11.

life because of the demands of their job and because of their essential self-centeredness. Larry Mahan admits to being "a very self-centered person My goals are number one. Everything else, like my family and so on is secondary And I've gotten to the point at which it really doesn't bother me that much."³⁴ Two different observers recorded in the same words, without giving credit to the other, one woman's description of the cowboys she knew:

They live for today. They have very little regard for tomorrow--or for taking people with them tomorrow. Sure, some of your older cowboys will settle down. Calf ropers or clowns will settle down with women. But your bronc riders and bull riders are almost suicidal in their efforts to rodeo. They just travel alone, and they don't want to be tied to anything.³⁵

Some cowboys even have a preoccupation with the male image and their own masculinity. One rookie cowboy was especially impressed with the bags that other cowboys carried their gear in; one had a picture of a strutting rooster labelled "Supercrack," and the rookie observed, "Now those are cowboy. Gutsy. A little bit mean. But animal. Because you've got to be."³⁶ The rodeo cowboy's masculine pride, like some of his other social characteristics, is reminiscent of the cowhand of an earlier time.

The rodeo hand's mental attitudes and ideas are frequently only updated and glorified restatements of what were, or what observers think were, nineteenth-century cowboy ideals. They profess a universal belief in the principles of personal independence and rugged individualism,

³⁴Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 202.

³⁵Ibid., p. 135; Cartwright, "Madness," p. 48.

³⁶Hall, Let 'Er Buck, p. 34.

yet their pride in their own role is ironically expressed in their scorn and intolerance of people who do not conform to "cowboy" ideas. Several writers and rodeo participants have witnessed cowboys harrassing other cowboys or outsiders having long hair, and Larry Mahan, himself the object of cowboy suspicion, criticizes the "rednecks" who behave this way, saying, "It is one thing that's holding rodeo back. We can't seem to accept new ways, or modern times."³⁷ Cowboys reserve special resentment for photographers and writers, like Larry McMurtry, who was criticized for writing an essay about rodeo that was not based on fact and that supposedly only skimmed the surface of rodeo life.³⁸ And for all their toughness, their romantic view of themselves and their lives is only apparently ironic. Gary Leffew, former "hippie" and successful rodeo cowboy, is one of the few cowboys who will admit that he is a romantic attracted by a romantic way of life: "I think people come to see someone who does defy danger. They kind of idolize him."³⁹ Larry McMurtry criticized movies, rodeo announcers, and cowboys who promote this romantic vision of the frontier individualism of the rodeo cowboy, especially the "little losers," at the expense of less colorful but more authentic cowboys. He wrote sarcastically of "the men who drag along from rodeo to rodeo, barely making their entry fees, because it's the only free way of life left open to them. . . .death beneath the horns of a bull would be preferable to the loss of their freedom."⁴⁰

³⁷Ibid., p. 207.

³⁸Ibid., p. 108.

³⁹Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁰McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 60.

However, McMurtry's general cattleman's scorn for rodeo hands did not keep him from writing somewhat sympathetically of the rodeo cowboy's role in the overall evolution of the twentieth-century cowboy.

Moving On, although not exclusively about rodeo, contains McMurtry's chief description of rodeo life and rodeo cowboys in the context of modern society, the results of research and observation McMurtry originally intended for a book about rodeo. Unlike the earlier Horseman, Pass By and Leaving Cheyenne, Moving On deals primarily with individuals, cowboys and ordinary citizens alike, who were more affected by modern problems than were Gid, Johnny, Homer, Jesse, or even Hud. Importantly, rodeo itself, from McMurtry's viewpoint, is an anachronistic corruption of earlier frontier values and traditions, and three main characters in the novel--Sonny Shanks, Pete Tatum, and Peewee Raskin--provide a cross-section and a description of rodeo life and the evolution forced on it by the twentieth century.

Sonny Shanks was the World's Champion Cowboy, the king of the cowboys, the epitome of "cowboyism."⁴¹ His whole personality revolved around his identification with his rodeo work, and everyone recognized and respected his cowboy ability. At one rodeo when Sonny was scheduled as the last bull rider of the evening, the crowd would have been "bored with danger and tired of cheering. But Sonny Shanks was the king of the sport--the World's Champion Cowboy--and for him they cheered eagerly, even before they saw the ride (p. 31)." His popularity was based on his flamboyance and his competence, exhibited in unusually high scores

⁴¹Larry McMurtry, Moving On (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1970; Avon Books, 1971), p. 104. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

for his rides and in his continued winning, despite his claim that he was past his prime and that he had been winning on finesse. True to both the cowboy tradition and the newer tradition of the rodeo athlete, Sonny also had the physical strength and stamina to sustain him in spite of the pain and cramping in his bad leg. But even more significant than his strength and ability as a rodeo cowboy was his total identification with his work role, a characteristic common to earlier cowboys. Not only was he convinced that riding was the only life for him, but he also became highly uncomfortable and irritable when he temporarily stepped out of his cowboy role to act in a movie about rodeo. He had assumed that he could do well at acting, but he discovered that his confidence left him whenever the camera followed him, and the stiffness and awkwardness that replaced it made him aware that he was not doing a good job (pp.428-429). Because of his frustration and the dullness of making the movie, he was irritable and insecure, even with his women, and Eleanor knew that he wished he could get back to rodeo. Sonny's restored and reckless behavior after a guest appearance at a small rodeo convinced her that "rodeo was his world, and he was the biggest name in it (p. 430)."

Sonny functioned best in the rodeo world where his social behavior was typical of rodeo cowboys and traditional cowhands. His sense of humor often manifested itself in rough practical jokes and in rude remarks at the expense of others. When Patsy Carpenter refused to succumb to his physical charms, he took her from her motel room in her robe and tied her up in the middle of the rodeo arena late at night (pp.1-0-122). But even Patsy could not stay angry with him forever, and he seemed to attract attention wherever he went, even at a dinner at an exclusive

Houston club where he was noticed more than the sophisticated Bill Duffin, a professor at Rice University (p. 333). Later at a dinner with rich Panhandle cattle and oil people, all seemed to admire Sonny:

. . .he was most of the things that the men would rather have been than what they were, and one of the people the women would rather have had than who they had. . . .Nothing made his ego shine like the admiration of people who were wealthier than him. . . . Sonny loved to awe (p. 426).

One of the most awed by Sonny was Jim Carpenter, a sometime photographer who listened eagerly to Sonny's stories about his exploits with horses, bulls, and women. One of the qualities that attracted people to Sonny was his wildness and the suggested latent violence that Patsy described as "a force in him" that was close to "real violence" (pp. 113, 129). Like the unattached cowhand and rodeo cowboy, Sonny expressed some of his wildness in his work and much of it in his behavior, such as his heavy drinking, his use of pills, and his unpredictable and famous stunts, all of which illustrated his resentment of any kind of restraint.

Naturally, Sonny did not want the restraints that a wife or family might bring, and his attitudes toward women were much like Hud's. He was very open about having casual intercourse with another man's wife in his notorious hearse, and he later unceremoniously dumped the drunken woman back in her own car, piling her clothes on top of her (pp. 35-38). Sonny also made no secret of the fact that he had been "zapping" Catherine Dunne and Angie Miracle, two young actresses in the movie he was making (pp. 427-428). Once he had even had an affair with Patsy's Aunt Dixie, and he hoped to seduce Patsy too. His charisma prompted three strange and bedraggled housewives to talk to Sonny about their

private sex lives, even though they had never seen him before (pp. 95-96). In spite of the charma and promiscuity that were typical of cowhands and rodeo cowboys, Sonny, however, developed a semi-permanent relationship with Eleanor Guthrie, a Texas cattle heiress who frequently said that she was attracted to Sonny because her father had not let he date cowboys. Although their affair was often stormy and violent, it lasted fifteen years, and it was clear that they were a match for each other. They needed each other, yet neither was eager to excahnge his individual freedom for marriage, though they discussed it frequently, even in their last telephone conversation before Sonny was killed (p. 657). Sonny had told Patsy earlier that he had a nephew and did not need any other descendants and that he was really more interested in leaving girls happy memories of their romances with the "king of cowboys" (pp. 447-478). Sonny's cowboy resistance to restraint in his social behavior was an example of mental attitudes that were also typical of cowhands and rodeo cowboys. Like these other cowboys, Sonny was perhaps insecure about his own intellectual ability and a bit suspicious of those who seemed to be more intelligent than he. When Sonny tried to force himself on Patsy, she called him a "stupid slob," and he became angry. "I hate to be called stupid," he said. "Specially by young bitches who don't know up from down. You could learn more from me than you'll learn from your goddamn books (p. 120)." He later told Patsy that hervocabulary would not scare him off (p. 327). And in the tradition of the cowboy who was garrulous around his comrades yet reticent around good women, Sonny sometimes had difficulty verbalizing his feelings with Eleanor (p. 435). Another of his mental attitudes was his apparent disregard of morals. Like Johnny, he never seemed to reflect on the rightness or wrongness of his actions, and,

he even seemed to flaunt his misbehavior. He took a married woman to a public dance and announced to some friends that he was not afraid of meeting her husband since he had survived a bronc and a bull that night and that he would choose adultery over their company (p. 35). Sonny did value his work, though, and the excitement that rodeo danger and the admiration of the crowds held for him. And true to the traditions of the cowboy-drifter as a rodeo cowboy, he valued personal independence and described it in modern terms to Eleanor. "Hard to resist the highway when I get an itch to go," he said (p. 504).

In addition to his "itch to go," Sonny possessed several other qualities of the mythical cowboy-drifter. He had a masculine force and an exceptional capability in his work that even a cattleman might admire, in spite of the fact that as a rodeo hand he was ostentatious. More importantly, he was so obviously an heir to the frontier heritage and Western influence that he seemed out of place whenever he was in Houston.

He needed his rightful milieu: the plains, the long empty highways, the bulls and horses and violent men, the space and the deep changing sky. All that belonged with him, while the large houses and well-kept lawns of South Boulevard seemed to conceal the real Sonny and make him look like a different man (p. 327).

However, Sonny also personified many corruptions of the original myth that were typical of the evolution of the twentieth-century cowboy. One obvious difference was his choice of the role of rodeo cowboy, a role that did not demand genuine work with animals or land or an assumption of traditional values or tribulations. Another difference was his reliance on pills for energy and stimulation, a distinctly modern vice that enabled him to carry out his slightly anachronistic

job and his contemporary style of living. Perhaps even more significant was his alteration of the myth of the horseman, his substitution of a machine for a horse. Like Hud, Sonny Shanks was associated with an ostentatious vehicle--a Cadillac hearse furnished inside as an efficient seduction chamber and decorated outside with three sets of bulls' horns painted in gold so people would recognize him. The vehicle, like Hud's Cadillac, was "an essential part of his legend (p. 36)." The corrupted horseman myth was also evident in Sonny's choice of rodeo contests. He told Jim that he could have learned to rope if he had wanted to, but he added, "Trouble with roping, it takes a horse, and then you've got to haul the goddamn horse everywhere in the world. I'd as soon have an anchor tied to me as a goddamn horse (p. 97)." He had even threatened to let his hair grow long and become a "cowboy hippie," "the Joe Namath of rodeo" (p. 62). It is somewhat ironic and fitting then that Sonny was killed in Los Angeles heading back to Texas "high" on pills when a car of "hippies" hit an intersection too soon, striking the hearse, which had hit the intersection too late, sending the contents of the hearse tumbling around Sonny Shanks, "World's Champion Cowboy (pp. 663-664)."

As a rodeo clown, Pete Tatum was far from Sonny's heightened status as "the" rodeo cowboy. Although Pete's job was important and he was good at it, he did not receive any of the praise and glory so important to regular rodeo cowboys. Most appreciate the clown's work; however, many cowboys feel superior to the rodeo clown, often a ridiculous figure, and Sonny once said that riding "beats clown" (p. 32)." Instead of performing in cowboy clothes on a spirited horse and traveling

with flair and speed, Pete wore hobo clothes, struggled with an uncooperative donkey, and travelled slowly in an old car pulling a small trailer. Even Pete was evasive when Patsy asked him if he liked being a rodeo clown. He replied, "It don't take much talent. . . .I just sort of stumbled into it (p. 154)." Pete, however, was conscientious and capable in his work, true to the traditions of early cowboys. He once considerately took care of Patsy and Jim after Jim had been hurt when a resentful cowboy hit him because he was a photographer (p. 18). That Pete took his work seriously was demonstrated when he became gloomy and depressed after he was unable to prevent injury to a rookie cowboy in the arena (p. 32). His ability and dedication notwithstanding, the simple choice of the role of a rodeo clown brought no glory and much hardship to Pete.

His difficulties were due partly to the inherent disadvantages of being a rodeo cowboy and partly to the evolution that affected cowboys and much of the rest of twentieth-century society. Money and injuries, two ever-present problems for rodeo hands, were difficulties also for Pete and Boots, his cowgirl wife. Boots had been hospitalized for injuries received during a barrel-racing contest, and in order to pay the hospital bills Pete started riding broncs again, causing injury to himself (p. 360). In spite of their efforts, they barely made enough money to exist from one motel room to the next, and Patsy was depressed with "the crampedness, uncertainty, and untidiness of the Tatum's life (p. 362)." The opportunity for Pete to be in the clown sequence of Sonny's rodeo movie was a financial boon to them but an obvious role change and a personal compromise since Pete hated Sonny (p. 40). Pete's

final transformation and reluctant retirement from rodeo life was complete when he accepted a job with his father-in-law as a used-car salesman in Fort Worth. He explained his decision to Patsy, saying that since Boots was pregnant, she could not travel well and did not want to be left alone and that he was not making much money anyway. Patsy told him that she was glad that he quit clowning since it was a ridiculous profession and that it was satisfactory only for strange people like Sonny, who had no dependents. But Pete's appearance and Patsy's thoughts belied her words. She noticed how he had changed, his face revealing heaviness, sadness, and disappointment.

But part of her could not believe her own words, not when she looked at him. He was dressed as she had always seen him dressed, in Levi's and a faded Western shirt. It was hard to imagine him in a white shirt, a tie and a cheap suit, standing on a windy car lot in Fort Worth. It would only be dull for him, and empty, and the dullness and emptiness were already settling in his face. (p. 650)

Pete's role change had diminished him, and Patsy felt that he was "so close to the end of what he had been that she felt she might never see him again (p. 653)."

The evolution in Pete's cowboy role paralleled but exceeded his variation from standard cowboy social behavior. Some of his actions were typical of cowboys, although milder in the comparison. Without getting drunk, Pete frequently drank beer in his trailer and in bars like "The Hole in the Bucket." He also revealed a general self-confidence and a cowboy independence when he resisted inadvertently making a disciple or dependent of Jim (p. 98). He had won had a legendary fight with Sonny over Pete's first wife, Marie, on the bridge over the Rio Grande at El Paso (p. 34). In some of his characteristics he was less like the

rodeo cowboys and perhaps more like authentic cowboys. Unlike Sonny, Pete did not enjoy speed, and he was even uncomfortable when Boots drove fast (p. 33). Like legendary cowboys Pete was melancholy and quiet. Patsy found it difficult to talk to Pete because he "did not seem like a man who talked much. . . ," and she felt more comfortable with him when they did not talk (pp. 130, 174). Pete, however, was more gallant and considerate toward women than most cowboys. He displayed his gallantry in a small way when he assisted and aided Patsy when Jim was first hurt (p. 18). Perhaps he was typical of his group in his earlier loss of his true love, his belief that Boots was too good for him, his open desire for Patsy, another man's wife, and in his comment, "Women are hard to tell about (p. 127)." However, the most important social distinction between Pete and other cowboys was his loyalty and commitment to his wife, a willing commitment that hampered his independence and saw him change from bronc rider to a clown, to an actor, to a used-car salesman and ordinary husband and father. No true rodeo cowboy, cowhand, or even cattleman would allow a woman to interfere in his cowboy role and its traditions.

In his mental attitudes and characteristics, too, Pete seemed to be both a modern and a traditional cowboy. True to the myth he was not intellectual; in fact, Patsy observed that he "did not seem unusually bright. . . ." But she noted further that there was something physically impressive about him: "His walk was not like most men's. . . .he looked easier to touch than to talk to (p. 105)." His moral concepts seemed to be partially a response to a code; he wanted to fight Sonny after he had tied Patsy in the arena (p. 128). Pete also seemed to be rather casual

about the violence that so upset Patsy as she read an account of two cowboys beating an old man (p. 173). Although he was not unusual in his apparent lack of reflection on the morality of sleeping with Boots before he married her or of hoping to seduce Patsy, he was unusual in his remorse and shame at finally making a rejected pass at Patsy, Pete lamenting, "I feel like I ought to be shot. . . (p. 653)." It was obvious to Patsy that Pete not only valued his cowboy life but also his life with Boots, in spite of the accompanying domesticity.

The real distinction though between Pete and earlier cowboys was the obvious difference in his work role, more than his social and mental characteristics. In a reference to Pete's profession, whether rodeo clown or salesman, Patsy noted that "the constant smile of his profession was costing him his true smile, the wry smile that had once made him so appealing (p. 653)." Through Pete, then, McMurtry effectively illustrates some of the pathos involved in the evolution of the rodeo cowboy.

Several minor characters also illustrate the ironic and comic qualities of rodeo cowboys and the changes that have come to their world. Pete told Jim that cowboys frequently fought for no reason at all, and Patsy hated the "insane violence" that seemed to be a general trademark of rodeo people (pp. 98, 170). One specific example of the crude and ridiculous self-confidence displayed by rodeo hands was Ed Boggs, the drunken bull rider who urinated on Patsy's car and then tried to make a pass at her. Like Sonny, he resented her wordiness, but he was not perceptive enough to accept her rejection of him until after she insulted him directly (pp. 12-14). At the same rodeo Royce Jones, a roper, al-

most ran over Patsy with his horse and yelled at her for getting in the way. He also condescendingly minimized whatever injury Jim might have had, and he "grinned at her in the tolerant way men of experience grin at the folly of women (p. 16)." As violent, crude, and condescending as these ridiculous cowboys were, Coon, Sonny's driver, was even more comic. He had not been a successful bronc rider, and he had started working for Sonny in order to get whatever girls Sonny did not want, another task that Coon was unequal to. Even being a driver was unrewarding, especially when they were in Los Angeles, a terrible place for cowboys. "Hippies with hair three feet long were treated better than he was, it seemed to him (p. 658)." Furthermore, Sonny fired him, an act which stripped Coon of what little status he had and made him even more miserable than most rodeo cowboys.

Of all McMurtry's rodeo hands, though, Peewee Raskin is probably the most pathetic. As his name suggests, he was small both in stature and in achievement. He was of little concern to anyone but the Carpenters; he was not disliked, he was simply overlooked. Unassuming and self-effacing, he was too simple to realize the extent of his simplicity. Compared to Sonny Shanks, Peewee was a joke, a caricature. However, he persistently attempted to be a rodeo cowboy, even in view of his lack of ability and the disadvantages spawned by a changed society.

Peewee is one of the class McMurtry described as "the little losers, the men who drag along from rodeo to rodeo, barely making their entry fees. . . ."42 And it is in his occupational characteristics and role identification that the evolutionary process in his own life and in that

⁴²McMurtry, "Goat-Ropers," p. 60.

of other cowboys can best be seen. He was like other rodeo cowboys in his dedication to the excitement of rodeo life. Once he explained to Patsy, "Well, you got to do something that's fun once in a while in your life (p. 156)." And to Patsy and Jim, Peewee at least looked and smelled like a cowboy, with his dusty cowboy clothes scented with hay and horse manure (p. 61). Professionally, however, he was definitely not a World's Champion Cowboy. For a good while he did not even manage to stay on a horse, much less win any prizes. His greatest claim to success came when he finally won a fourth place at Klamath Falls (p. 155). Because he was so unsuccessful at his chosen occupation, he was forced to take odd jobs such as working at a filling station and washing dishes at a cafe (pp. 71, 155). These temporary jobs enabled him to continue his rodeo efforts; however, one of these odd jobs turned into a permanent job when he finally quit rodeoing. Peewee's new career, driving a miniature train in the Hermann Park Zoo, was as tragi-comic for a cowboy as Peewee was himself. This occupation took him out of the rural West and put him in a decaying motel in urban Houston. It replaced his quasi-cowboy work with work that was not only uncowboylike but ridiculous. It even substituted a baseball cap for his cowboy hat (p. 287). Ironically, the unreflective Peewee enjoyed his work and was apparently not aware of the ignominy that most cowboys would have felt in taking such a job. Even Patsy observed that he was unchanged except for the hat: "He was obviously a person who would never amount to anything, and who knew it, and who had only his friendliness with which to face the world (p. 65)."

Peewee's friendliness helped to prevent his being a total social failure. Patsy and Jim liked him, and their intellectual graduate school

friends found Peewee and his cowboy hat interesting and quaintly charming at a party held at Patsy's house in Houston (p. 673). However, his awkwardness was predominant in most situations. While riding to a rodeo with the Carpenters, he was too embarrassed to ask Jim to stop at a restroom (p. 65). And when they invited him to dinner in Houston, he came "slicked up" and was so overwhelmed with the dinner and their apartment that he later bragged about being "almost over to River Oaks" to his seedy friends at the Gulf-Air Lounge, his favorite bar (pp. 297, 301, 303). Here he felt obligated to drink beer as the manly drink, even though he did not particularly like it (p. 320). Although he felt somewhat superior to them after his dinner invitation and although he carefully wore his cowboy hat and tried to appear manly, the regular customers at the Gulf-Air called him "Squirt" and insulted his job, his manhood, and his dubious social status (pp. 302-303). Again though, Peewee seemingly did not notice that even the lowest class habitues of the bar found him somewhat ridiculous. His cowboy habits, such as blowing his nose with his fingers and being polite and proper around women, served only to make him more out of place in a modern, urban society. While he was gallantly and protectively helping Patsy when she was drunk, he became nearly panic-stricken when she suggested that they smoke pot at a friend's house, an idea that brought up visions of heroin addiction and years in the Huntsville prison (p. 678). His other hapless and naive social endeavors with women were obvious examples of his lucklessness. He revealed a discomfort around women that was typical of earlier cowboys when he first met Patsy; he attempted to tidy himself by tucking in his shirt, he corrected a mild use of profanity in her presence, he respectfully called her "ma'am," and he

wanted to leave the Carpenters when Patsy had a crying fit in El Paso (pp. 63-64, 67, 70). And even though he seemed to desire a woman's affection, he told Patsy in terms reminiscent of the cowboy-drifter that no one would ever marry him and that he even had a hard time getting dates (pp. 70-71). Patsy tried to console him after he had waited for hours for a ride.

You just happen to resemble that man in Lil' Abner who has all the bad luck. You know, the one with the small black cloud over his head. Joe something or other. Subconsciously people think a mountain will fall on them if they pick you up (p. 155).

Apparently, Peewee was almost as great a failure in his social life as he was in his work.

Perhaps Peewee's lack of mental acuity and his dwindling adherence to an anachronistic Western code were a type of salvation for him. His lack of introspection and intelligence may have inured him to his own misery. In examining the titles of some of the Carpenters' paperbacks, he observed, "It makes me glad I quit school when I did. I ain't got the brain power for such as that (p. 67)." In fact, his taste in reading material was limited chiefly to Rodeo Sports News and dirty books such as Her Talented Tongue and Passion Flayed (p. 302). But unlike so many other cowboys, Peewee was not blatantly anti-intellectual; he even had a naive admiration for the Carpenters and the others who were smart enough to go to Rice University (p. 304). In place of a philosophy, Peewee paid homage to an out-dated and corrupted Western code, a code that accepted violence and valued hedonistic living. When the ex-lover of a waitress at the Gulf-Air Lounge entered and hit her for her misdeeds, neither Peewee nor any of the other men seemed to take notice since they were accustomed to "the concept of Fist City" (p. 304). Later in a parody of

the typical Western saloon scene, a man from Spring Branch, looking for Satsuma Street, pulled his gun and started shooting indiscriminately because there were not enough beans in his chili. Other than a momentary shock at nearly swallowing his toothpick, Peewee was mainly concerned that a bullet intended for him had hit a jar of vinegar and pickled pigs' feet which had splattered on his precious hat (pp. 307-309). Although Peewee himself did not get to participate in all the good times due a drifting cowboy, he did value the kind of life that a real cowboy like Sonny Shanks lived. Peewee had idolized Sonny, and he nearly broke down in talking about Sonny's death. His voice quavered as he said, "Live fast, love hard, die young, and leave beautiful memories Won't be no more like him (pp. 677-678)." Through a portrayal then of Peewee's values and his mental characteristics or lack of them, McMurtry satirizes the cowboy code and its corrupted incarnation in Peewee Raskin.

According to McMurtry, the rodeo cowboy is far from the archetypal cowboy seen in the role of the cattleman. Rodeo hands in their "sybaritic and epicurean" lives are actually "the suburbanites of the West."⁴³ More important than McMurtry's criticism of the rodeo cowboy's characteristics, however, is his portrayal of the evolutionary process that has degenerated cowboys into "mindless and tasteless suburbanized slobs."⁴⁴ The differences between Sonny Shanks and the less glamorous Pete and Peewee serve to illustrate some of those changes within the rodeo cowboy's role itself. However, the changes that absorb cowboy values and traditions into a broader and less distinguished society are more important. In talking to

⁴³Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Pete about Boots' pregnancy and their new lifestyle. Patsy observed the sad effects of the general evolution on McMurtry's rodeo cowboys in Moving On.

It struck her that he could scarcely be expected to be glad about it [the baby], since it had taken him from so much that he was part of: the West, all that country, those drives he and Boots loved, and rodeo horses and bulls, the whole movement of the arena. For all that it was dumb and dull to her, it kindled something vital in Pete. He matched with it in some way. So did Sonny. Even Peewee matched with it, in his way. On the zoo train he was just a sad uneducated kid in a big city, doing a silly job. Pete would look just as sad on a car lot, it seemed to her. It had already taken something away from him. He no longer looked like a man who could move faster than a bull (p. 651).

In spite of his corruption of the horseman myth and his inferior cowboy characteristics in comparison to the cattleman and the cowhand, the rodeo cowboy still is at least partially attached to the Western ethos, "his blood's country and his heart's pastureland."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Larry McMurtry, Leaving Cheyenne (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Popular Library, n.d.), p. 5.

Chapter V

The Symbolic Cowboy

Although symbolic frontiersmen have existed almost as long as the cowboy and his myth, they are chiefly a development of a modern society, a context that nurtures increasing urban influences. The symbolic cowboy, then, is the final stage in the evolution of the cowboy. Larry McMurtry's books parallel this movement; inhabitants of an agrarian environment at first, his characters move in succeeding books from the ranch to the small town to the big city, reflecting the essential sociological movement of the twentieth century.

The Metropolis swallowed the Frontier like a small snake swallows a large frog: slowly, not without strain, but inexorably. And if something of the Frontier remains alive in the innards of the Metropolis it is because the process of digestion has only just begun.¹

Symbolic cowboys have always been more numerous than authentic cowboys, and since the "process of digestion" has just started, there are many obvious manifestations of symbolic frontiersmanship, even in urban areas. Although guns, hats, and horses are not longer pre-eminent as symbols of the frontier spirit, Western clothes are prominent evidence of the efficacy of that influence. Renewed enthusiasm for country and Western music, even in New York, is perhaps a significant indication of the folk's nostalgia for their rural roots. In the Southwest especially, young male "kickers" display their identity with the popular Western ethos, somewhat defensively, through their stubborn Western attire and through obnoxious bumper stickers such as "Goat-Ropers need love too," "Cowboys are better lovers," and

¹Larry McMurtry, In a Narrow Grave (Austin: Encino Press, 1968), p. 44.

"God bless John Wayne." Elaborate frontier celebrations and pageants are not limited to any region. Larry McMurtry offers an apt analysis of these symbolic and somewhat anachronistic expressions.

We are no longer the prisoners of distance, but I think it will be awhile yet before we free ourselves of attitudes formed in the days when we were creatures of the lonely plain and knew nothing of streets and subdivisions. A just characterization of our cities must take account of the fact that many of the people in them and most of the people who control them, remain . . . symbolic frontiersmen. Wheelerdealerism is an extension of the frontier ethos, refined and transplanted to an urban context; and while only a few of us are wheeler-dealers most of us practice symbolic frontiersmanship in some form or fashion.²

He stated that one of his purposes in writing In a Narrow Grave was to examine the effects of the frontier ethos, in Texas especially, and he observed, "The tendency to practice symbolic frontiersmanship might almost be said to characterize the twentieth century Texas, whether he be an intellectual, a cowboy, a businessman, or a politician."³

Larry McMurtry's symbolic cowboys do, in fact, appear in several different roles which are somewhat related to the characteristics and types of symbolic cowboys. One type is the character who has strong connections with the past and its traditions. He is conscious of his ties, but he does not totally reject them, even though he may be drifting toward a role and a society that are corruptions of the myth. A second type is the character who is unconsciously influenced by the frontier spirit. Frequently a caricature, his behavior parodies characteristics of the early cowboy, and he works at uncowboylike jobs and plays unlikely

²Ibid., p. 120.

³Ibid., p. 43.

roles. The character who is not attached to the past but who is aware of its power and who would like to be under its influence is another type of symbolic cowboy: the wishful observer. Probably more numerous than any other group, this symbolic cowboy recognizes the power of the myth and the poignance of its passing, and he either wishes he could be a part of that romantic experience or he attempts to assume at least the outward signs of the traditions. A final type is the person who may be influenced by the traditions and the environment but who rejects, or attempts to reject, the frontier ethos which he may find somewhat stifling. One common bond among the different types of symbolic cowboys though is their connection with the past, the frontier spirit, and real and mythic cowboy qualities. One observer noted that "in the crowded, industrialized nations, the cowboy is coming to stand for the free spirit of man, operating at a time and in a place in which he would condition the world around him instead of being conditioned by it."⁴ This analysis is a plausible explanation for the symbolic cowboy's attraction to the myth and the incarnation of some of its properties.

The twentieth century has naturally altered even the symbolic cowboy's characteristics. However, because of the legacy of his archetypal past, there are some similarities between the modern, "drugstore" variety and the authentic, old-time cowboy. The similarities are chiefly due to the modern man's admiration of the romance, the flamboyance, and the freedom of the mythical cowboy-drifter. The qualities and values of the more realistic cowboy-settler or cattleman are not emulated or coveted. Except for the basic concept of manliness shared by both cattleman and cowhand,

⁴David Nevin, The Texans: What They Are--And Why (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1968), pp. 54-55.

the concepts of the romantic drifting and personal satisfaction of the cowhand are the symbolic cowboy's choice over the cattleman's values of permanence, land, and work. The symbolic cowboy, therefore, like his predecessor, is characterized by drifting; drifting in his work, his social behavior, and his mental characteristics and attitudes. McMurtry's symbolic cowboys drift physically like the earlier cowboy, but their occupations do not involve cowboy work; the roles include coaches, students, intellectuals, and writers. Socially, they are irresponsible, self-centered drifters. In some cases they reveal intellect and introspection, but they value drifting more than they do the land, the work, and the old value system. The symbolic cowboy, then, although blessed with a complimentary label, seems inferior in comparison to cattlemen or even cowhands of an earlier time. However, McMurtry reveals a split attitude in his novels and in his nonfiction, writing in one essay, "I am critical of the past, yet apparently attracted to it; and though I am even more critical of the present I am also quite clearly attracted to it."⁵ And although he recently seems more attracted to the present in his growing exclusion of rural elements from his novels, the overall picture is one of a "contradiction of attractions," an ambivalence that can be seen in the following serious and satiric observation: "In Texas a ranch is the equivalent of a distinguished geneology--it establishes one's connection with the past. Here it is better to be a drugstore cowboy than no cowboy at all."⁶ And many of his characters are indeed "drugstore cowboys."

⁵McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 141.

⁶Ibid., p. 71.

In Horseman, Pass By Homer Bannon's grandson Lonnie is a symbolic cowboy who is conscious of his strong connections with the past and its traditions. Although an authentic and ordinary cowhand on his grandfather's ranch, there are indications that he will not choose that role for his future and remain a cowhand after his adolescence. Because his final role is not revealed, his occupational characteristics and tendencies are seen chiefly in his relation to the cowboys around him. One powerful influence on Lonnie was Homer, the archetypal cattleman in McMurtry's novels. Lonnie frequently listened to his grandfather's cowboy stories, and he clearly admired his almost mythical ancestor, especially after his death. Lonnie enjoyed listening to Jesse, the cowhand-drifter, even more. In fact, Jesse's stories about his adventures and travels never lasted long enough for Lonnie.⁷ One critic calls Lonnie "a cowboy at heart."⁸ Evidence of this can be seen in Lonnie's dawn ride of Homer's favorite horse, Stranger, a fast bareback ride that exhilarated him and showed him in the mythical role of the horseman.⁹ He even dreamed once of a mythical morning ride with his grandfather as they rode toward a ranch he could not see, the Llano Estacado or Matador maybe, and looked at the land "spread wide under the clear spread of sky like the opening scene in a big Western movie (p. 60)." However, because of the changing times, he was also influenced by a different force. Lonnie noted, "Granddad and I were in such separate

⁷Larry McMurtry, Hud, paperback ed. of Horseman Pass By (New York: Harper & Row, 1961; Popular Library, n.d.), p. 17.

⁸Thomas Landess, Larry McMurtry, Southwest Writers Series, No. 23 (Austin, Texas: Steck Vaughn Company, 1969), p. 10.

⁹McMurtry, Hud, pp. 76-77. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

times and separate places. I had got where I would rather go to Thalia and goof around on the square than listen to his old-timy stories (p. 21)." Ranch life did not offer the excitement that he craved, a factor that disoriented him and made him pull toward a different world. At the dance after the rodeo he was listening to a Hank Williams song about the wild side of life and he thought of how those who pursued excitement ended up doing without.

I felt lost from everybody, and from myself included, laying on a wagon sheet in a pastureland of cars. Only the tune of the song reached me, but the tune was enough. It fit the night and the country and the way I was feeling, and fit them better than anything I knew (p. 117).

And even though he realized that seeking excitement was probably futile, nothing compelled him to stay on the ranch and be a cowboy; his final act was to hitch a ride in a truck that was headed away from the ranch and his ancestral occupation.

Lonnie was also a drifter in his self-centered social behavior. Although he demonstrated loyalty to Homer and concern for Jesse, most of his plans and conduct were as selfish as those of the drifting cowhand and rodeo cowboy. Since Lonnie was young though, he did not have much actual experience to his credit. Once he had spent three wild nights in Fort Worth wandering among wild-looking people, drinking beer, and listening to country music in hillbilly bars, and the "few-mouthfuls of excitement" he had tasted there were a constant part of his dreams and wishes for experiencing more excitement (p. 20). Listening to Jesse's stories only made him more restless, and he wished that he, too, had "something wild and exciting to do (p. 20)." His attitudes toward women were a part of his general yen for excitement. He indulged in fantasies

about characters in novels, and he especially enjoyed his fantasies about Halmea, their black cook. Although his age and his restlessness did not permit him to seek or value a permanent marriage relationship, he did demonstrate sensitivity and consideration for Halmea, who served as his surrogate mother-lover. The best example of his mixed feelings toward her occurred when he attempted to stop Hud from raping her, realizing that he wanted to watch at the same time (p. 97). His respect for her as a friend was balanced by the excitement she brought his confused sexuality. Even the annual rodeo in town was exciting to him because it brought wild and strange crowds (p. 83). Often when he sat on the windmill at night he thought "of the wild nights ahead, when I would have my own car, and could tear across the country to dances and rodeos I kept happy thinking of all the reckless things that could happen in the next few years (p. 7)." He compared his restlessness with "an itch there's no way to scratch," and tied to the ranch he began to feel like he was "strangling," relieving the pressure once by shooting frogs (pp. 71, 72). However, the only thing that really seemed to rid him of his restlessness was actual movement or drifting. Even the rodeo crowd and the drunk cowboys made him feel that he was strangling. "When I was moving down the dark highway, moving on like the song said, I didn't feel so hemmed up and I kinda relaxed (p. 110)." After Homer's death Lonnie caught a ride on a cattle truck. "I was tempted to do like Jesse once said: to lean back and let the truck take me as far as it was going (p. 142)." McMurtry does not specify whether or not Lonnie (who was no longer a cowhand and who had only envied rodeo cowboys) would return to the ranch to mature in the rural Texas of the fifties.

Although Lonnie's introspection was chiefly involved with his adolescent confusion, some of his mental attitudes reflected sentiments of old-time cowboys and of modern symbolic cowboys. Observing all the difficulties entailed in rounding up the cattle for government inspection prompted Lonnie's typical cowboy reaction. "That was enough to put me down on the government myself (p. 46)." His aversion to religion was expressed in his scorn for the decorations in the church, the "phonies" who attended the funeral service, the preacher that Homer never liked, and the idea that Homer's death put him in a better place (pp. 133-136). Lonnie's morals were not clearly delineated, but he did show disgust for some of Hud's behavior, especially with women, and he seemed to have imbibed some of Homer's basic goodness. He also appreciated and valued some of the same things Homer loved--the land and the ride. However, "his heart nevertheless responds to the sensual, self-indulgent life that Hud represents."¹⁰ This contradiction of attractions is characteristic of symbolic cowboys, and Lonnie seems to be "the embodiment of a tentative future and the symbol of a generation which looks upon both past and present with bewildered ambivalence."¹¹ Lonnie's ambivalence is partially explained in his description of some of the changes in life on the ranch, a prime factor in symbolic cowboys:

¹⁰Landess, McMurtry, p. 13.

¹¹Ibid., p. 9.

In my gradeschool days we had hung carcasses in the smokehouse, beeves and hogs that Granddad and the Cowboys butchered on frosty mornings in November. For a while then there would be cracklin's, and salty smells, and the dogs would be fighting over the pigs' feet. But now the beeves and hogs were in the locker plant in Thalia, and the smokehouse only held broken lawn mowers and spades and pieces of harness.¹²

Time brought changes not only to those on the ranches who were aware of the influence of their traditions but also to those who had modern occupations and were unaware of the power of the frontier influence on their lives. McMurtry has several of these characters enact part of the ethos of the earlier cowboy although they are engaged in unlikely occupations. In The Last Picture Show Sonny Crawford, Abilene, and most of the men of Thalia were affected by that influence, but Coach Popper was most obviously an incarnation of the exaggerated Western code of masculinity.

Although Herman Popper was a football coach rather than a cowboy, his occupation was held in highest approbation by the males of Thalia. Here football had replaced rodeo and ranching and was a highly-regarded masculine ritual, a ritual that demanded the presence of every male as a spectator at the Friday night game, betting on the home team, the participation by every able-bodied high school male in the game, the inevitable Saturday morning quarterbacking by observers who had found some flaws in the masculinity, and even a hierarchy of masculinity which placed the coach and the backfield above the lowly linemen. As tokens of the males' esteem for the football coach, the Quarterback Club rewarded his winning football seasons with a new gun and even a new car, while

¹²McMurtry, Hud, p. 121.

ignoring his failures as a basketball coach since basketball did not really matter. Herman Popper and everyone else in town considered Coach Popper to be the epitome of manliness.

Most of his social behavior was apparently consistent with this code. Cursing was almost obligatory, and he was entitled to ridicule anyone who did not live up to masculine standards. After laughing at the preacher's son, Joe Bob Blanton, who was trying to peel his socks off his blisters after a hapless performance at basketball practice, Coach Popper also belittled Joe Bob's physical masculinity: "Look at that little worm there What kind of female you ever gonna get with that thing for bait, Joe? Wouldn't do for a six-year-old girl."¹³ No one in town, except his wife Ruth, would ever believe that Herman Popper was a latent homosexual, that he had an unusual affection for his quarterback Bobby Logan. Not even the boys who had witnessed his rage when someone popped Bobby with a towel and who knew he had kissed Bobby on the ear one night would believe that he was "queer" (pp. 38, 103). After all, he was the football coach. His attitudes toward his wife and other women were also apparently consistent with the "cowboy" code. He advised his boys, "Find'em, fool'em, fuck'em, and forget'em (p. 103)." He even thought of sex as a good, potential punishment for girls like Jacy who distracted his boys (p. 117). He certainly did not expect or condone Ruth's getting any pleasure out of it, and he was repulsed with her when she did, comparing her unfavorably with his mother, who was decent. "If my mother was alive and knew how you acted she'd have your hide. I've always heard women got

¹³Larry McMurtry, The Last Picture Show (New York: Dial Press, 1966; Dell Publishing Co., 1972), p. 37. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

nasty in their old age but I never thought it would happen to no wife of mine (p. 130)." Even Ruth's skinniness was inferior to his mother's hard-working, five-eleven, masculine frame (p. 117). After Ruth had had a tumor removed from her breast, he refused to bring her a pain pill when she was too groggy to get up; and he told Ruth and the doctors that it would have been cheaper and more sensible to remove the whole breast since it was doing her no good (p. 64). When Sonny told him that Ruth was not feeling well, he replied characteristically:

Hell, women like to be sick Ruth had rather be sick than do anything. I could have bought a new deer rifle with what she's spent on pills just this last year, and I wish I had, by God. A good gun beats a woman any day (p. 51).

This statement could also serve as a key to his values and mental characteristics. As a civics teacher, Coach Popper was incredibly stupid, falling asleep in class three out of four days while trying to figure out a paragraph in the textbook or revealing that he did not even know the Pledge of Allegiance (pp. 33-34). Watching the news on television bored him, and his favorite reading material was a fishing story in Sports Afield (p. 116, 153). Coach Popper was also openly anti-intellectual. He was outraged when he discovered that Bobby Logan was riding to another school with Mr. John Cecil, the English teacher, in order to take a summer school course in trigonometry so that he could enter a good college. He thought that Bobby should be practicing instead of sitting in a classroom, and he told Bobby, "I can get you a scholarship anywhere and you won't need to know a fuckin' thing (p. 151)." He presented his belief that Mr. Cecil was a "homasexyul" to a group of townsmen who were chewing tobacco, discussing masculine matters, and agreeing that teaching English was not a

man's job. Naturally, they had the school board fire Mr. Cecil (p. 152). When he bragged to Ruth about what they had accomplished, her rage did not make him feel guilty for his moral hypocrisy; perhaps he was not aware of his own homosexuality, for he replied, "Nobody in this town would believe that. I'm the football coach (p. 154)!" His perverted symbolic frontiersmanship is obvious in his predilection for a cowboy symbol, guns. He would not attend any Saturday night functions, even a special Christmas dance, because nothing could make him miss Gunsmoke. He owned many guns, and once he had even shot at Sonny because he thought Sonny had scared off a dove he was stalking (p. 38). And he clearly valued guns more than he did his wife, resenting her for ending his bachelorhood and ruining his chances for taking some real hunting trips, to Alaska, for example (p. 118). He did not want a family, and the only thing he valued was his masculine image, an unlikeable example of a man unaware of the influences of a masculinity-oriented frontier ethos.

Hank Malory in Moving On is another character who is apparently unreflective and basically unaware of the forces that make him a symbolic cowboy. However, compared to the caricature of the football coach, Hank is both enlightened and likeable. He has more of the mythical cowboy's acceptable characteristics and fewer of the flaws because he is a straight character rather than a parody of what is ludicrous about the cowboy ethic. He is like Coach Popper in that he is not a cowboy by profession, but Hank does possess some characteristics of the cowboy role in his physical appearance and in his background of some Western vein. Most of his clothes were old; he frequently wore Levi's and a suede coat, and he even kept an

old pair of cowboy boots in his closet.¹⁴ Hank was lean and tall, and he made Patsy feel small and feminine (p. 255). "He sometimes reminded her of Pete; like Pete, he had a kind of presence that had more to do with physical confidence than with intellect (p. 257)." When she first met him, she said, "I bet you're from the West. You've got a Western jaw. Months of rodeos taught me to recognize them. You probably even smell from the West (p. 219)." And the background she sensed as being different from hers was indeed somewhat Western. His father, Monroe Malory, the old Wichita Ranger, was a hillbilly musician who named his son after Hank Williams (pp. 225, 695). Patsy noted that Hank was different from the other graduate students and was not very "Rice-like" (p. 225). When he left Houston, he headed west both times, once working on a surveying crew in Childress, Texas, and in his home town, Portales, New Mexico. Later he worked in an art-film house in Lubbock, a part of the desert that seemed to fit him (pp. 356, 654, 667). None of these jobs were cowboy occupations, and Patsy knew him best as a graduate student in Houston, meeting and talking with her in the drugstore, a significant setting for a drugstore cowboy.

Much of Hank's social behavior was related to some of the characteristics of the earlier cowboy. Hank was quiet around everyone, including Patsy and his previous lover, Clara, who once remarked to him, "You should have been a cowboy. You're great when you don't have to make conversation (p. 270)." His solitariness made him more forceful and interesting to Patsy when they were alone than when they were in a group (p. 522). His

¹⁴Larry McMurtry, Moving On (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1970; Avon Books, 1971), pp. 218, 254. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

melancholy air that was typical of the cowboy was occasional self-pity as he talked infrequently of his unhappy past (p. 447). When Clara noticed that he no longer seemed interested in her, he displayed a cowboy's honesty and admitted it (p. 447). When he decided to leave Houston since Patsy would not have him, he also demonstrated a firm decisiveness. Patsy observed, "He looked very firm about it. She was not used to such firmness and it shocked her a little that a man could be so decisive about a matter of feeling (p. 269)." And around women he did possess some of the mythical cowboy's characteristics and problems although he was certainly more oriented to women than the cowboy was. Once when Patsy had discovered him asleep in the library, he tried to straighten himself and tuck his shirt in, an action which reminded her of Peewee. "Getting their shirt-tails tucked in was apparently an instinct with Western men (p. 349)." Jim told Patsy, and Hank admitted, that he did not understand women or know what to do with them, a common cowboy complaint (p. 271, 567). Clara analyzed him as the romantic type who wanted marriage, "the big show or nothing," rather than simple sex (pp. 270-271). And he did have an emotional commitment to Patsy, telling her that he loved her and wanted her to come with him, without actually mentioning the word marriage (p. 600). But like the cowboy of old, Hank did not win his true love, and he was forced to leave Houston and move on, partially because Jim had discovered that Hank and Patsy were lovers (p. 607). Many of his social characteristics, then, were similar to those of the mythical cowboy.

Hank's mental attitudes and characteristics were less obvious. His reticence and his apparent lack of reflection, while typical of a cowboy, obscured whatever ambivalent ideas and values that may have been there. If a scholarship to Rice and enrollment in its graduate school is an

indication of intellectual ability, then Hank was indeed "fairly smart" as Patsy once described him (p. 257). However, Hank did not seem to be involved in academic life or scholarship, and he seemed to value his relationship with Patsy more because he had left graduate school twice on her account. Hank did not value any one particular spot of Western land, as the cattlemen did, but Patsy thought that Hank once looked homesick as he stood looking northwest toward "the country where he came from--the land of northers (p. 265)." And it was in this direction that Hank travelled as he turned significantly onto Sunset and left Houston and Patsy for perhaps the last time. Although he continued his attempt to win Patsy, as a symbolic cowboy he was also unknowingly following the pattern of the cowboy-drifter at this point. "He liked to drive and could do it without thinking; he did not feel too bad (p. 609)."

A third type of symbolic cowboy is the individual that lacks the ties to the cowboy traditions but is attracted to that myth. This type includes all those who look wistfully at the cowboy and the past and perhaps try to capture some of the trappings or feelings for themselves. One minor but striking example is Marlet in Horseman, Pass By. When Lonnie first met him, he was hanging around the chutes at the auction. He worked in the yards without pay on his days off work at the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company, an opportunity for him to be around work with cattle. Although he wanted to be a cowboy, he "just looked like a city high-school kid, ducktails and flowery shirt" ¹⁵ Marlet was no help with the cattle because he just got in the way. ¹⁶ Socially he was not much more

¹⁵McMurtry, Hud, p. 62.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 63.

successful, stating his commitment to "getting it" and complaining to Lonnie, "I never got it from a blue-eyed woman once."¹⁷ Marlet obviously valued the cowboy life that his casual acquaintance, Lonnie, seemed to represent. With an unlit cigarette in his mouth Marlet announced that one day he too would own a horse and that he wished that his family owned a ranch.¹⁸ Everything about his present life made him feel as if he were strangling, but he had hope of living the free and romantic life of the cowboy.

Patsy and Jim Carpenter were also attracted to the myth in different ways. Patsy did not enjoy rodeo, the people, and the constant travelling, but she enjoyed everything about the life at the ranch belonging to Jim's Uncle Roger. She chatted and volunteered to help Roger with the chores by straining the milk like one of Thomas Hardy's milkmaids, and she day-dreamed of having her own ranch as she enjoyed the smells of the country and Roger's wooden spoons and utensils.¹⁹ Once when she was alone at the ranch, she had a fantasy that she was a pioneer woman left alone in danger from Indians (p. 185). She even enjoyed a late afternoon ride with Roger and her son Davey, especially when she witnessed the horse and horseman chasing the cow (p. 495, 499). Patsy's attraction to Roger and the life on his ranch is significant considering the fact that she grew up in Dallas, lived in Houston, and had no background for her appreciation of

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 62, 64.

¹⁹McMurtry, Moving On, pp. 48-49. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

the horseman myth and rural living.

Jim had no more frontier heritage than Patsy did, but he too was drawn by the Western spirit. However, much of his attraction was to rodeo life and the elements that were less authentic than those represented by Roger Wagonner. Jim was predominantly a product of modern society, a physical and moral drifter whose fling with cowboy life was just one of the many things he attempted in his search for himself. Before he decided to become a photographer and compile a book of pictures about rodeo, he earlier had gone through elaborate preparations to become first a novelist and then a linguist (pp. 85-86). While a graduate student at Rice, he also began book collecting before giving up both projects and moving to California where he went to work for IBM. An unsympathetic observer would probably describe him as a "job-hopper"; even Patsy grew frustrated with his inability to settle into a role or complete a project. "She was always unable to take his work seriously enough at the time when he was most intense about it; by the time she became enthused about one of his lines of endeavor he would almost invariably be bored with it and ripe for a new pursuit (p. 222)." Jim had a total lack of identification with any work role, an identification that was requisite for cattlemen, cowhands, or rodeo cowboys. Furthermore, Jim's general inability was most obvious in his current work as a photographer on the rodeo circuit. He did not even fit the surroundings. "Despite his Levi's and boots he himself felt incongruous--he no more belonged to the scene than the ladies on the horses. He felt almost as hopeless at photography as they were at horsemanship.... (p. 77)." Even the tolerant and understanding Pete, who had seen many young

men adrift, noticed that "it was so obvious that Jim didn't know what he was doing that it made things a little awkward. He didn't even know how to pretend he knew what he was doing (p. 98)." Most of the time he simply took pictures of rodeo life, but when he attempted to become a small part of it by riding around on a borrowed horse, it ran away and threw him into a car, breaking his hip, leg, and collarbone (p. 527). But because Jim was an outsider and not a horseman, he did not suffer the ignominy that would have befallen an authentic cowboy.

Because of Jim's inability in the attractive world of the rodeo cowboy and because of his inability to select a work role, he admired and imitated others in an attempt to find his personal identity. His strongest and most consistent adulation was reserved for Sonny Shanks, three times World's Champion Cowboy. The respect he had for Sonny's fame and ability was supplemented by the awe he felt in Sonny's presence. "He decided that if he knew anyone with charisma, it was Sonny. It was no wonder the women had all seemed bewitched. He had a way of making whatever he was doing seem interesting, and even his most casual gestures had a kind of authority (p. 96)." Even after Sonny tried to seduce Patsy and tied her up in the rodeo arena, Jim was still perfectly willing to socialize with Sonny, to follow him to rodeos, to defend him to Patsy, and even to work for Sonny taking still pictures of his movie about rodeo (pp. 151, 159-160, 518). Jim even sought lowly Peewee Raskin's advice about rodeo and envied Peewee's job experiences because Jim felt that his own merits never could have gotten him his past jobs with the oil companies owned by his father's friends (pp. 65-71). Jim also picked an idol from academic life who was as famous in his own world as Sonny was in his; he

admired William Duffin enough to imitate his book collecting hobby and to ask him to be his major professor. Even after Duffin, "the Sonny Shanks of the scholarly world," as Patsy termed him, made repeated passes at her, Jim still wanted to socialize with him, resenting Patsy's upsetting his plans again (pp. 238-239). She commented, "You've got to be somebody's disciple, don't you? I wish I could understand why you invariably pick bastards (p. 244)." Duffin described Jim as not having much of an identity (p. 238), and Jim echoed that analysis in his own fears: "He had always assumed that he was basically okay, and lucky and perhaps even gifted, and that things would turn out well once he found out what he really liked to do. But he wondered (p. 642)."

The confusion and weakness characterizing his work and role identity were also a part of his social behavior. Although Jim and Patsy were both from wealthy families, he irrationally insisted on driving an old and perilous car, living in a cheap apartment and cheap motel rooms, not spending any money, and generally pretending that they were poor (p. 245). Although Jim was personable and well-liked, he was unsure of himself as seen in his disciple complex, and he was weak in his dealings with people, especially women. Patsy noted, however, "For some reason Jim took on authority when he slept; it was then that he seemed most like the man she wanted him to be (p. 46)." Considering Patsy to be prudish and conventional, he was attracted to women who were not. He enjoyed talking to Pete Tatum's wife, Boots, because he "was a little intrigued by girls who came right out with words like screw and dong (p. 81)." He was so impressed with Sonny's lover, the famous Eleanor Guthrie, that he did not have enough self-confidence to attempt to make love to her (p. 516). He

even convinced himself that Patsy did not appreciate him. Jim's preoccupation with his problems, his apathy toward Patsy's difficulties, and his weakness in comparison to other men in fact made it difficult for her to value him. She was especially disillusioned when he did not become concerned or angry when men like Ed Boggs, Sonny Shanks, Pete Tatum, and Bill Duffin made passes at her. Even when he discovered that she was sleeping with Hank, he did not become angry or make a scene, even though he said he had idealized her (pp. 592, 603). The voluptuous Clara, a fellow graduate student, bolstered his self-confidence, but he was even indecisive about leaving for California with her (p. 637). Later, he was undecided about whether or not to stay married to Patsy. Although Jim was weaker, less independent, and somewhat more sensitive than earlier cowboys, they were similar in their difficulties with women.

Jim's mental characteristics and attitudes were less obvious, perhaps because of his own confusion. Jim was apparently bright, but Patsy frequently showed up everyone in literary discussions, contributing to his paranoia about her competition (pp. 246-247). He was impressed by the Western ethos and the cowboy life. Once as he observed several Indian teenagers walking along the road with lights in the background, he thought, "Except for the teenagers, it was a little like being in the Old West for a moment, the scout slipping past the Indian encampment (p. 72). The austerity of Pete's rodeo life and his one-man trailer also appealed to Jim's symbolic frontiersmanship. "He loved the thought of being able to live on next to nothing--on the bare essentials. In his imagination he often stripped his life of all extras, all luxuries, everything wasteful (p. 81)." The Western life of the rodeo world influenced him so that he

even picked up the habit of humming hillbilly songs, and he later argued that rodeo compared favorably with graduate school (pp. 179, 364). Jim wanted a chance to prove his personal merit on his own terms, echoing a popular cowboy sentiment. When he learned of their prospect of inheriting Roger Wagonner's land and ranch, he was excited and incredulous that Patsy had not mentioned it to him. However, it is ironic in view of his attachment to the frontier ethos and his negation of personal wealth that he valued the land for its financial worth (pp. 576-577). So in his values, as in his social behavior and his lack of role identity, Jim demonstrates weakness and confusion while offering strong evidence of his attraction to the myth.

A final type of symbolic cowboy is the person who is heir to frontier influences and is attracted to them but who finally rejects them or realizes that the ethos is no longer valid for him. Danny Deck in All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers, McMurtry's most recent book,²⁰ is an example of this type. Danny, McMurtry, and the novel are far from McMurtry's archetypal Homer and Horseman, Pass By in time and distance in the evolutionary process. For example, Danny's mental work as a writer is totally different from the action-oriented work of the earlier cowboy, even though he was described as a "frontier genius" (p. 41). He thought of himself as a writer, and he fantasized on the way to a hapless autograph party that people seeing his nondescript appearance would think him

²⁰Larry McMurtry, All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers (paperback ed.; New York: Pocket Books, 1973). McMurtry is supposed to publish a new book in late 1974. All following references to this source will be cited by page number in the text.

"an inspired madman, like Dylan Thomas (p. 193)." He had used his West Texas heritage in writing about Old Man Goodnight and his grandmother in one of his novels, but he rejected the rest of the novel when he put it in the Rio Grande to float out to sea (pp. 245-256). Although the publication of his novel and the promise of screen rights assured him of financial success, his work was not enough salvation from all the other problems that afflicted him.

Most of Danny's problems were of a social nature. His fellow graduate student friends, Flap and Emma Horton, liked him; Petey Ximenes, the Mexican janitor in the library, liked him; a few other exceptions liked him. However, Danny received rejection and antagonism from many sources. His Uncle Laredo, for example, criticized him for his long hair, a characteristic that also provoked some Texas Rangers (pp. 152, 219). His main difficulties were with women though, problems earlier cowboys were familiar with. The curse that the lesbian put on Danny, that he would not be able to reach women, seemed to haunt him (pp. 45-46). His most spectacular failure was with his wife Sally, who became increasingly aloof as soon as he succeeded in making her pregnant. She even refused to let Danny see his daughter in the hospital (p. 209). Jill Peel cared for Danny, although she apparently could not respond to him sexually, and she committed herself to helping someone else and could not help him when he needed someone to give him direction and comfort after he had lost his daughter and complicated his ties with his friends Jenny Salomea and Emma (p. 228). Even the Mexican whore, Juanita, rejected his offer to come live with him (pp. 232-233). One of his novels was about a young man who was incurably foolish with women, and like the title of that novel, Danny

himself seemed to be The Man Who Never Learned, a mixture of the mythic and the modern unfortunate and loveless cowboy (p. 127).

Danny's work and his mental attitudes best reflect his position as a symbolic cowboy in the overall evolution. Texas was a powerful force in his life. When he first left Texas, he felt it behind him like "some giant, some genie, some god (p. 67)." The influence was so great that because of his disorientation in San Francisco he tacked up a Texaco Road map of Texas over his typewriter, unsuccessfully hoping that it would make him feel more solid (p. 80). His nostalgia for Texas and his return convinced him that his separation from his place had been the source of some of his problems.

It was the sky that was Texas, the sky that welcomed me back. The land I didn't care for all that much--it was bleak and monotonous and full of ugly little towns. The sky was what I had been missing, and seeing it again in its morning brightness made me realize suddenly why I hadn't been myself for many months I couldn't feel anything in a place where I hadn't even noticed the sky (p. 149).

He was even affected by the myth's power in minor details in his life. He enjoyed fantasizing and using his gun to shoot a squirrel out of a tree near his apartment in Houston (p. 9). And Danny did not own a real horse to effect his travelling and drifting as a horseman, but thinking of his car he decided that he would call it El Chevy and bury it someday beneath some rocks near the Rio Grande, a tribute to the creature that was as quivery and tired as he was, as they streaked to the battle (p. 171).

In spite of his apparent attraction to the frontier ethos and its characteristics, the myth had grown sour and had perhaps lost its power to sway him. After visiting his Uncle Laredo and the ranch, Danny was

tired and disheartened. "The Hacienda of the Bitter Waters wasn't the Old West I liked to believe in--it was the bitter end of something. I knew I would never want to visit it again (p. 170)." When he left Houston the last time, he did not know why he had left or where he was going, a drifter in the traditions of the cowhands, the rodeo cowboys, and other symbolic cowboys (p. 216). He later drowned his book, except for the parts about Old Man Goodnight and Granny, in the Rio Grande. He described his ambivalence: "It was always a borderland I had lived on, it seemed to me, a thin little strip between the country of the normal and the country of the strange. Perhaps my true country was the borderland, anyway (p. 246)." Danny also gave words to the evolution and displacement of the cowboy when prior to his suicide he thought, "I didn't see the great scenes anymore, the Old Man riding, the Old Woman standing on the ridge, the wild scenes from the past that I usually saw when I was walking some border of my own at night. Maybe all that was over (p. 246)."

It is appropriate that McMurtry's latest published novel deals with a symbolic cowboy, a writer like McMurtry himself. Writing as work is as remote from cowboy work as any job could be. A writer is not limited to a place or to an area; he is free to drift even wider than the rodeo cowboy. However, he is frequently bound mentally to his place and is apt to take it with him, even to the city. Even though Danny Deck once lived in San Francisco he was drawn back to Texas physically, and judging from his chapters on mythic Western figures, his pioneer grandmother and Charles Goodnight, he was also drawn to it mentally. Larry McMurtry too has carried, perhaps inadvertently, his traditions with him to urban areas and has tried to escape them. One critic believes that the frontier ethos is powerful,

often stifling the artists who try to work with it.

. . . Larry McMurtry's literary life reveals the forces at work in the dominant culture patterns of the Southwest: the anguish of those of its artists who are searching for firm ground upon which to stand within the ethos of the western legend, and the difficulty of their psychological effort to break through the limitations of frontier affirmation in order to achieve a critical focus on their material.²¹

Another critic writes that McMurtry's In A Narrow Grave "develops a really complex theory about the relationship of the end of Texas' physical frontier and the present and future explorations into its literary frontiers."²²

McMurtry analyzes the relationship between his uncowboylike work and his traditions:

. . . we are country writers yet, but country writers who have moved to the city to write. We are several degrees more remote from the country than Bedichek or Dobie, but the emotions, images, symbols that animate our books pertain to the country still. We too are symbolic frontiersmen, most of us, attempting to keep the frontiersman's sense of daring and independence by seeking these qualities, not in the life of action but in the life of the mind.²³

Specifically, this life is expressed in novels, McMurtry revealing the earlier cowboy's work or role exclusiveness, writing that "nonfiction is a pleasant way to walk, but the novel puts one on horseback, and what cowboy, symbolic or real, would walk when he could ride?"²⁴ In pursuing

²¹Larry Goodwyn, "The Frontier Myths and Southwestern Literature," American Libraries, April, 1971, p. 365.

²²James R. Giles, "Larry McMurtry's Leaving Cheyenne and the Novels of John Rechy: Four Trips Along 'the Mythical Pecos,'" Forum, X (Summer-Fall, 1972), p. 35.

²³McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 137.

²⁴Ibid., p. 139.

the life of the mind rather than the life of action, McMurtry and Danny Deck (and, in a confused way, Hank and Jim) then are symbolic cowboys in their occupations.

It is also appropriate that McMurtry's symbolic cowboys suffer from confused social orientation because of opposing attractions. Lonnie is drawn both to the old values and traditional behavior Homer represents and also to the distinctly modern appealing life Hud leads. Although Coach Popper is not truly confused, McMurtry uses him to criticize those symbolic cowboys who stubbornly and insensitively try to practice the life of action and manliness without regard to the changes in the social structure and without recognition of the values of the life of the mind. Hank Malory, more a physical than a mental character, is typical of many modern Westerners who are apparently unaware of the influences that are affecting them and sometimes splitting them between the two worlds. The Carpenters' behavior indicates that not even urbanites in Texas are immune to the ethos. Although somewhat less successful in his social endeavors, Danny Deck too exemplifies the confusion resulting from split legacies and forces.

The symbolic cowboy's occupational, social, and mental characteristics and attitudes are, of course, interrelated. It is also natural that McMurtry's own values and attitudes color and guide his characters, even those who serve satirical functions. He analyzes his mental ambivalence and his function as a writer who dramatizes the fading heritage and calls attention to the cowboy's evolution and to the departure and, perhaps, death of the horseman-god. It is especially appropriate that All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers ends with a reference to the fading image of the cattleman prototype, Charles Goodnight. Goodnight once called the

Pecos "the graveyard of the cowman's hopes," hating and humanizing the treacherous river and its terrain.²⁵ Generations later, McMurtry expresses a milder but similar sentiment about Texas, its past, and the figurative Pecos:

Texas is rich in unredeemed dreams, and now that the dust of its herds is settling the writers will be out on their pencils, looking for them in the suburbs and along the mythical Pecos. And except to paper riders, the Pecos is a lonely and a bitter stream.²⁶

In assessing the place of symbolic cowboys in the literary world, one critic writes that McMurtry "personifies the new Texas writer who is reaching for creative, imaginative frontiers to replace the lost one and who realizes some of the ugliness involved in 'the mythical Pecos.'"²⁷

²⁵J. Evetts Haley, Charles Goodnight: Cowman & Plainsman (2nd ed.; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), p. 134.

²⁶McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 173.

²⁷Giles, "McMurtry's Leaving Cheyenne," p. 35.

Conclusion

"The Heart Faced with the Loss of its Country"

Larry McMurtry's writings show the evolution and decline of the twentieth-century cowboy in several roles, from characters expressing the original or mythical cowboy qualities to modern imitations or corruptions of that archetype. He once said that titles were important, that they control a book, and he said that all of his titles have a "sense of something passing."¹ This sense is conveyed in the types or roles of the cowboy; in comparison to the original, each succeeding category is increasingly altered or corrupt. Even within each group, individual examples or characters reflect the evolution. In nearly every role there is one character who has near-mythical status in his role, after which inferior examples of the type are patterned. The mythical qualities as well as the occupational, social, and mental characteristics of the ordinary character are based on historical fact and popular legend. The cattlemen and the cowhand are closest to the original qualities and values; the rodeo cowboy and the symbolic cowboy are modern corruptions of the archetype.

Charles Goodnight may have been the prototype for McMurtry's cattlemen, although his characters do not have Goodnight's status. Homer Bannon, Adam Fry, Gid Fry, and Roger Wagonner exemplify the cattleman's attachment to the land, the work, and the traditional values; they are the closest to the original pattern. However, even these men are exposed to change and forced to accept some compromises. In McMurtry's allusion to Don

¹Larry McMurtry, "The Questions a Writer Gets Asked," (unpublished speech, University of Houston Special Collections), p. 4.

Quixote in Gid's character, he is suggesting that even though the cattleman goes through the rituals of the myth perhaps the romantic ethos is antiquated or even a bit ridiculous. Sam the Lion and Eleanor Guthrie vividly demonstrate many of the external results of the evolution, and Uncle Laredo is a satire of the myth itself. Even though the cattleman is vulnerable to the pressures of change, in McMurtry's novels he is closer to the archetypal cowboy in his values than are the other cowboy types. As a trailhand the early Teddy Blue Abbott could serve as a prototype of the cowhand. Gid's friend Johnny is an example of the cowhand who was loyal, hard-working, likeable, and somewhat irresponsible. Both Abbott and Johnny finally stopped roving, but Johnny avoided the responsibilities that a family and property would bring. Jesse is even more a drifter, tying himself to nothing. In his avoidance of commitments he is somewhat inferior to the cattleman, and he wishes that he had settled too. Hud is both a product of cowhand traditions and of the "bad man" or gunfighter tradition. He is more modern and corrupt than any previous character; however, as a functioning cowhand, he shares with Jesse and Johnny an aversion to responsibility and reflections.

Although rodeo and its participants have a history and some resemblance to the traditional, they are more modern than authentic cowboys and cattle work both in history and in characteristics. In real life the contemporary and colorful Larry Mahan can serve as a prototype for succeeding rodeo cowboys who aspire to success and glamor, and the fact that rodeo hands are generally more interested in the thrills than in actual work makes them inferior to the earlier cowboy-drifter, despite their claims that they are heirs to the Western traditions. Sonny Shanks is the epitome of the corrupted cowboy myth seen in the rodeo hand. Like

Hud, he is a man of action rather than a man of the mind. Pete Tatum, the clown who becomes a salesman, demonstrates the changes that come to individual cowboys in rodeo, and he also is typical of the general sociological movement from the country to the city. Hapless Peewee Raskin is a pathetic and caricatured example of the often-glorified "little loser" who insists on his freedom to drift; he, like many other displaced cowboys, also ends up in the city doing much less glamorous or mythic work that may even be ridiculous.

It is logical that the symbolic cowboy group is largest in number since the ranch industry is dwindling and more people are moving to the city by choice or chance; often the movement is forced by inevitable change. Some symbolic cowboys are influenced by their roots and their traditions; others are simply attracted to the traditions. Some are aware of the effects of the frontier ethos in their lives; others are not aware of the source of their motivations. Lonnie is closest to the traditions since he is at one time a part of ranch life; however, his future is uncertain and is influenced by the pull of the city. Coach Popper is a parody of the Western myth of masculinity and action that influences him without his awareness. Hank is drawn both to intellectual life and unconsciously to the past and his background. Marlet and, more subtly, Patsy and Jim are attracted to the force of that ethos, although they are not direct heirs to the traditions. Paper riders Danny Deck and Larry McMurtry are heirs to that influence and acknowledge it, but they choose the life of the mind and function as symbolic cowboys in their writing.

The evolution and decline of the cowboy has significance beyond the personal regret at his passing felt by Larry McMurtry and others. It

even has significance as a regional problem. One observer writes that the powerful frontier heritage is now simply an action ethic in Texas, an ethic which values the doer rather than the thinker.² The fact that McMurtry himself is concerned with this situation and has written of his region, however, does not limit him or his work to a narrow situation. In an interview he said, "I suppose I have been a regional novelist. But I don't feel bothered by it, or limited by it, or that it is a problem that has hampered me in any way."³ The evolution Larry McMurtry writes of has both historical and a sociological significance. David Nevin feels that the country's proximity and relationship to its own frontier is one of America's two most basic and powerful drives, the other being its great wealth.⁴ McMurtry writes that it is a split legacy:

The middle class will get the land, one way or another, but Hud and I were left the water rights. That is, we were left the mythology, he to live it and I to dramatize it. . . .that mythology operated in the lives of some of my blood kinsmen, and. . . it is operating now in my own books and the books of my artistic kinsmen.⁵

James R. Giles states that McMurtry's novels show a deep regret that the old way of life has passed, and he concludes that Leaving Cheyenne emphasizes the loss more than his other novels.⁶ In thinking of his relationship to the old days and the trail drives, McMurtry writes:

²David Nevin, The Texans: What They Are--And Why (New York: William Morrow & Company Inc., 1968), pp. 45, 179, 182.

³Arnold Rosenfeld, "Books," Houston Post, October 30, 1966, p. 26.

⁴Nevin, The Texans, p. 43.

⁵Larry McMurtry, In a Narrow Grave (Austin: Encino Press, 1968), p. 140.

⁶James R. Giles, "Larry McMurtry's Leaving Cheyenne and the Novels of John Rechy: Four Trips Along the Mythical Pecos," Forum, X (Summer-Fall, 1972), p. 35.

That life died, and I am lucky to have found so satisfying a replacement as Don Quixote offered. And yet, that first life has not quite died in me--not quite. I missed it only by the width of a generation and, as I was growing up, heard the whistle of its departure. Not long after I entered the pastures of the empty page I realized that the place where all my stories start is the heart faced suddenly with the loss of its country, its customary and legendary range.⁷

Modern man's loss of his roots, his heart's "legendary range," is a predicament that reaches beyond the Cheyenne of McMurtry's books, the Cheyenne that he describes as "that part of the cowboy's day's circle that is earliest and best: his blood's country and his heart's pasture-land."⁸

⁷McMurtry, Narrow Grave, p. 140.

⁸Larry McMurtry, Leaving Cheyenne (paperback ed.; New York: Popular Library, no date), p. 5.

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