

## **The Patterns of Cowboy's Life as Reflected in Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Passby & Leaving Cheyenne***

**Suparman\***

### *Abstract:*

Pendekatan ekspresif dan mimetik dalam kajian ini bertujuan menjelaskan tentang pola kultur kehidupan Koboy. Kajian ini berusaha menganalisis dua novel populer karya Larry McMurtry. Fungsi utama literatur populer untuk menghibur masyarakat, sedangkan literatur ilmiah untuk mendidik atau memberikan pendidikan akhlak. Hasil analisis novel menunjukkan bahwa Koboy Amerika memiliki kultur kehidupan yang unik dibandingkan dengan masyarakat lainnya. Sebagai contoh, menggembala ratusan ternak, mengunjungi *nightclub*, *saloon*, mabuk-mabukan, berjudi, terbiasa dengan *free sex*, pelecehan seksual, dan lain-lain.

**Kata Kunci:** *pattern of cowboy's life, popular literature*

**RELATED** to the notion of literature, there are two kinds of literature, high literature and popular literature. Both, popular and high literature have different type, function, and notion. In very general idea, high literature has function to reveal values, while popular literature has main function to entertain the society or readers. Popular literature according to Cawelti can be used as an effective and appropriate vehicle for experience of escape and relaxation.<sup>1</sup>Escape according to Roberts has always been a word non-readers used to make readers defensive.<sup>2</sup> It has many kinds of genres; they are detective story, romance, adven-

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ture--western, horror story, etc. Accordingly, Cawelti states that there are five types of popular stories: 1) adventure stories, 2) romance stories, 3) mystery stories, 4) melodrama stories, and 5) Alien being/ states.<sup>3</sup> Western stories are the typical form of American adventures. They have different kinds of archetype and formula. Cawelti defines archetype as a story type, which is universally found in many different cultures at many different times. Thus, archetype is not limited to a specific culture or period. Formula on the other hand, is defined as a structure of narrative or dramatic convention employed in a great number of individual works.<sup>4</sup> This writing tries to discuss two western novels, *Horseman Passby* and *Leaving Cheyenne* by Larry McMurtry. Western is the term applied to novels, short stories, motion pictures, and radio and television dramas that purport to represent life in the American West, especially during the period between the Civil War and the late 1890's.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Holman states that, it is short story and novel that lies in western United States and dealing with the adventurous lives of frontier man, woman Indian, fighters, scouts and cowboys.<sup>6</sup>

Since the stories of the two novels are dominated by the life of Cowboys, one big question appears in analyzing the two novels is that what kinds of cowboy's life revealed in the story. In line with that problem, this paper is mainly aimed at picturing the cultural life of cowboys in the two novels, which is related with

the archetype and formula in western fiction. To focus the discussion, the writer limits the problem on revealing the cultural life of the cowboys, related to archetype and formula of western popular literature through Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Passby* and *Leaving Cheyenne*. Larry McMurtry was born in Wichita Falls, Texas. The son and grandson of cattlemen, he spent most of his growing years in the ranching country of north central Texas. He was a graduate of North Texas State in Denton and got a master's degree from Rice University in Houston. He received a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University and was awarded at John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing in fiction. With the publication of *Horseman Passby* (1961), his first novel (which was made into the movie *Hud*), he won overwhelming acclaim as one of the most brilliant of contemporary novelist. His subsequent works included *Leaving Cheyenne* (1963), which was made into movie *Lovin' Molly*, *The Last Picture Show* (1966), which was also made into a movie, *Moving On*, *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers*, *Terms of Endearment*, and *Somebody's Darling*.

The main sources of this writing are two novels by Larry McMurtry, *Horseman Passby* and *Leaving Cheyenne*. Two other main sources consulted are those dealing with archetype and formula of western novel written by Cawelti and Daryl Jones.

## Cowboy's Life in *Horseman Passby* and *Leaving Cheyenne*

### Living in the prairie

One of the characteristics of Cowboy's life mostly lives in a large prairie or forest. Prairie is a wide area of level grassland with very few trees, especially in North America.<sup>7</sup> Prairie, forest, and small village will be the setting of the western popular novels. Besides, in the western stories, villages and small cities would take the place of the wild forest.<sup>8</sup> The two places show the wilderness. Wilderness is an uncultivated or uninhabited region such as a desert or mountainous area.<sup>9</sup> In the two novels, *Horseman Passby* and *Leaving Cheyenne*, the characters take prairie and forest as the setting to spread the cattle.

The prairies were absolutely needed by the ranchers and cowboys. It was because the cattle can only live generally in grassland. Grass would be the main food for cattle. Besides, the number of the cattle was great—hundreds or thousands. It was impossible to place the numbers of cattle at home, instead of making ranch house on the prairie. In *Horseman Passby*, the owner of the cattle possessed his own prairie to tend his cattle. "We waded a patch or two of high prairie weeds."<sup>10</sup> "That time of day the prairie smelled rich to me, stinky and sappy and green. ... I drove us home across the darkening pastures."<sup>11</sup> Grandad, the owner of cattle had four little pastures, and one big one. "Once we got them in bunches they

were easy enough to handle."<sup>12</sup> Having his own prairie or pasture could make them easier in tending the cattle. The prairie was surrounded by certain fences. Besides, the cowboys could lead and tend the large number of cattle easily.

### Nightclub/ Saloons.

From early in the morning until evening the cowboys worked hard in the field or wide prairie to tend hundreds of cattle. As soon as getting home, they had dinner together in the kitchen, which were provided by the cook, then they went out to nightclub. It was like their habits, they went out in the night using pick-up to the coffee center, domino hall and Saloons. Higgleton defines saloons as a kind of place where alcoholic drinks may be bought and drunk, and played domino, etc.<sup>13</sup> In the saloons they spent the whole night to play game, to gamble, to drink, and very often in their spare time, they looked for some girls to play and sleep with. This habit of nightlife can be seen in the two works. "We were all too young to buy beer, but that didn't matter. We were talking about where we might and find some girls when we got back."<sup>14</sup> In *Horseman Passby*, the cowboys spent the night in the domino hall to play game or drink beer and some other alcoholic drink. "I bath and put on some clean Levis and a T-shirt before I eat; then as soon as I was through eating, I got in the pickup and drove away from the ranch, through the cool night."<sup>15</sup> Levis was like a typical custom in cow-

boy's life. Levis was needed because besides the weather was cool in the night, it was thick and save to wear in rocky, grassy, or muddy field. In addition, it was last long. In the Domino hall they played game, and other gambling using money. "... all they cared about was their cars, their works, and their gambling... the nigger was slipping around with his rack waiting for the games to be over so he could take in money".<sup>16</sup> In *Leaving Cheyenne*, the three men (Gid, Johnny, and Eddie) went out together using pick-up to the saloons. The saloon life has become part of their regular/daily activities. "*They wouldn't take us to their places, so we went back to the saloons and drank some more and did without*".<sup>17</sup> Sometimes, they brought Molly to the saloon to drink and dance with in turn. Besides, they spent money to play poker game. "*And that saddle you gave him, if he don't lose it in a poker game first*".<sup>18</sup> When they didn't bring Molly to the saloon, they always tried to find another "night-women" while they were going home or in the spare time of their playing. Drinking, gambling, and looking for "women" had become the habits of cowboy's life. They drunk liquor or another alcoholic drinking to make their body warm; they played game or another gambling to keep awake in the night; and they need "night women" to release their tension (sexual desire). Their fighting each other actually was the result of their too much drinking. Getting in and out of whorehouse was also another part of their

cultural life. In *Leaving Cheyenne*, it can be reflected through the action of Gid and Johnny. "*Then we ran into a damn drunk and he took us right to the whorehouse. He was so drunk he couldn't walk straight; he walked all over the street*".<sup>19</sup> They did in such a way, especially when they lived far away from Molly. "*I should look another Indian woman because Molly is five miles for*".<sup>20</sup> The cowboys did in such a way because they thought that "night woman" or whorehouse was culturally legal. They wanted to be free.

Fighting among the gamblers and drinkers in the domino hall sometimes could not be avoided. Even though the three men were closed friends, but they drunk too much, they fought each other because they snatched to play and dance with Molly first. Molly was so attractive, sensitive, and sexual that every man liked to play with her. Besides, she was the only woman in her master's house. One of the main problems of their fighting was about woman. According to the cowboys, fighting among them was not regarded as a big problem. "*Johnny looked happy about it all; he never minded fighting*".<sup>21</sup> For the cowboys, fighting was regarded as part of regular or daily life. As long as they still continued their drinking too much, fighting could not be avoided. Drinking could cause them had no frightful feeling.

In this case, Molly (as a woman) played a very influential role in fighting. Even though she was not involved together directly in the physical fighting, she could

trigger the fighting as well as to stop it. Even though she had three boyfriends at the same time, she could manage it. She would be the center of their daily attention. *"Go stop then Gid, she said. It's such a nice dance; I don't want them to fight. Eddie gets so mean. Tell Johnny, I won't never like him agin if he fights"*.<sup>22</sup> Since the number of woman was less than the number of men, she would be the center of attention and problem as well. Woman is symbolized by all that is lunar, receptive, passive, and hollow or to be entered.<sup>23</sup>

### **Close to Animal Life (Cattle)**

Cowboy activities dominate the story in the two novels. Most of the talking was centered on the cattle life—the way to breed the cattle, to buy and sell cattle, to tend, and to cure unhealthy cattle. In *The Horseman Passby*, it was very clear that the main characters (Hud, Grandad, Lonnie/ the speaker) were very closed to animal, especially cattle. Grandad was the owner of the large land/ prairies and the owner of the cattle. Lonnie and Hud worked for Grandad as cowboys. Everyday, Lonnie and Hud tended hundreds of cattle by riding a horse. Sometimes, they went to a market to buy small good cattle and sell some cattle which were regarded as weak, old, unproductive, sick, etc. *"We have to go about four or five miles across the big pasture to get where the heifer was. We waded through a patch or two of high prairie weeds, getting our Levis damp almost to the*

*knees"*.<sup>24</sup> *"... Grandad woke me up to see if I wanted to go into Wichita with him, to a cattle sale."*<sup>25</sup> The characters were very closed to animal because their daily lives were in the ranch house. Besides, their profession were as cowboys, they were not educated men. They lived in the country that was far away from town. On the other daytime besides tending cattle, they also hunted some birds, fished catfish, crappie, and perch to eat. Good or bad condition of the cattle would be the responsibility of the cowboys. Their daytime was spent to handle the cattle. When there was epidemic, hundreds of cattle died at the same time. In that condition, the cowboys should understand the way of how to handle them. As soon as they saw unhealthy cattle, they directly called the vet to cure or inject them. According to the vet, there were only two possible ways to handle the cattle disease; namely, first by mass killing of the sick cattle at the same time in isolated place. *"I remember correctly, the government had to kill about 77.000 cattle, plus almost that many sheep and goats, and even something like 20.000 deer. It's a terrible thing,"*

The second way, there must be quarantine among the sick cattle far away from the healthy cattle. *"In European countries they try to stop it with a quarantine, but over here we don't dare do that"*. The cowboys were busied with these activities, curing, separating, and tending, the cattle. *"...no better method than killing. ... This disease spreads*

like a grass fire. One animal can infect a whole area".<sup>26</sup> Their life was depended on the cattle. By tending the cattle, they could get salary and some other things to fulfill their daily needs. It was stated in the story that they had no other profession or skill except tending cattle.

In *Leaving Cheyenne*, the main characters (Gid, Johnny, and Eddie, besides Molly) concerned very much with the cattle life. Gideon's father was the owner of the ranch house and the cattle. Johnny and Eddie worked for Gideon's father as cowboys. They worked in the daytime for tending hundreds of cattle in the large prairies. During in the prairie, they made tent for living until evening and sometimes until night. They tended cattle by riding a horse. Horse would be their daily transportation. Besides, they liked hunting some animal to eat for example coyote. "*early in the morning we drove the cattle to Henrietta, until about night that same day*".<sup>27</sup> In their talking among themselves, they would not want to be rancher, but to be cowboys. It was logical that, to be cowboy was easier, and the responsibility was lighter than the rancher. They could go and escape somewhere as they like to release their tension. In the morning, sometimes they went to the market to find or to buy cattle. "*Get up and let's go look for those cattle*".<sup>28</sup> In the market they bought and sold cattle. "*He took me right on in exchange building after the cattle were weighed and gave me a check*".<sup>29</sup> Gid's father wanted him

much to take care on the cattle, because he was old enough. Gid's father did not permit him to get married because he was still too young according to his father. The father decided to leave the cattle alone to Gid, in order that Gid was busy with the cattle, and forget the marriage with Molly.

### Free-sex and Sexual Violation/ Harassment

Free-sex and nightlife also embellished in the stories of the two novels. In *Horseman Passby*, the free-sex and sexual harassment can be seen clearly through Hud's action toward a woman worker. One evening, he entered Halmea's room without permission. Halmea was one of the workers in her master. Her main work was cooking in the kitchen and providing food and drinks for the cowboys. Halmea was the only woman in that place so that she would be the center of attention among the workers/cowboys. While the cowboys were tending the cattle, Halmea was staying at home to cook, and provide the food and drink on the kitchen table.

As soon as Hud entered Halmea's room, he sited near Halmea (on her bed). "*He had made her naked from her feet to her breasts, and he was laying across her brown twisting legs, trying to catch her hand. Halmea's eyes were still shut and her mouth was twisted, but she didn't try to holler*".<sup>30</sup> "*Then Hud caught and squeezed one of Halmea's breasts, and then he mashed it and she groaned when he did. She said, "Oooah," ... then*

he rolled off Halmea...<sup>31</sup> Hud did in such a way to Halmea because he thought that she was including one of his properties. He thought that whatever he did to Halmea was all right. Besides, sexual fair with some women had become part of his daily habits.

Another form of pornographic action could be seen from the speaker's action, Lonnie. Pornography here refers to an actions intended to cause sexual excitement.<sup>32</sup> The speaker (Lonnie) actually wanted to love Halmea too, but he was not as straightforward as Hud. Lonnie often stole time and occasions to peep Halmea when she was sleeping. Lonnie just admired Halmea's sexual body, especially her very swollen breasts every time he met her. *"I wanted to cheer her up some way, but I probably couldn't manage it if I tried. I walked down to Halmea's shack, it was dark, but I didn't figure she was asleep".<sup>33</sup> When she stooped I saw part of her breast. She had on a loose floppy dress, her breasts rolled against it like cantaloupes when she sat up".<sup>34</sup>* Beside her beauty, it was her sexual body or appearance that also stimulated some men to approach her.

In *Leaving Cheyenne*, Molly and her three boy friends (Gid, Johnny, and Eddie) practiced the same sexual purposes. Molly was also one of the workers in her master of ranch house/cattle. Her main job was cooking in the kitchen and providing food for the other man, workers (cowboys). The forms of sex wo-

uld be free-sex, because they enjoyed their sexual intercourse very much. Molly treated her sexual desire to the three men joyfully. On the other hand, the three men tried to visit to Molly's house separately in order that they did not take the same time. They practiced free-sex for over than 30 years. Every time Gid met her, she offered him to stay in her house for supper. After supper, she never permitted him to leave before holding her first for sexual purposes. *"In a minute I was wrapped around her. It was the best sleeping in the world, when I wake up, Molly was still asleep and I was holding her (Gid said). Then Molly persuaded Gid, You just enjoy me a whole lot, that is was I want you to do".<sup>35</sup>*

In this story, the woman, Molly was more attractive than the men. It was she, who initiated to offer the men to stay late in her house and company her to "sleep". In the end of the story, among her three boyfriends, Molly was forced by her father (*Mr Tailor*) to marry Eddie as her legal husband. However, Gid did not stop his visiting her, because she always persuaded him to come when Eddie was not at home. Gid still continued his visiting to accompany her in bed in the night. The frequency of Gid's visiting to Molly's house was more than Johnny and Eddie. Whatever Molly did reflected her habits as a whore-prostitution. Whorehouse was part of her daily habits too. She wanted to be free and enjoy her freedom. This would be one of the characteristics of cowboy's life.

## The Outlaw

Outlaw means a person who has broken the law and who lives outside society trying to avoid capture or punishment.<sup>36</sup> Daryl Jones states that outlaw was a social outcast and confirmed rebel whose attitude toward law was openly defiant. Outlaws commonly appeared as minor characters in dime novels written in the early 1870s but not until 1877 did the outlaw first assume the role of hero. There is a kind of conflict between conventional law and true justice.<sup>37</sup> Convention law covered whatever done by the cowboys, while true law concerned with the true law established by the government. As long as the cowboys did something as they liked, there would be cultural contras.

In *Horseman Passby*, the outlaw can be seen through the action of Hud. He killed Granddad, his own father in the middle of the road while going back from the domino hall. Granddad was seriously ill at that time. The sickness was so serious that Hud did not want to see him in very sick condition. Besides, Hud had another motive of killing his father. He shot his father because he wanted to be the master of ranch house and leader of the workers in his house. After his father's death, Hud inherited all the ranch houses and the cattle. Since that time he would be the master and the ruler of the works/jobs in his house. Another Hud's outlaw was his sexual violation to Halmea. He raped his cook, Halmea as the form of her punishment. When Hud was co-

ming back from ranch house, he could not see Halmea in the kitchen. As soon as she got home in the evening, Hud directly got into her room and did what he had planned. He forced her to treat what he wanted on bed. "*He rolled off Halmea ... Halmea had curled the wall, and the blood on the sheets was smeared. Blood was sticking to her cotton nightgown.*"<sup>38</sup> Halmea then cried over and over, but she could do nothing. After being forced to treat Hud's sexual desire, she went away from that house, and never came back. "*Heah, I helpless, she said. Dat gets me. He come in head aifah me an' do what he did. Nobody stop him dis time*"<sup>39</sup>.

Almost the same thing happened in *The Leaving Cheyenne*. Gid wanted to live freely. He didn't want anybody to forbid him to do or not to do something as he pleased. He did not care with his action, even though it caused suffering toward somebody else or it broke the law. One evening he involved together in a fighting among the gamblers in the domino hall in Thalia. When there were some policemen coming to that place, Gid directly challenged against the policemen to have fighting. He did not obey to the instruction of the policemen at all. Moreover, he mocked and kicked the policemen, then he ran away.

Another Gid's outlaw was acted several months before his dying. When he was sick and hospitalized several weeks, he went away from the hospital without asking permission and wi-



thout paying the cure and hospital fee. He went away from the hospital before really being well according to the doctor. His escaping from the room of the hospital was accompanied by Johnny. From the hospital, Gid did not go home to his own wife (Mabel), but he went to Molly's house and slept there with her. Several days after his escaping from the hospital, the policemen and hospital official caught him in Molly's house. They suggested Gid to come back to the hospital because he was not well enough according to the doctor's instruction. Gid didn't obey the doctor's instruction and didn't go back to the hospital. Gid then ran away until his dying. He thought that he like to be free even though he was sick rather than to stay in the hospital. For him, hospital was like jail; he could not meet women, could not play gambling, could not drink too much, could go out all night long, etc. Gid's cowboy friend, Johnny did almost the same outlaw. He showed his rebellion against the doctor when he was in hospital to keep Gid. The doctor suggested him to go out from Gid's room, but he challenged the doctor to fight. *"Hospital roles, the doctor said. If he won't leave, we'll have show him out"*.<sup>40</sup> This action also showed that he did not want to be ruled or dictated by others. He wanted to be free as he usually did in tending the cattle and playing in the nightclub.

Molly's committing to have fornication/adultery with three men at the same time (Gid,

Johnny, and Eddie—before becoming her legal husband) was also another form of outlaw. Even though Molly had already married Eddie, but she still hoped Gid's coming to sleep together whenever Eddie was out. Besides, she also committed to have adultery with her own brother, Richard until having illegitimate child. At last, she also made sexual intercourse with her own 18-year-old son, Jimmy. Jimmy was the result of her illegal fair with Gid. For Molly, whatever she had done was used to release her tension. She wanted to be free as the "night woman" could do.

### Backwoodsman

Higgleton defines Backwoodsman as people who live in the backwoods, live along way from large cities and their modern way of life.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, Daryl Jones described that characters cast from this mold were sometimes good-natured men whose rustic habits and folksy humor abrogated their lack of social polish. More often, however, they were rough...<sup>42</sup> The simplicity of cowboy's life can be found in the two novels. The life styles of the main characters in *Horseman Passby* (Grandad, Hud, Lonnie) were simple. The simplicity can be reflected through the action or the condition of their lives, including their houses. *"It'd be an accomplishment, he said. I got around him and opened the bunkhouse door for him, then switched on the lights. The house was just one long bare room, with five or six steel cots in it, and a little partitioned-off lavatory and sho-*

wer bath down at one end.<sup>43</sup> It is shown that the condition of the house was very simple. Besides, they lived separately from the town. They lived among the ranch house. When they wanted to see or to have entertainment, they should go to the town after their going home from the tending. *"I went to the town that night, hoping the second rodeo performances"*.<sup>44</sup> Rodeo is a contest of skill in lassoing cattle, riding untamed horses, etc.<sup>45</sup> They had their entertainment in the night as much as their working in the day time.

In *Leaving Cheyenne*, the simplicity of the character can be reflected through Molly's life. She lived separately from the society. She lived alone on the hill. She wanted to live separately and could established her own and private law or habits. She did not want to be interfered except by her lovers. Her house and everything around her were simple. There was no electricity, no crowded people, and no machine-transportation, except horses of her expected guests. Besides, her lack reasoning of committing to have adultery shown her simplicity. It was irrational for mother to have sexual purpose with her own son, and her own brother, besides with some other men at the same time. The fact that she did it joyfully. From the educational factor, she did not study. However, in the end of the story there was a kind of agent of civilization. Having too much sinful action with some men, later Molly was "lectured" by one of her own sons, Jimmy.

Jimmy was the result of her fornication with Gid. Jimmy did not want to live together with her mother. He went away from home and lived with one of the priests in that society. He did it because he understood that her mother practiced adultery or whore-prostitution. Moreover, he himself was aware that he was the result of his mother's adultery with Gid. After having enough "moral teaching" from the priest, Jimmy went home to advise her mother not to continue adultery anymore and come back to the church. Molly rejected it and she tried to persuade his son to sleep together with her without wearing anything. Looking the beauty and sexual body of another sex in bed, Jimmy was not aware that she was his mother. He then grabbed and rolled his mother. This will be the beginning of her adultery with her own son. In the end of the story, Gid decided not to visit Molly anymore but he lived together with his own wife, Mabel. Because Molly did not want Gid left her, for the time being, Gid have to love two women (Mabel and Molly) at the same time. Gid tried to divide the time to visit Molly not as often as before, but she demanded more. Finally Gid decided to talk directly to Molly that he should stop loving her and stop visiting her for whatever reason. Gid was really aware that whatever he had done with Molly had ruined other people. Gid said .. *"We ruined one child's life and we could ruin another. That's worse than any going to hell. It's just about ruined my life.. Molly cried loudly*

and said, "Well good by then. Damn you!"<sup>46</sup> This would be another form of agent of civilization. There was developmental process of civilization.

### Conclusion

The story of the two novels, *Leaving Cheyenne* and *The Horseman Passby* are dominated by Cowboy's life. From the reading analysis of the two novels, there were found that the forms of cowboy's life are very different from many common people in the society. Living in the large prairie, separating on the hill, having sexual purposes with her own son and her own brother, committing to do adulatory with any men freely, breaking the law, concentrating on the life of ranch house especially cattle, all of them are the form of cowboy's life. Both novels are really very rich of ideas and information. There are some other aspects of cowboy's life which are not discussed for example their plainsman, their religion, etc for the time and space reasons. To have a better understanding of the discussion, it is suggested for the other writers to discuss the works from another aspects.

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Rasulullah Saw. bersabda:

رَحِمَ اللهُ عَبْدًا قَالَ خَيْرًا فَنِمَ، أَوْ سَكَتَ فَسَلِمَ.

Allah mengasihi seseorang yang berkata baik lalu beruntung, atau diam lalu selamat.

Al-Mutanabbi berkata:

وَمَنْ يَجْعَلِ الضَّرْعَامَ لِلصَّيْدِ بَازُهُ  
تَصَيَّدَهُ الضَّرْعَامُ فِيمَا تَصَيَّدَا

Barang siapa yang menjadikan singa sebagai penangkap buruan, niaka tidak akan luput, ia sendiri akan diburu oleh singanya.