

CONFRONTING CHANGE: RANCH HANDS AND RANCHERS IN SELECTED

WORKS OF BENJAMIN CAPPS, ELMER KELTON,

AND LARRY MCMURTRY

by

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Any man can be thrown from an untamed horse,  
but it takes a real man to get back on and tame it.*

*-Anonymous*

Patrick Dearen and John Erickson use nonfiction to write about the hardships the ranch hand and rancher endured on a daily basis. Dearen studied the hardships of the old-time cowboy through his personal interviews and archives dating as far back as the 1800's. Dearen interviewed seventy-six men who cowboied in the West before 1932 and reading over 150 archival interviews and written accounts from as early as 1870. He spoke to former ranch hands in their eighties, nineties, and even one-hundreds who told him about their dangerous experiences on the frontier, giving him a unique connection with the past. Dearen's studies led to nine non-fiction books and twelve novels. Dearen brings the experiences of the old-time cowboys to life, detailing the cowboys' hardships and bravery as they survived the dangers of their craft— bucking broncs, ropes tight enough to sever digits, blinding dust storms, stampedes, dangerous prairie holes, and mudslides. The cowboys risked their lives every day for a cause they believed in—often for a mere dollar a day. The background is important because it proves that although the ancient ranch hand and rancher endured tremendous difficulty, he was not always prepared to deal with more than he was accustomed to.

The ranch hands loved their independence but ignored the physical ailments that accompanied their professions. They were willing to risk losing their lives or limbs to tend to someone else's cattle. A fifteen-hour workday was common, and most of their work was done on horseback. They developed hemorrhoids and bowed legs and arthritis

and skin cancer. They were at the mercy of the elements, whether it be an unforgiving summer sun or a winter blizzard. Cattle drives were often long, with limited shelter, food and water. Dearen's writes, "Death was never far from a cowboy. He may have submerged the possibility of a youthful bluster of supposed invincibility, but every time a cowhand dug his boot into the stirrup, the ride could carry him to the trails end" (2). His very life hung in the saddle. If the boss asked a ranch hand to break a bronc, his best bet would be to go ahead and pick the wildest one because that would most likely be his assignment. Risk was just part of the cowboy's life. The brave cowboy faced "the flinty hoofs and devil horns of an outlaw steer, the crush of a half ton of fury in the guise of a saddle horse, the snap of a rope pulling taut with enough power to rattle bones and cut off fingers. A cowhand clung to life with all the zeal with which he approached his trade. The most loyal of employees, he displayed a work ethic beyond reproach, repeatedly putting his neck on the line...." (3). The cowboy was not ruled by money but by hard work from sunup to sundown. Dearing quotes nineteenth-century drover, Teddy Blue Abbott's statement made in 1931, "The boys never made a kick. Did you ever hear of a herd being lost or turned plum loose? The only way they could be lost was for the whole outfit to die, cook and all. As long as one man could set his horse, the herd was held. The man that owned the herd would quit long before the cowhands would even give it a thought" (3).

A cowman's horse could be his greatest ally or his worst nightmare. "You've got to use your head or you'll get hurt bad," warned W. R. Green, a cowhand of the early 1900's (8). Cowhand Frank Yeary from the Southwest in 1920's said, "If you're not

ahorseback, you might as well be at the house." Once in the saddle, the ranch hand was transformed (8). Dearen notes,

No longer was he a mere man with insurmountable limitations and frailties; he was a knight of the dance, possessing the speed to overtake stampeding beeves, the strength to throw a yearling at rope's end. He had the agility to outmaneuver a quick-footed steer intent on bolting, the endurance to keep the pace with a herd marching relentlessly. He was part-man, part animal, and all cowhand. (6)

The ranch hand had many uses for a rope, and it was all about control (52). The cowboy needed a rope to drag a calf to a branding fire, to round up broncs, and to doctor wormy cows, but there were circumstances beyond his control. Pulling a stray animal in with a taut line could be dangerous. Dearen writes of an incident in 1935 when Shorty Northcutt's horse broke in two when he roped a sheep on the Spade Ranch in Texas. "It's been a-rainin' and my rope was real limber. When I exchanged hands, it drew up on two fingers and jerked them off... I had to learn to rope all over again" (55). A lassoed animal could be wild and dangerous, a situation calling for quick action by the cowboy. On a West Texas ranch in the 1930's, Walton Poage saw a spinning horse wrap a roper in a stretched lariat and drag him from the saddle. Poage and the other on-lookers grabbed the horse, sparing the cowhand (56). Dearen writes of a humorous, but frightful incident on Sugg Ranch along the Middle Concho River in Texas when a rebellious bull needed to be tamed. One cowboy, Brook Campbell roped the brute's head, another roped the tail. The third cowhand roped the bull's saddle, wrapping it around a tree, jerking the old bull's tail off (56-57).



John Erickson, a lifelong cowboy and rancher, uses first-hand knowledge to write about cowboying and ranching in the Texas Panhandle, making light of the difficulties in *The Devil in Texas and Other Cowboy Tales*, *Cowboys Are Partly Human* and *Some Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys*. He was born in Midland, Texas, but moved with his family to Perryton in the northern part of the Texas Panhandle by the age of three, where temperatures can be harsh and land is often difficult to farm. Erickson began working for Texas ranchers by the age of twelve where he gained much knowledge of the trade. Erickson compares ranch-life to the experiences Major Steven Long recounted in his memoirs about his map-making expedition in 1820 from the Rocky Mountains to the hundredth meridian where he reports a temperature of 105 degrees. A few days into the trip, Erickson says Long's men were caught in a violent thunderstorm and pelted with hailstorms one inch in diameter. Since there were no trees, they wrapped themselves in blankets and took their lumps. Five days later, the men moved eastward out of the Panhandle, marking the area on his map, the "Great American Desert," "almost wholly unfit for civilization" (Erickson 8). Erickson shares the opinion with General Long about the harshness of the land: "We don't have quaint rock houses in quaint little towns. We have no shade-giving Oak trees. Our rivers aren't very pretty. Sometimes they don't even run water, which is annoying. Our weather is legendary" (8). Difficult weather and a lack of water were hardships the cowboys and ranchers were familiar with.

Another hardship Erickson and Dearen describe is the frustration of dealing with stubborn animals. Erickson claims there are two kinds of cowboys: those that are young and stupid and those who are old and foolish. The first group expects livestock to obey him, and when things don't go smoothly, he often loses his temper and curses (1). The

second type of cowboy is older and knows better, but still expects things to go smoothly and when they don't, he loses his temper and curses, too. The difference between the two, Erickson says, is that when the young cowboy loses his temper, he often does something to hurt himself rather than the animal that angered him. The older cowboy might hurt the animal, but "if there was any blood to be shed, it won't be his" (2). Erickson tells about an incident in 1974 when he and his friend, Loper discover that a cow and her calf had wandered from one of the neighbor's pastures into Erickson's corral. After a few weeks, Erickson is ready for the animal to leave, so he goes after them. The cow and calf run in opposite directions. Erickson jumps on his horse and heads the cow off, preventing it from going through a hole in the fence. He then sets out to rope the two hundred pound calf. Erickson writes,

He could run like a deer and dodge like a jackrabbit and he made a complete monkey out of me and my catch rope. When I finally got him caught, I was in a towering rage.

I flanked him down and started tying him down with my pigging string. He kicked out of it. I tried again, and he kicked out again. Then he kicked *me*. Sweat was stinging my eyes so I couldn't see too well. I cocked my fist and aimed a right hook at his neck. He squirmed and the blow landed squarely between his horns—the very hardest part of his anatomy. (1-3)

To report that the calf "shuddered stiffened and died on the spot would be an exaggeration" (2).

Erickson howled and “drew back his withered wrist,” and had to wear a cast on his hand for six weeks, to his embarrassment. Cowboys often had to break broncs for their mounts, a dangerous activity—even more dangerous if you didn't know what you were doing. Dearen reports what Lonnie Griffith told of his experience in 1915: “Two or three of you would hold him till you get a saddle on him, put a blindfold on him so he couldn't see. If them horses could see you, why, they was liable to kick you. Whenever you got up there in that saddle, boy, it was all up to you” (8). The cowboy couldn't relax or the bronc could find numerous reasons “in a half-day's ride to “cut the figure eight,” Frank Yeary, who cowboied in Texas in the 1920's, said. A volatile horse could be a recipe for distaster. Dearen reports cowboy, Seth Young's statement in 1910: “There's good ones, and mean ones, and sorry ones.” (7). A young bronc rider might not know the difference, but an experienced cowhand would. “The rider who could stay on a wiggler had the staying power of a leach,” observed Sam J. Rogers, who broke horses along the Pecos River in the 1890's. (9) “The cowboy that said he never was throwed—by gosh, he never did ride much,” said Alton Davis, a Texas Hill Country waddy by 1920” (19). Whether his horse pitched, fell in a prairie dog hole, slid on uneven ground or ran into a fence or tree, the rider was bound to fall and hurt himself. Dearing quotes fifty-four year old J.M. Brown during the first depression after he hired out as a bronc buster fifteen miles north of Fort Worth: “I hurt all over all the time. I'm just like a punch-drunk prizefighter. After a bronc buster gets thrown once, real good, as a rule he's good for nothing else but a three-by-six hole in the ground. I've been thrown so many times that I'm just cheating the undertaker by living” (10).

There are times in a cowboy's life when he has to take extreme measures to save his life or that of another bronc buster. Dearen reports an incident recorded in the 1880's when J. P. Bernard was breaking a bronc on his father's ranch. Bernard appeared to be in complete control when all of a sudden, the horse made a twisting jump, throwing Bernard. Bernard lay flat on his back, awaiting the dreadful fate of crushing hooves. Bernard's father shot the bronc in time, saving Bernard's life (10).

A stampede was something a cowboy never could forget. Most stampedes occurred at the end of a trail when the cowboys wanted nothing more than "to seek a dead man's sleep in camp, fifty to a few hundred yards away," but someone needed to keep watch so the cowboys took turns standing guard. (98). One animal could spook the whole herd. "You never heard such a racket in all your life, what with their runnin' on that hard open ground, their bellowin' and their horns crashin'! Their horns crashin' was the worst. You wouldn't think they could make so much noise" (99). To add to the danger, Teddy Abbott said the cowhand had to "ride at a dead run in the dark, with cut banks and prairie dog holes all around you, not knowing if the next jump would land you in a shallow grave" (100). The cow puncher needed "sand in his gizzard"— as some would say— to hunt down the leaders, "crowd a skittish horse against rapier— like horns of terrified demons, all in an attempt to turn the elongated herd back in on itself and force a mill, the only chance of stopping a stampede" (100). Texas cowhand, Jap Adams witnessed a grave situation when a horse wreck occurred among barreling cattle and a "shadowy rider overtook the leaders of the rampage." A crazed steer bumped the rider's horse, causing the pony to fall and crush the man to death. (104).

The weather was another variable the cowboy couldn't control. Dearen writes, "...threat looms in the sky, manifesting itself with wicked displays of nature's wrath — rains that blinded and chilled, hail that pounded and fractured, lightning that rattled bones and deafened if it missed... or came with a silent finality if it didn't" (2). Summers could bring blistering heat, kill crops and grass, threaten skin cancer and heat strokes. During long drouths, livestock starved. Cowboy Spence Hardie spoke of the fierce winters of 1883 and 1884 in the Red River Country: "We would simply freeze right through to the marrow, it seemed. It was so cold that grown men cried and never thought anything of it" (85).

Chronic stress including physical labor and excessive temperatures were stressors ranch hands and ranchers were willing to bear. When other stressors were added, they often had difficulty adjusting. Benjamin Capps, Elmer Kelton, and Larry McMurry used fiction to write about the changes the ranch hands and ranchers faced at the end of the pioneer era as well as their different reactions to change. At any given time throughout history, one can find the old going out and the new coming in, which creates a natural conflict between those who are trying to remain the same and those who want to bring in the new. Although some changes were inevitable, the characters in these novels weren't always willing to make the necessary adjustments to thrive in a fast-changing environment. When unfamiliar stressors were confronted, it often became uncontrollable or "too much," often causing the individual to respond in a non-productive manner. Older men, in particular, who were already facing old age, the introduction of new laws, and emerging industrialization at the same time often had more difficulty adapting to change, especially when those changes challenged their core beliefs. We will see specific

examples as we examine the way the ranch hands and ranchers handled stress in the novels of Capps, Kelton, and McMurtry.

Stress from change is a natural part of life. A number of studies have been done on the effects of stress and health as well as on a person's ability to adapt to it. Small amounts of stress, such as the stress before a race or exam, can have positive results if it is not excessive. Too much stress, however, can affect us negatively, often leading to physical diseases or personality changes.

Endocrinologist Hans Selye (1907-1982) was one of the pioneers who studied stress in the 30's and 40's. Selye termed the two types of stress, positive and negative. He defined stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change." To him, stress wasn't necessarily good or bad. It was just a response to changing stimuli around us. When the stress becomes chronic, it has been shown to lead to disease. First, Selye discovered the three stages of adaptation, which he called the general adaptation syndrome. During the first stage, the body is in a state of alarm—the way it responds to cold or sickness. It's called the "fight or flight response because the body decides to either fight or flee from the source of stress. It's the same response we get when a car pulls out in front of us, almost hitting us. Our heart beats harder. We may sweat. The second adaptation stage is the "resistance stage" (or adaptation stage). The body attempts to return to its normal state by "restoring energy and repairing damage. If prolonged, the person may feel angry, frustrated, or irritable (Nevid 375-386). The third stage, the exhaustion stage, is when the body's resources become seriously depleted as a result of prolonged or uncontrolled stress, leading to what Selye termed "diseases of adaptation" (diabetes, heart disease, diseases, depression, and so on.) In his research, Selye believed

“life changes” —a divorce; loss of a spouse; exposure to trauma such as hurricanes; prolonged unemployment or foreclosure of a home— were linked to health problems, especially when several life changes occurred over an extended period of time. When a person’s ability to cope or adapt to stress became overwhelming, it often lead to physical illness and personality change. The College Life Inventory Scale was developed to measure the amount of life stress experienced by college students. Each stressor (rape, final exams, death of a loved one, etc.) was given a score. When these scores were found to add up to 300, they commonly lead to illness (375). Some subjects, however, thrived on larger amounts of stress than others, possible proof of some having stronger coping skills than others.<sup>3</sup>

It was often harder for the older characters to adapt. Some, however, escaped and some held onto their puritan values and traditions and resisted change. Some compromised, and some adjusted the best they could. Change was rarely easy. Hardship was something the ancient cowboys and ranchers dealt with every day. However, when those changes involved drastic changes to which the characters were not accustomed, they didn’t always respond in a predictable or reasonable manner. I will discuss what influenced the characters’ decisions, their different reactions to change, and the consequences of their decisions.

A common thread found among the fiction writers, Benjamin Capps, Elmer Kelton, and Larry McMurtry, is that each grew up in a crucial time in history and each chose to write about the period of change at the end of the pioneer area, and its affect on the people. Each of the writers was familiar with the pioneer ethics and endurance that marked those of the older generation: their parents and grandparents and others they met

who survived during those difficult pioneer days when hardship was just a part of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Although each of the writers lived and breathed the frontier experience growing up, none of them chose to continue living in the past. What they did know, however, was that the stress of change makes good fiction, especially when emotions are high among those who resist it.



## 2. THE RANCH HAND'S RESPONSE TO THE CONFLICT OF CHANGE

Kelton often said the comical ranch hand, Hewey Calloway, the central character in his novels, *The Good Old Boys* and *The Smiling Country*, and *Two Bits a Day* was his favorite character. Hewey is a good-natured old boy, but he has his share of conflicts due to his inability to adapt to the changes going on around him. Like many other ancient ranch hands, Hewey loves his independence above all else and dislikes the idea of ownership, territorialism, and the new standard of conduct. He battles his environment, nature, and himself. While some old-time ranch hands moved on in search of a better future, a brighter opportunity, Hewey's brother, Walter, settles by becoming a rancher in order to provide for his family. Other ranch hands became aimless wanderers, never fulfilling their capacities. Hewey is similar to other minor characters, Boy Rasmussen in Elmer Kelton's *The Good Old Boys*, Jesse Logan in Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Pass By*, Hugh Hitchcock in Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, Johnny McCloud in Larry McMurtry's *Leaving Cheyenne*, and Joe Lefors in Benjamin Capps' *Sam Chance*.

When Elmer Kelton wrote about Hewey Calloway, the whimsical ranch hand Hewey Calloway in the Hewey Calloway Trilogy, he was writing about change, something Hewey was not fond of. Kelton devoted three novels to him: *The Good Old Boys*, *The Smiling Country*, and *Two Bits a Day*. The three novels cover a time span between about 1890 and 1910, a time of significant change in the Southwest when cattle drives were taking place from Missouri to western Kansas. Farmers then began to settle and homestead on land that had once been free range—2,560 acres of open land. Nesters began plowing land that led to the Great Dust Bowl disaster (Lee 76). Kelton grew up in a changing era, listening to ranch hands and ranchers tell stories of how things used to be,

both on his father's ranch and during his forty-year career as an agricultural writer. Hewey Calloway could not continue to live his former life in a fast-changing society. He resists change in every way possible, but his resistance causes unavoidable conflict as he battles society, man, and himself. Hewey's sister-in-law is convinced Hewey will end up under an outlaw horse or become an aimless wanderer like Boy Rasmussen.<sup>3</sup> Hewey's brother, Walter, thinks Hewey should settle down and become a rancher like himself. C. C. Tarpley, an affluent aging rancher, warns Hewey that he will have nothing to show for his time on earth if he doesn't stop his wandering ways. Hewey's nephew, Cotton, is correct in believing that cars and automobiles are the way of the future, not Hewey's wandering lifestyle.

*The Good Old Boys* is set in 1906 when Hewey is approaching middle age and is confronting the age of the automobile, and he doesn't care for either one. As *The Good Old Boys* begins, Hewey has spent the last two years of his life on horseback, traveling from job to job. He's free to go where he wants, when he wants. He doesn't like it that fences are springing up everywhere, inhibiting his ability to roam. He carries a bedroll and a "war bag" containing things like a dried rattlesnake skin to ward off rheumatism—which Hewey already has—and some old biscuits and dried-out bacon left over from the last homesteader that took him in. Hewey had spent a lonely winter in New Mexico, haying cows. He is comfortable outdoors, and he's not accustomed to being dependent on anyone else. Hewey says, "I always liked God better when I found Him outdoors. He always seemed too big to fit into a little-bitty cramped-up church house" (57).

Hewey's opposite is his sister-in-law, Eve, who berates Hewey about his wandering lifestyle for fear that he will rub off on her husband, Walter, and their sons,

Tommy and Cotton. Eve is quite happy to keep Walter and her boys at home. Although Tommy likes cowboying, Cotton prefers learning about machines and automobiles. He doesn't want to be a nester or a cowboy; he's interested in a more settled, secure life as an automobile mechanic. Hewey is in no way prepared to defend his position against Eve. He looks up to wandering cowboys who once tamed the wilderness like Boy Rasmussen and C. C. Tarpley. The narrator describes Boy Rasmussen as a legend, once "a great cowboy in his prime, pushing herds up on a trail from South Texas to the railroads in Kansas, and beyond to the Indian reservations in Wyoming and Montana." Over the years, however, Boy Rasmussen became a heavy drinker, wandering from camp to camp. The narrator continues, "There had been a "time before the years and the bottle had robbed him of his dependability, that he had bossed herds and been a man of substance and repute" (119). Boy was respected by Hewey as a fellow wanderer, but Boy had "gone downhill a long way." The physical demands of working and living off the land had taken a toll on Boy's life. He'd become an aged, dirty, senile drifter. He carried his teeth in a pouch and his clothes were old and faded and his hands are covered with liver spots. Boy had a smell that "made the barking black dog keep his distance" (17). Eve's prediction comes to pass. One day, Boy Rasmussen dies next to his horse while opening a gate. Hewey knows that he too, might die alone, but he hasn't given up his romantic view of the cowboy life.<sup>2</sup> Hewey delivers a tribute to Boy at the funeral:

"Fellers," Hewey spoke gravely, "me and Walter, here, we just brought an old-timey cowboy to town. He was Old Boy Rasmussen. Now some of you knowed him and some of you didn't. Whether you knowed him or not, you all know the breed. He was followin' the mossyhorns up the trail when most of us was still followin' our mothers

around the kitchen. It was him and his kind that beat out the trails and shot at the Yankees and fought off the Indians. It was them fellers that taken the whippin' so me and you could have the easy life we are livin' today" (148).

Having recently grown lonely, he decides to visit Walter and his family. Hewey can't quite fit in when new laws are established because this is another adjustment he is not willing to make. On his way to his brother's house, Hewey travels through a Panhandle railroad town called New Prosperity. Prosperity doesn't interest Hewey and neither does the town, so he takes a "shortcut" down a street lined with elegant two-story houses. The thought of having to own one of those houses would have scared Hewey, but he enjoys the view. When the town's fat marshal sees Hewey, he calls him a saddle tramp and orders him off his horse. The two men exchange blows. Hewey leaves the marshal lying flat on his back and tosses the marshal's pistol in the water trough. Hewey's consequence is an injured jaw and a warrant for his arrest. Hewey's nephew, Cotton— with a mirror image of his mother's conscience— later asks Hewey why he didn't just ride on the other side of the street. (14-15) That thought never occurred to Hewey.

On his journey, Hewey crosses paths with C. C. Tarpley, an aging rancher he hasn't seen in two years. C. C. notices the ugly mark across Hewey's jaw. At thirty-eight, Tarpley thinks Hewey should have already "worn the itch out of his feet," but Hewey hasn't made the adjustment; he's still in the resistance stage. Tarpley is correct in his analysis of Hewey when he tells him he "sure ain't no valentine" and that gray hair and arthritis will be "settin' in." "All you've got is a brown horse past his prime, an old

saddle, and maybe twenty dollars. Ain't much to show for all them years, is it?" Hewey defends his way of life to Tarpley:

"I've left a lot of tracks and seen a lot of country. I've worked down to the border of Old Mexico. Been to Cuba for Uncle Sam. I've worked cows from the Sam Saba River plumb up to Wyoming and Montana. I even went north once into Canada and seen the glaciers. You ever seen a glacier, C. C.?"

The old man just stared at him. He probably didn't know what a glacier was. "What's it ever got you?" he demanded... "The man that gets ahead is the one who stays put and minds to business, not the one who's always fidgetin' around to go like a horse in an antbed. You've seen all of that country. How much of it do you own?"

Hewey pondered the question. "In a way, I own it all" (13).

Hewey had never owned more of the world's goods than he could tie on a horse and didn't care to (12). Tarpley, on the other hand, hadn't paid anyone for use of the land in the beginning years, but he had done well. The land and the mavericks had been free, and Tarpley had seen fit to take them. James Ward Lee takes note of the communion between the reader and the author in his essay, "The Hewey Calloway Trilogy." Although it is clear that Hewey is not adjusting well, the reader and Kelton begin to see things Hewey's way. He is not adjusting to change because he has not managed to get past the resistance stage of adaptation.

Some of Kelton's characters adjust to change by compromising. In Hewey's eyes, his brother, Walter, compromises by marrying a farmer's daughter and settling down as a small rancher. Like Hewey, Walter, had once been "a cowboy at heart, unfettered of spirit, willing to ride anywhere they had not been, ready to try anything they had not

tried.” Walter was not cut from the same cloth as Hewey. Walter had fallen in love with Eve at a young age and compromised further by buying on time a plot of land from the old wealthy rancher, C. C. Tarpley. His goal is to simply run a small ranch and raise a family. When Walter tries to persuade Hewey to take up a homestead, Hewey is not convinced:

The temptation had been strong—for a couple of days. But Hewey contended that land ownership worked two ways. A man might own the land, but the land also owned him...Hewey had no wish to be tied to one place so small that a horse could hardly break a sweat loping across it in trade for his freedom of the whole West from the Rio Grande to the Canadian border.

All Walter owned was this little piece of land. Hewey owned it all.

(25)

Hewey envies the life of his brother, who has a home, a family, and land to call his own, but settling down to a wife and kids is a sacrifice Hewey is not ready to make.

The reader knows that if Hewey refuses to adjust and continues to be foolish, his fate will be like that of Boy Rasmussen—or worse. He might die under an outlaw horse, as Eve predicts. There is a comical scene where Hewey and his sidekick, Snort Yarnell, lasso an automobile. We all know the horse will outdo the automobile, but Hewey is not convinced of it. Neither Snort nor Hewey can relate to the machine age or to the automobile owner’s inflated ego. A fight starts, and Walter’s leg is broken as a result, leaving Walter unable to take care of his responsibilities on the ranch. Hewey knows Walter would not be in this position if it weren’t for Hewey’s foolish behavior. Even

though Hewey doesn't care for farm work, he compromises by taking Walter's place on the ranch, redeeming himself with Walter, Eve, and the boys.

Hewey dodges another commitment when he is tempted to marry Spring Renfro. His "hell-raising" friend, Snort Yarnell comes by just in time and invites him to work a job with him in Mexico. Snort paints a picture of paradise, telling Hewey the country is wide open the way Texas used to be "before they commenced puttin' fences across it and cuttin' it up for farmin'. It's like goin' back to when we was young. I think me and you ought to see that just one more time, while there's still a little of it left" (250). Hewey still prefers fresh air and hard work to the confinements of marriage. At the end of the novel, Hewey is riding off into the countryside with his sidekick, Snort Yarnell. Neither character is a hero. They are simply some of those unable to adjust to the impending changes in the Old West.

Hewey's "free-wheeling" life is finally brought to an end in the sequel, *The Smiling Country*, when Hewey is four years older. He's worked for two years as a ranch hand on the J Bar Ranch in the "smiling country" of the West Texas Davis Mountains for a rich rancher (similar to C. C. Tarpley). As he is teaching his nephew, Tommy, to ride and break broncs, their boss, Jenkins, orders Tommy to ride a wild horse. Hewey goes against his orders and rides the horse himself to spare his nephew, and Hewey is seriously injured. Suffering from a broken arm and a crushed knee, Hewey realizes his own mortality: He can no longer do the work he used to do. When offered a job as a foreman, Hewey accepts it out of necessity. It allows him to settle down and provide for his "wife-to-be," but it is not his first choice. Hewey's sidekick, Snort Yarnell, doesn't

like the change in Hewey and tells Hewey he might as well be dead. “Well, I ain’t,” Hewey responds (252). He tells Snort everything changes.

Like Boy Rasmussen, ranch hand Jesse Logan in McMurtry’s *Horseman Pass By*, is a marginal character. Jesse’s free spiritedness and love of the land are apparent, but like most of McMurtry’s characters, Jesse lives in the past. Jesse rides a horse, but doesn’t own one. He depends on Homer Bannon to provide one for him. In fact, Jesse doesn’t claim to be a good horseman. Instead, he prides himself in riding in a truck (Browning 56) and working from sun-up to sundown. Like Homer Bannon, Jesse has a lame leg, and he’s beaten and worn out, “his stories never lasted long enough and ...always ended up with him getting tireder and tireder and more sad” (22). Jesse resists change and is unable to change because he knows no other way. He looks at things grimly as he ages, realizing the ideal image of the working cowboy is coming to an end. When Homer Bannon tells Jesse he can sleep later than usual, Jesse says, “I couldn’t sleep late if you told me to” (18). He is not materialistic. In fact, he shows up at Homer’s ranch with few belongings—a sack of clothes and a saddle, and leaves with nothing to show for his hard work. Instead, he drifts in search of a better job in a better place, but he never finds it. Like Hewey Calloway, Jesse is not satisfied in one place for very long. He tells Lonnie:

I remember when I was about nineteen...I had been on my own, and I had to go back and start helpin’ Dad. We had a cotton patch in Throckmorton County, right next to the highway... and no tellin’ where-all. I spent all my time following a couple a work mules around that field, and all day long folks would whiz by in their cars, going places I wanted to go. Don’t



think I wouldn't a given that whole run-down piece a land to a jumped in one a them cars and gone whizzing by some other pore bastard that had to work..." (37).

Jesse is too much of a loser in life to be considered a hero (Lee 53-54). He can't accept the fact that the roaming cowboy life is ending, and he can never achieve success or a sense of completion because he never stops wandering long enough. As in almost all of McMurtry's fiction, most of the characters long for a bigger, better, or at least a different world. Very few adapt to the changes going on around them.

In both McMurtry's and Capps' western novels, *Leaving Cheyenne* and *Sam Chance*, the protagonists' best friends, Johnny McCloud and Joe Lefors, are carefree ranch hands. Neither McCloud or Lefors cares for status or ownership as the protagonists of their novels do because it would inhibit their freedom. Like Hewey and Snort Yarnell, they'd rather roam the countryside than manage a farm. Johnny is the romantic drifter—whose only possession is a saddle that his friend Gid has given him in exchange for taking him to the hospital to be treated for a social disease. Johnny never marries or settles down. Johnny repeatedly tells Gid his only desire is to be a good cowboy, not a rancher because of the worries it brings. Johnny is satisfied to work for wages and spend his free time the way he wants. He tells Gid, "...I got 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" (194).

Even though Rancher Sam Chance gives Joe Lefors several opportunities to go into business with him, Lefors never accepts the offers because he is not interested in staying in one place or in owning property. Lefors would rather get drunk for three

weeks than stay around the camp. When Chance tells Lefors he doesn't have to leave the ranch to get drunk, Lefors tells him he wants to "go to places where there's music and bright lights and female gals." (65).

Hugh Hitchcock in Elmer Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit* is a different kind of cowboy.<sup>3</sup> He's wagon boss of Rancher Charlie Waide's "W" Ranch. "Hitch" knows the cowboy life. His purpose is to fight for order in spite of changing laws and unruly ranch hands and ranchers. He serves as a peacemaker between the two groups, but times are changing quickly, even for Hitch. He's gained the ranchers' respect because of his integrity, but he's up against a wall when the big ranchers bring in business syndicates to replace the old traditions of trust with written rules, lowering the cowboy's wages, and taking away their rights to own cattle. Hitch feels honor-bound to his men and to Charlie Waide, but he has to choose between the two when a dispute breaks out after Law McGinty, one of the W cowboys, is caught changing brands on a roan cow. He had made a promise to his men that if Charlie Waide ever turned his back on them, siding with the other ranchers and lowering their wages, he would lead them off the W. To Hitch's surprise, this is the "straw that broke the camel's back" for Charlie, and he does side with the other ranchers. In spite of Hitch's better judgment, he leads the strike, expecting that they will lose. This decision cost Hitch his job at the W and a lot of hardship, but hard work is not foreign to Hitch, so he is willing to endure it for a good cause.

When the old rancher, John Torrington, wants Law hung to make an example out of him, Hitch becomes worried. The rumor among the ranchers is that most of the ranch hands are thieves. They want to squeeze the smaller ranchers out and pay the ranch

hands an unlivable wage. Although Hitch is an honest man, he knows he is battling an old order that takes justice into its own hands, where strength and greed dictate, not right.

After the strike, Hitch goes into survival mode, digging a dugout and rebuilding his own herd. He is frustrated because he has only gained nine mavericks over the course of three weeks. At this rate, Hitch doubts he'll ever get even with Torrington and Selkirk for the cattle they'd taken. Hitch's resentment builds after he is badly beaten and his cattle are stolen. Hitch had never stolen anything or branded a calf that was not a true maverick, but he waivers, nearly compromising his own principles. He toys with the idea of a hair brand. By the time the calf was weaned, there would be no sign of a brand. By then, the calf would be a true maverick. "Torrington...Selkirk, he whispered as he shook down his rope, "You'll pay me yet" (164).

Ole John Torrington, would bawl to if he knew, Hitch thought. Him stealing off me was one thing, but me stealing off him was something else.

Stealing. The idea did not sit easy. Hitch told himself that what he was doing was not stealing; it was simply recovering what he had lost.

But what he was doing was the same, in effect, as what he fired Law McGinty from the W for; he was artificially creating a maverick, knowing full well the brand its mother bore.

I don't know what's so bad about it anymore, he told himself in justification. Everybody does it; the big take away from the small, and the small take away from the big. (164-165)

Hitch lets the calf go, but curses his own indecision. “John Torrington,” he thought, “you and Selkirk may break me; you may take away all I’ve got but one thing, and that’s my pride. Be damned if I let you turn me into a thief” (166).

Times are definitely changing, and the ending is a little far-fetched, but Kelton makes a good point. Hitch is elected sheriff and seeks justice, arresting Torrington and his men for killing Law. The court case ends with a hung jury, but progress is made. Years earlier, the case probably wouldn’t have made it to trial. Law McGinty’s first name is ironic because changing laws were necessary for order. Times were changing. The banker, Edson Biggs, compares Law to Torrington and Selkirk. All three, Biggs said, were consumed by greed, but born in a different time period. If Law had been born twenty years earlier, he would have had a large herd and plenty of land (193).

Torrington is too stubborn to accept that the laws have changed, but Hitch tries to explain it to him anyway: “Nobody’s takin’ away anythin’ that’s rightfully yours, but you can’t take away what’s rightfully somebody else’s, either. It’s not enough anymore that you was the first one out here. There’s other people now, and other rights” (240). Hitch tells Torrington that time doesn’t stand still: “I’d like to’ve seen it stay the way it was for us cowboys, but you didn’t let it. It won’t stay the same for you, either.” Hitch sees no sign in Torrington’s face that the old man understood what he was saying. “Torrington never would understand; it wasn’t in him” (239).

### 3. THE RANCHER'S RESPONSE TO THE CONFLICT OF CHANGE

The ranchers have different challenges than the ranch hands. The larger ranchers faced different challenges than the smaller ranchers. While the larger ranchers battled the Indians, the changing environment, the changing laws, and the changing economy, the smaller ranchers had to work harder to stay afloat. The stress often became too much. For some, it was easier to resist change because they were accustomed to their puritan values and too stoic to change, especially those of the older generation. The older ranchers in the novels had a tougher time adjusting to the changes because of their ties to the land and puritan roots. The older generation of characters includes Charlie Flagg in Elmer Kelton's *The Time it Never Rained*, Wes Hendrix in Kelton's *The Man Who Rode Midnight*, Charlie Waide in Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, Homer Bannon in Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Pass By*, Adam Fry and Gideon Fry in McMurtry's *Leaving Cheyenne*, and Sam Chance in Benjamin Capps' *Sam Chance*. Each of the ranchers has a choice to make in the midst of the changing frontier—to either stay and hang on or move off the land. Those who stay on the land feel obligated to stay. Their parents and grandparents were able to endure similar difficulties, so why shouldn't they? Adjusting to the difficulties of dealing with horses and cattle were just par for the course, and inclement weather was not unheard of in the Southwest. These were difficulties a rancher was used to. But characters were often weakened when other factors such as old age, changing laws and government regulations, and modernization were added. Often, the combination of stressors made the adjustments too difficult. Emotions were high among those who resisted change. Kelton, Capps, and McMurtry were well aware that these were all factors that contributed to good fiction. The subject was by no means new.

It prevailed in the 1930's and was the basis of John Steinbeck's award winning novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* as well as George Sessions Perry's *Hold Autumn in Your Hand* written in 1941. Both novels show abandoned houses, boarded up businesses, and closed banks. The ranchers and farmers who were once self-sufficient were no longer. Those who were adaptable moved on or learned to depend on modern machinery to thrive. Many of the older ranchers refused to change and became difficult people, hardened by their own choices.

Charlie Flagg, the central character in Elmer Kelton's *The Time It Never Rained* is the cantankerous owner of a middle-sized ranch. The novel is so well written that Elmer Kelton was awarded a Spur Award from the Western Writers of America and a Western Heritage Award from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Charlie Flagg is surrounded by change. His motto is to "cull deep, hang, and rattle" as he fights nature, his environment, and himself. Some changes Flagg adapts to, and others he doesn't. He survives a disastrous seven-year drought, losing nearly everything that is dear to him, his land, his horses, his cattle. Flagg is desperate, but his stubbornness will not allow him to accept help, and he insists on doing most of the work himself.

The stress was often harder for the small- to middle-sized ranch owners because they were hit the hardest by the economic decline. Middle-sized ranch owners like Charlie Flagg, Charlie Waide, and Wes Hendrix were usually forced to "get bigger, get a job, or get out" due to social and economic changes. They had a harder time getting loans to stay afloat because they weren't backed by the Eastern corporations like the large ranchers were, and they had a difficult time finding and keeping good ranch hands—if they could afford any help at all. They hung onto their land as long as they could because

of their strong pioneer mentality and love of the land, but they had to be strong enough to withstand the pressures imposed on them by the large ranch owners, most of whom had already been won over by the Eastern corporations. Flagg faces old age, a changing economy, changing values, and pressure from his peers—all of which compound his stress. Unpredictable weather is one thing Charlie is willing to accept. He believes nature will find her own cures in time. After all, seasons come and go. In the beginning of the drought, Charlie remains steadfast, but he makes changes in order to hold onto his ranch. He tries one thing, and when that doesn't work, he tries another. Then he endures some more. When the price of cattle drops, Flagg begins raising goats to make up for his losses. He feeds his cattle prickly pear, an ancient practice he learned from the Mexicans. When the cattle stop eating, Flagg sprays the tibosa grass with blackstrap molasses for the cattle to eat, but they only lick the molasses and leave the grass. This clogs Flagg's sprayer, but he doesn't stop trying.

Flagg isn't convinced government assistance is the answer. He becomes increasingly resentful when the government interferes. This was his land, his ranch, his livestock. He didn't need anyone telling him how to run it. Charlie's philosophy is that what he can't do for himself, he'll do without. Kelton does a good job of showing both sides of the coin, that of the rancher, and the government in *The Time it Never Rained*:

Here the man of the land came to declare his crop acreage, his past year's plantings. Here he was told how much land he would be allowed to seed in cotton, in grain sorghums, in whatever other crops might be under federal control. Here he came for price support and to receive checks to

help him pay for terraces and water spreading, for water wells and surface tanks, for battling back the prickly pear and thorny mesquite.

Here he sold his freedom bit by bit, and was paid for it on the installment plan. (6)

As a Texas rancher, Charlie Flagg belongs to a breed of sturdy, stubborn, and fiercely independent people. Flagg describes his grandfather:

He came to this country when the Comanches still carried the only deed. Granddad, he kept his powder dry and didn't look to the government to hold his hand. He went through cruel hard times when there was others takin' a pauper's oath so they could get money and food and free seed, but he would never take that oath. He come within an inch of starvin' to death, and he died a poor man. But he never owed any man a debt he didn't pay, and he never taken a thing off the government. (59)

Flagg's stubbornness is understandable. He got where he was without the government's help, and he doesn't need them telling him what to do now. He knows nothing is ever truly free. Flagg watches as his friends are fined for accepting government assistance. They look up to Flagg for standing his ground and refusing government aid, but resent him for making the rest of them look weak. Flagg's good friend, Page Mauldin has spent his life acquiring more land and cattle, but the drought has left him in a financial bind.

Flagg's only son, Tom Flagg, accepts change and leaves the ranch for the rodeo. Flagg's wife, Mary, reminds Flagg that Tom is different from him: "He's not the same as you; he never was. I don't know why it's been so hard for you to see that. He lives in a



different world than you do” (299). Like Jesse in McMurtry’s *Horseman Pass By*, Tom prefers bright lights and fast women. Flagg’s friends get used to government aid “like a kid gets used to candy.” After holding out for quite some time, Mauldin gives in, accepting government aid because of the quick relief it provides. The system is a failure, however, and Mauldin finds himself worse off than before. When the government declares he’s ineligible for assistance, Mauldin loses his ability to fight. He commits suicide, leaving his daughter, Kathy Mauldin, to manage the farm alone.

Kathy Mauldin shares her father’s love of the land and takes over his farm when he’s gone. Even after watching her father work himself to death, Kathy refuses to give up her father’s farm or accept government aid. She later joins the fight to save Flagg’s goats from freezing to death in the cold rain. Kathy does adapt to mixed racial marriages. She marries Manuel Flores, a Hispanic that lives next to Charlie Flagg. Page isn’t ready to accept the change. When young Kathy Mauldin and Manuel play together, Page mutters, “these kids nowadays, they can’t tell one color from another. I wonder sometimes what this world’s comin’ to.” Charlie, however, is bothered by the fact that Manuel, whose dream is to become a veterinarian, will cause some opposition. Page remarks that Manuel could be anything he wanted—a doctor, lawyer, or banker. Charlie knows Manuel’s chances are slim because he is Hispanic. After Manuel’s horse dies, Charlie thinks that Manuel “has no more of a chance than a snowball in hell” (McAdams 38). By the end of the novel, however, Charlie convinces the banker, Emmet Rodale, to loan Manuel Flores the money to attend veterinary school—even after Rodale complains because Manuel is a Mexican. Charlie says he doesn’t see what difference that makes “as long as he’s good.”

Many of Flagg's neighbors and friends can't accept the changes and escape or move on. Some leave to work in the oil field. Others go to work at the factories. Flagg's neighbor, Emil Deutscher, loves the land "as much as he loves God," but he sees the writing on the wall. Like Flagg, Emil believes "we are all tied to the Mother Earth. Deep inside, everybody wants to go back to it" (70). Emil is able to move on in search of a better life. He takes a job in Fort Worth as a carpenter around an aircraft plant. Unlike Charlie, Emil is able to adapt to a different lifestyle to make ends meet.

Charlie has a hard time understanding what he is not accustomed to. He likes the Hispanics he knows but doesn't trust the strange ones. He's fond of the Flores family that he provides for. He considers Teofilo Garcia, the sheep shearer, a friend and tears up when Teofilo talks of growing old. Flagg doesn't take his own age or declining health into consideration, however, when he tries to rope a coyote and lands poorly on his weak leg, twisting it badly. Flagg knows he cannot walk unassisted, but his prejudiced roots rise when Joe Rivera, a young "wetback" appears in the distance. Flagg doesn't know whether to trust the young "wetback" or not, but he has no other choice because he can't walk unassisted. Charlie feels a tug of resentment because the newcomer has uncovered prejudiced feelings Charlie doesn't know still exist. Still Flagg feels guilty because Rivera is hungry, and Charlie is not. Flagg has a soft heart toward the hungry because he hates seeing anyone starve—Anglo or Hispanic. Flagg feeds the young Rivera and has Mrs. Flores nurse him back to health. Flagg gives the young man a job on his ranch until the border patrol pressures Flagg to let him go.

Charlie does have a heart, and once he has lost his livestock and his sheep, he realizes that he and Mary had remained close during the toughest of times. In fact, in

times past, the difficulties made them even closer. Now Charlie is forced to face the fact that his relationship with his wife has deteriorated. Charlie and his wife, Mary, had hardly spoken in years, but he misses her company. The stress of the ranch had taken its toll on their communication. They no longer had intimate relations or private discussions on the front porch.

Charlie didn't look forward to mealtime with much anticipation.

When he and Mary were alone in the big house there was a cold emptiness Charlie couldn't get used to. It was a cavernous old place with big, lonely rooms and deadly quiet. They seemed to have little to talk about; he had wearied about discussing dry weather, and Mary had wearied of hearing about it. (126-127)

After watching Charlie push himself so hard that he suffers a heart attack, Mary reaches out to Charlie. She climbs in Charlie's bed, reaching for him, rekindling their relationship in a way she hadn't done in years. As the story ends, Flagg is "incredibly tired now and chilled to the bone." He tells his wife, "A man can always start again. A man *has* to" (392). Charlie is still not ready to accept defeat. He turns his back on all he had lost. He and Mary walk together through the cold rain. (392)

### **1. Small Ranch Owners**

Rancher Homer Bannon, the aging patriarch in Larry McMurtry's *Horseman Pass By*, is another small- to middle-sized ranch owner whose values represent those of the past. His core values of honesty, integrity, and hard work haven't changed, but they are more influenced by his past than accommodating to the present. He doesn't want to

accept the fact that he can no longer do the same work he could do because his sense of identity and accomplishment come from the land. Homer is in the resistance stage, and the pressure is building. As Homer ages, he rises slower in the mornings. He's has already suffered the loss of his first wife and now has to deal with his unscrupulous, power-hungry son-in-law, Hud who would like nothing more than to take over his step-father's ranch—not for the land, but for its monetary value. Homer's wife is a hypochondriac and his own physical and mental health are declining. Homer still rides across his ranch every morning with admiration and pride. Homer is courageous and heroic in many ways, but his stubbornness and insensitivity to his stepson's youthfulness bring about his downfall (Busby 303). He opposes new laws and government control over farming and ranching and has no interest in modernization. Homer's real challenge comes when his cattle are diagnosed with Hoof-and-Mouth Disease and the government orders an extermination of the entire herd. The only life Homer has ever known is ending. He has reached his stress threshold. His inability to adapt to change becomes more apparent when he talks to relatives from the past and when he converses with his grandson, Lonnie, about Hud's plan to take over the ranch. Homer doesn't fear change because he'd rather die than live. While Homer represents the myth of the cowboy, a lover of the land and the traditions of the cowboys' past, Hud represents the cowboy of the future who would rather drink and chase women than work with cattle. The "Huds" have lost their loyalties to the land as well as the unshakable sense of integrity that once belonged to Homer Bannon and Gideon Fry.<sup>2</sup>

Homer can't imagine anyone drilling for oil on his land. It's sacred to him. He says, "I don't like it and I guess I'm a queer, contrary old bastard, but there'll not be holes punched in his land while I'm here" (105).

What good's oil to me...What can I do with...[oil wells]? I can't ride out ever day an' prowl amongst 'em, like I can my cattle. I can't breed 'em or tend 'em or tend 'em or rope 'em or chase 'em or nothing.' I can't feel a smidgen a pride in 'em, cause they ain't none of my doin. Money, yes. Piss on that kinda money. If I'd been in this business for the money, I'd a quit and start sellin' pencils or somethin' back before you were born. I still like money as well as any man, early, and I done with it an' without it as much an' more than most people have, and I don't ever intend to let on I don't want a big share of it. But I want mine to come from something that keeps a man doing for himself." (105-106)

Hud is a debased version of Homer Bannon, as his stepson status implies. (Busby 78). Hud is angry and frustrated because he is not prepared for the coming changes. He resents the fact that Homer kept him from going to college. Hud tells Homer:

You think I oughta drive that godamn feed wagon for you, instead of goin' to college. Yeah. You held on tight then, but you sure let me go in a hurry when the draft board started lookin' for somebody to go do the fightin'. 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. (78)

When Homer asks Hud for advice following the government's orders to exterminate Homer's herd, Hud, representing the embodiment of alienated youth, tells Homer to get rid of the herd at any cost as soon as he can before the government has them killed. Homer is appalled by Hud's response:

“You mean try an' pass this shittin' stuff on some old boy who wouldn't know what he was getting'? I'd have to be a whole lot worse off than I a to do that.”

“Hell, no,” Hud said. “Sell 'em to someone stupid enough to buy 'em knowing what the situation was. There's a many of 'em dumb enough to do it, just on the gamble.”

“Oh, I don't doubt that there's some that would... but that ain't no way to get out of a tight.” (78-79)

Hud's next plan is to have Homer declared incompetent so he can take over his land. “Some day I'm gonna have your land, Mr. Bannon, and right here may be where I get it. You're the senile bastard who bought them Mexican cows, and you're the one better get us out of this jam, if you don't want to end up working from the shoulders down yourself” (79). Homer is too tired to fight with Hud by this time.

Hud's frustration in dealing with change turns into repressed anger. McMurtry comments on Hud's lack of sentimentality and growing hostility in *In a Narrow Grave*<sup>5</sup>:

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-established tradition of Western wildness that involves drinking, fighting, fast, and reckless riding/and or driving, and of course, seducing. (24-25)

Hud's weapon is his Cadillac, not a gun, but is symbolic of the twentieth-century cowboy.<sup>1</sup> We only see Hud on a horse twice; we think of him in the Cadillac, a symbol of status and a highly useful tool (McMurtry 25).

Hud's anger is further exemplified when he rapes Halmea, the Bannon's black cook. No doubt, Hud is expressing his racism, but he's also showing his lack of respect for women. Violence toward minorities was not unheard of in Western literature, either, as McMurtry mentions in *In a Narrow Grave* (Busby 81).

In "Take My Saddle from the Wall." McMurtry notes that Texas men believed that cowboys had a commitment to a cowboy way of life that had little consideration for women (148). Homer is not a good role model for Hud. He periodically sends his own wife off to have surgery to satisfy her hypochondria and he pays little attention to her. In fact, their separation is most obvious when Homer and his wife listen to separate radio shows at the same time, "with both stations blaring...against each other" (Busby 81).

Gideon Fry, central character of McMurtry's *Leaving Cheyenne*, owns a small ranch he inherited from his father, Adam Fry. Gid feels an unending, compulsive need to work, and he is unable to break the workaholic mold of his father. Gid's father, Adam, believed misery made a man work harder. Adam was similar to Homer Bannon, but, as Zaphran notes, "instead of alluding to suicide when his ranch was failing, Adam kills himself when he can no longer work his land or animals" (116).

Gid is so consumed with right and wrong that he is never able to enjoy life. Gid's father tells him life is not to be enjoyed and believes that if Gid had married Molly, "the love of his life," he would've been too happy and therefore, wouldn't be a good worker. After forgoing a trip to the Panhandle with his friend, Johnny, Gid was told by Adam to stop feeling sorry for himself because he had to "plow an oatfield once in a while."

"You can say all you want to," I said. "I still wish I'd gone to the Panhandle. I ain't trainin' to be no oat planter. I intend to enjoy my life."

"If that ain't a fine ambition," he said. "Why, any damn fool can enjoy himself. What makes you think life's supposed to be enjoyed anyhow?"

"Well," I said, "if you ain't supposed to enjoy it, what are you supposed to do with it?"

"Fight it. Fight the hell out of it." (24-25)

Gid has a forty-year affair with Molly, the only woman he ever loved, but is never able to enjoy himself because of his guilty conscience. Gid is different from his best friend and ranch hand, Johnny McCloud, who is carefree, never worrying about the consequences of his actions.

Gid can't accept the fact that his son, Jimmy—who was once a religious fanatic—is now a homosexual. Molly receives the following letter from Jimmy after he joins the army:

"Don't worry. I'm not going to marry no girl. Filipino or otherwise. I'm not very religious no more, this war has caused that, and I don't take after



girls any more. I take after men. I have a friend who is rich, and I mean rich, he says if I will stay with him I will never have to work a day, so I'm going to. I guess we will live in Los Angeles if we don't get killed." (208)

Gid is unable to relate to his son, Jimmy's homosexuality because he doesn't understand the changing times.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. Large Ranch Owners**

One of the most influential large ranch owners is Old John Torrington in *The Cowboys Quit*.<sup>4</sup> Torrington typifies a man who cannot change. He is similar to other large ranch owners, Frank Claymore, in *Stand Proud* and Sam Chance in *Sam Chance*. They were among the first to claim the territory from the Indians and to brand maverick cows. Once heroes, they are now forgotten old men, out of place in a rapidly changing society. If a stretched rope—hanging a rustler—was necessary to teach a man a lesson, so be it. Torrington had stretched many ropes and is not impressed when the cowboys go on strike for better wages. Non-working cowboys are “vagrants” in his eyes. When Torrington can't convince the sheriff to arrest the whole bunch and throw them in jail, he goes after them himself. Torrington asks, “Who's in charge of this heathen outfit?” Hitch answers, “Nobody, Mister Torrington, and everybody. They're all free men.” Somethin' you wanted, Mister Torrington?”

“Damned right! I want all you loafers off of this hill, and I want you off in a hell of a hurry! This is my land you're sqattin' on, and I won't have it. It's all my land, right up until where the town starts. If I'd had any sense, I'd of never let them put the town there, either.”

Hitch wanted to avoid provocation. “As I remember it, Mister Torrington, this here land still belongs to the state. You just been usin’ it for your cattle. You got no more claim on it than anybody else.”

“I claim it by right of first possession. Wasn’t nobody here when I come but a few Mexican shepherders and a remnant of Indians with the butt end out of their britches. I took it and I’m keepin’ it. I want you off.”

(112-113)

Trouble brews when Law McGinty is caught changing brands on maverick cows. Torrington teams up with a wealthy investor from the East named Prosper Selkirk to hire Lafey Dodge, a cold-blooded killer, to hang Law. Dodge has no conscience and gets no pleasure out of the killing; he simply works for money. There are no real winners when the strike ends. Hitch is badly beaten, and his cattle are stolen by a band of men hired by Torrington and the sheriff. The story takes an odd twist when Hitch is elected sheriff and decides to make things right. He wants to arrest Torrington, Selkirk, and the rest of the guilty party for stealing his cattle and hanging Law.

Torrington is still in the resistance stage and has not accepted the fact that the laws are changing. Hitch calls Torrington a “gritty old bastard in a time when it was what it took to stay.

When Torrington’s attorney, De Witt, implies to the jury that another man known for stealing cattle, Cato Bramlett, may have killed Law, Torrington stands up in his own defense.

Torrington stood up angrily. “Goddammit. Judge, this has gone far enough. It’s a damned lie. Every bit of it!”

Judge Wilkins pounded the gravel. "John, you set yourself down."

"The hell I will. I paid enough money for this Kansas City lawyer to've bought me four sections of land, and I'll be damned if I intend to throw it all away in a lie."

Torrington looked at the jury, then at the bench, defiance in his eyes. "Judge, what he said ain't the way of it all, and I don't want him gettin' credit for it. It was us that hung Law McGinty. We done it because he was a cow thief, and we done it as a lesson to anybody else who might be thataway inclined....You think this country was built by tiptoein' lawyers and a shelf full of lawbooks? No sir, it was built by men with guts, men who done whatsoever had to be done and didn't fool around that way as long as I got strength to climb into a saddle. And if it ever stops bein' that way you can mark it down that this country has gone to hell." (267)

When Hitchcock's former boss of the "W," Charlie Waide, is called to the stand, he makes an important point about change. He admits he's taken part in two lynchings in his past. Waide says, "There wasn't no law then except what we made for ourselves. If we hadn't done what we done, them people would've overrun us. Even so, I ain't proud of it; I woke up many a night rememberin' and wishin' it never happened. Them days we had an excuse, of sorts; now there's no excuse at all." (226).

Torrington sums up his argument by saying that Law McGinty needed to be hung because he was a thief. Torrington will not submit to new laws or new ways of doing things, and he doesn't expect anyone else to, either. "Now, if times has changed so much

that a man can't take care of his own troubles, then I say Texas is the worse off for it." He tells the jury to punish him and Prosper Selkirk if they have to punish anyone, and says he has no regrets. "...I want you to know one thing: I ain't in no ways sorry, and I ain't in no ways ashamed. And remember this is still our country. You don't have to keep on livin' here. If we was a mind to, we could put you out." (268-269). The trial ends with a hung jury, but the point is made. The law was changing.

Like John Torrington, Frank Claymore in *Stand Proud*, was once powerful and invincible. In the beginning of the novel, Claymore is old, hardened by life, and no longer a hero. Kelton was wise to tell the story in a series of flashbacks so that one can see the events leading to the changes in Claymore's personality. Claymore is respected by the older generation because they knew him when he fought the Indians and tamed the wilderness but is disliked by many who know him from a distance. In many ways, Claymore is like Charles Goodnight. He had had dangerous encounters with the Indians in the past, but grows to respect them. One of the first encounters Claymore has with Indians is when he meets twenty-one year old, Red Shield. Claymore confronts the Indian to save his own life, but Claymore is extremely fearful. Claymore comes to respect Red Shield in his old age and pays homage to the Indian after his death. The two men understood what it meant to fight for their positions.

Charlie Waide, the owner of the W Ranch is similar to Charlie Flagg. He has strong values and works closely with his ranch hands, having a mutual respect for them. He believes in paying his ranch hands a fair wage, but when one of his own ranch hands, Law McGuinty, is found changing brands to an LR, Waide's stress increases. His health is beginning to fail. His arm wounded in the Civil War begins to bother him more, and

he nearly collapses from the demanding circumstances. He paces all night before making his decision to side with the other ranchers, lowering the cowboys' wages. The peer pressure from the other larger, ranchers is more than he can handle, and he is in danger of losing his loan. At this point, Waide has reached his stress threshold. Not having the mental fortitude to hang on, he simply gives up.

Wes Hendrix is another example of a stoic rancher, an owner and operator of a small farm in Elmer Kelton's *The Man Who Rode Midnight*. He refuses to give up—even when staying afloat seems impossible. The aging ex-rodeo champion fights to give up his land when his town elects to solve the economic crisis by putting a recreational lake on his property. Wes's life has been closely tied to his land and to agree to give up his portion of the land would, in a sense, be to end his life. It had been the livelihood of many generations before him, but Hendrix finds the ranch can no longer support him. The story is based on the devastating effect of the “cattle market crash of 1973-74 and the long delayed recovery in the late 1980's,” which, according to Kelton, was the “harshes economic period since the great Depression,” especially for cattle ranchers (3,4). Ranching families who had been reasonably self-sufficient were now using machine power to do the work that men and horses once did, and it was more costly. As Lyndon B. Johnson once said, a family had to “hunker down like a jackrabbit in a hailstorm,” during times like this (Kelton 4). Kelton writes:

For the ranch or farm operator it takes many times more units of produce today to buy a specific necessity than was the case a generation or two ago. Even during the worst of the long 1950's drought and cattle-price slump, a cattle owner could take a dozen or so calves to market and

buy a new pickup. During the early 1980's he had to sell thirty to forty calves to buy a comparable vehicle. (4)

Hendrix once was known as one of the few cowboys who could ride the bucking horse, Midnight, but no longer. Years have past, and Hendrix is now nothing more than a grouchy seventy-eight year old man, staunchly set in his ways. He's opposed to the plans for a profitable river project that could benefit his town. His grandson, Jim Ed, the young tender foot, has been sent from his home in Dallas to West Texas by his businessman father, Truman, partly because of failing out of college and partly to talk his grandfather into selling his land and moving into a nursing home in Dallas. As Jim Ed works side by side with his aging grandfather, he grows to love and appreciate his grandfather and what he represents.

Even when he is old and ailing, Wes Hendrix's puritanical conscience drives him to keep going. He derives satisfaction by working long hours alongside his grandson, building a fence along the riverbank, knowing he has already lost the battle opposing the river project. Hendrix is defined by hard work, dogged determination, a stubbled face, and whiskey breath. Life hasn't been easy for him. He has suffered the loss of his wife and the physical demands of being a good roper—which means he is missing a digit or two. For Wes, it is the first joint on his right index finger which he points at his grandson: "I knowed your daddy didn't send you here just because he thought I needed help. He sent you here to try and talk me into giving up" (18). Wes knows his son, Truman, Jim Ed's father, would like nothing more than to talk the old man into selling his land, but Wes is not ready to give up his dreams or the land he loves.

Wes sits forward in his seat as his grandson, Jim Ed, drives him across the land Wes once knew as home. Wes talks to his grandson about the open prairie and the land he once loved, now gone, taken over by the oil industry (233). As Neinstein notes, "There is no mode for dealing with the vanished mythic energies any longer except through memory, nostalgia, and fading desire" (16). For Wes, the remnants of the land have become a graveyard:

Jim Ed slowed and turned in. There was a cattle guard made of secondhand pipe, and it had an oil company sign on it, with a lease name and number. Off to the side lay a small pile of rubble that Jim Ed realized had once been his father's entrance gate.

Wes blinked and sadness came into his voice. "Papa and us worked awful hard getting' that gate to lookin' nice."

The road was packed with caliche for easier passage of oilfield equipment trucks. At intervals, abandoned oilwell locations lay like scars on the grassland, their pads sterile of vegetation because of the deep caliche and the oil spillage. Concrete foundations stood like tombstones to mark the death of dreams. Rusted pipe and twisted piles of heavy cable lay scattered like the battlefield relics of a lost war.

Wes grumbled, "Wasn't none of that trash here in my time."

He commented how the mesquite and other brush had taken over, crowding out much of the grass. He recalled that this had been mostly open prairie. "When I was a button, chuckwagon cooks had to

hunt like hell to even find firewood... “Just look at this mess, now would you?”

He cautioned Jim Ed to slow down. “...See the windmill yonder in the brush?”

Jim Ed slowed and made the bend. He heard his grandfather groan. He saw no house, no barns, nothing but a fallen-down set of old wooden pens...The skeleton of a wooden tower lay on the ground nearby, rotted into almost total collapse. (233)

It saddened Wes to see what had become of the place:

Half- angrily, he said, “I don’t know why they had to tear the house down. It was a good one. The well water was always gypsy. My mama had her cistern right yonder for drinkin’ water” (233).

Wes cautiously tasted the water and made a face. “The water sure ain’t improved any. Even tastes a little like oil now. Contaminated from all them damn oil wells.” “Damn them! Damn them for what they done to a good country.” (233)

Building a fence is Wes’s only defense against the changing world. Jim Ed begins to understand the root of his grandfather’s bitterness and sadness, not only for losing his land, but also about the loss of Wes’s late wife. Jim Ed’s bond to his grandfather become stronger and more apparent when he hears his grandfather play fiddle tunes such as “Faded Love” and “Kelly Waltz”, songs to which Wes and his late wife once danced. It’s a bond Jim was never able to share with his father, Truman, who was tied to the city. He makes up his own mind to see things through the eyes of his aging



grandfather and by the end of the novel, Jim Ed watches his grandfather suffer a heart attack when Truman's attorney forces Wes to sigh over his land and agree to go to Dallas with Truman. The stress of leaving the land he loves is too much for Wes. He'd rather die than leave, and Jim Ed knows it. Jim Ed tells Truman, "You can't cut an old tree from its roots and transplant it. It'll die" (255). Truman responds:

"Lots of old people have had to learn to leave the land and move to the city, especially these last few hard years. They learn. Your grandfather is tougher than you give him credit for."

Jim Ed kept remembering the despair in Wes's eyes.

"Tough enough to will himself to die. You know he through his heart pills away?"

"...But, all that'll all pass, once he's acclimated to a new way of life. An easier way."

*A dependent way*, Jim Ed thought...I hated this country when I first came here, but it grew on me, like he grew on me. I know what it means to him. I think I even understand why. But *you* don't. You always hated it. (256-267)

By the end of the novel, both Wes and Jim Ed have agreed to use the proceeds from Wes's land to buy Glory B.'s grandmother's land and Jim Ed agrees to finish college to become the ranch business manager, a bridge to his grandfather's lifestyle. Jim Ed will never love the land the way Wes does, but he can understand Wes's determination to keep the land (266-267).

Sam Chance, in Benjamin Capps' *Sam Chance*, is another strong individual who makes the adjustment, although it is not without much difficulty. Some of the same qualities that helped Sam Chance survive on the open prairie eventually make him the successful owner of an empire. Chance was crafty and intelligent, but like many other frontier ranchers, he wanted to acquire more land, more livestock. After seventy-two days of hard work under the "merciless sun with only one trip back for supplies and one brief rain shower," Chance had acquired one hundred and fourteen animals under his own brand, of which fifty-two were cows and two bulls for breeding (55). He doesn't particularly care for cattle, but he is proud of those that carry his brand (55). He gains one to two more head per day. Once he has built his empire, Chance, like Gideon Fry, delights in doing most of the work himself, tilling the gardens, hauling cattle, hunting and skinning buffalo for trading and selling, and building dams to irrigate his land. In his ingenuity, Chance breeds his own line of domesticated cattle with strong English bloodlines, modeled after the Scottish-English standard.

Chance is hardly a hero. Like Frank Claymore, Chance's drive to succeed is so strong that he often hurts those around him. He doesn't sympathize with his wife's longing to travel with him or return to her hometown to see her family. Sam stays gone for days, sometimes months at a time, leaving his wife and two small children. According to Lawrence Clayton, Sam Chance's family was a hardship to him, but it did not interfere with his work which demanded that he leave for long periods of time (50). Chance's wife's response to the harshness of the frontier life is one Walter Prescott Webb discusses in *The Great Plains*. Webb says, "Much of the evidence reveals...that the plains repelled the women as they attracted the men...If we could get the truth, we should

doubtless find that many a family was stopped at the edge of the timber by women who refused to go further” (54-55). Chance’s wife isn’t able to adapt to the harsh outdoor climate or the loneliness, which Webb describes as “crushing to the soul,” to the women “who did not meet the isolation with an adventurous spirit.” (55). Clayton compares Chance to the tragic hero in Homer’s *Odyssey* in which the warrior leaves the battlefield and launches on a long journey filled with adventure and hardship (50).

Sam is more concerned with building his empire than taking care of his wife and two small children. He does, however, intend to fulfill his promise to his wife—to build her a big house, but by the time the house is built, his wife dies at the age of forty-two. The cause of her death, the doctor says, is simply old age. She was simply too worn out and unhappy, having never adjusted to the hard life Chance subjected her to for so many years. Chance’s wife represents many frontier women who never adjusted to the changes required to endure the physical and psychological demands of frontier life.

Chance comes face to face with another danger—the Indian raids which were common in early pioneer life. Chance’s benevolence in giving the Indians their horses back was not appreciated by the warring Indians, who decide to take what they can, when they can, with no regard for Chance’s benevolent act (53). Their merciless killing of the young boy who was left to guard the camp further exemplifies Chance’s perception of the Indian’s savagery. After Capps and his men return to the camp hungry and tired after running down horse thieves and surviving a dangerous stampede, they discover the Indians had beaten them back to camp. The narrator explains:

They could see portions of cattle herd scattered widely, and could see nothing of the four big draft horses. The tarp seemed to be off

Chance's wagon, and no sign of life showed around it. Something was wrong. They took the recovered horses toward the water hole a half mile below camp.

Junior says, "Pa, I bet Ab's gone to sleep somewhere, don't you?"

Buzzards flew from the water hole, threshing their big wings clumsily. Between a patch of scrub willows and the water lay the carcass of a horse, the hide split down the backbone and peeled back. From the flesh, now darkened and hardened by the sun, great hunks of meat had been cut.

Chance wheeled his horse. "Let's get up to the wagon."

The first thing they saw was a round object lying on the bare ground a hundred and fifty feet from the wagon, a thing with human hair and dark clotted blood, grotesquely and incongruously along. The boy, a kind of desperation in his voice, was chattering. "What is it, Pa? What is it? Where's Ab? Why don't? Whereabouts...?"

The naked beheaded head of the young man was staked across the ashes of the dead fire, front up. The wrists and ankles were still bound with rawhide to the stakes. Sticking up in the belly, like a fantastic decoration, were six arrows, their places of entering a pool of crusted blood. The muscles of the legs were cut with gashes to the bone. (63-64)

Chance fails to tell his wife of the incident or the brutally cold winters for fear of it ruining his plans. Instead, he dives deeper into his work, "digging holes in the creek bed floor "about four feet deep, ten feet wide, and twenty feet wide" (66), working and

training oxen, then roughing it out with Lefors for three winter months in a dugout, hunting and skinning animals. Chance and his partner endure by making light of the situation:

As they sat cross-legged one night on the buffalo-hide floor, the cradle on a bucket between, Chance became aware of Lefors' eyes upon him and looked up from his work.

Lefors said, "Damned if I don't believe you're the ugliest man I've ever seen."

Chance laughed. "I reckon it's just as well we don't have a mirror. If you could see yourself, you'd run off and hide."

"Hide? Well, we live in a hole in the ground right now. I hope don't nobody take us for a couple of varmints."

Lefors picture of them had merit. Chance thought suddenly how he would hate to be seen right now by any woman whose opinion he cherished. He had not had a bath or shave in two months, nor a haircut for six. He was wearing all the clothes he owned, layer after layer of them, against the cold. He did not remove them even to sleep, except maybe the top layer on some balmy afternoon. The bottom layers were infected with fleas and ticks and imbued with the pungent smell of animals; the top layer was saturated to stiffness with dried blood and tallow and rancid fat." (77)

Chance isn't bothered by the conditions because his wagon is filling.

By the mid eighteen-seventies, Chance encounters another hardship that's indicative of the time period, the declining economy. Chance becomes one of the first settlers to use barbed wire to fence and mark his property and save his cattle during hard times. The cattle prices had dropped and were starting to come back, but most of the settlers had moved back to the West, wanting land of their own. They, along with of the many farmers, don't like Chance; they view him as a "land hogging cattle king who lords it over thousands of square miles." Chances is unyielding because of the difficulties he has endured and feels he has a right to keep his land. After all, he fought the Indians, built dams for irrigation, and started a school on that land. Although Chance is an adventurer, determined to make good, he can't escape the mold of the tragic hero. His own stubbornness leads to his downfall. When Chance is asked by the county commissioner to give up some of his land to make it available for others, he's too stubborn to give in until he is old and too tired to manage it alone. The town is finally named after Chance just before his death. His body is found in the pasture with his horse and rifle nearby.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

While studying the characters in the frontier novels of Benjamin Capps, Elmer Kelton, and Larry McMurtry, I have found that several character traits or factors influence the characters' reactions to change. The three basic approaches that the characters take are a conservative approach, a pragmatic approach, or an innovative approach.

Many take a conservative approach, seeing no benefit in going with the flow. As the frontier fades, many ranch hands find survival on the open range increasingly difficult and hang in as long as they can, but when other factors are added to the mix such as old age, injury, and/or modernization, they go to work for other ranchers or settle down to manage a ranch of their own. The wear and tear of the rugged cowboy life forces them to make changes or compromise—whether they were willing to accept them or not. Hewey Calloway's brother, Walter Calloway, compromises by managing a ranch to provide stability for his family. Walter is not as skilled at cowboying as Hewey is, so living in the open range is not as easy for Walter as for Hewey. Hewey is able to do the same ranch work as Walter, but in less time. After living most of his adult life on the open range, Hewey Calloway, having already developed arthritis, settles down as a ranch foreman in Kelton's *The Smiling Country*, after suffering serious injuries from falling off a horse. He realizes he can no longer do the dangerous work he used to do. Becoming a foreman is a compromise—the next best thing.

Charlie Flagg, Adam Fry, Gid Fry, Wes Hendrix, Charlie Waide, Homer Bannon, and Wes Hendrix change little because they take a conservative approach—the path of least resistance. They prefer to have things stay the same and find change stressful and

unnecessary— partly because of the puritan ethics instilled in them and partly because they have already accumulated too much stress, no longer having the physical or mental fortitude to adapt. They have become stubborn, aged, and tired. They have lost their first love—the land— and aren't prepared to change. They fight to make ends meet for years and either die trying like Gideon Fry or commit suicide like Adam Fry. Elmer Kelton's main characters are like Charlie Flagg and many others he knew growing up. To Kelton, they are not typical heroes. Rather they are tragic heroes, set up for failure. Kelton describes them as "quiet but determined men and women who stand their ground year after year in a fight they can never finally win, against an unforgiving enemy they know will return to challenge them again and again so long as they live" (x).

Some characters like Charlie Flagg change in some areas but not others. Flagg never accepts government assistance, but he does learn to overcome his prejudice for Hispanics because of his love for the Flores family and Teofilo. Charlie Waide treats his ranch hands better than the other ranchers, but once things get difficult, he gives up, siding with the other ranchers and increasing their pay. Old age, illness, and the pressure from the other ranchers have become too much to bear.

Having already dealt with the death of his spouse and an unscrupulous stepson, Homer Bannon suddenly finds himself facing old age and modernization at the same time, and he is not willing or prepared to make the adjustment. Unlike Gideon and Adam Fry, however, he stops fighting. Once Bannon's herd is gone, he gives up. He's too set in his ways and tired to change. Adam Fry, like Paige Mauldin, commits suicide. Wes Hendrix knows he is fighting a losing battle to save his land, but he knows no other way. He never stops fighting for his land.



Another group of characters are more pragmatic. Characters like Emil Deutscher take a more practical approach because they see “the writing on the wall.” In order to survive, Emil moves his family to Fort Worth, so he can work as a carpenter at a factory. He moves to save his family and to keep from losing everything to the bank. Deutscher would have been just as likely to stay in the resistance stage if things had been moving in his favor. Page Mauldin goes with the flow, buying into the government feed program until the government disqualifies him from the program. Already a nervous wreck, he can no longer handle the pressure, and he commits suicide. Mauldin resents Charlie Flagg for making the rest of the ranchers look weak because Flagg stands his ground, rejecting the government feed program. This group of characters seem to be in the middle and can go either way.

Others like Sam Chance are innovators—independent self-starters that embrace opportunity and change, and are willing to acquire the necessary skills to survive in spite of tremendous difficulties. Sam Chance would be considered an entrepreneur today. He tries new things and explores new ideas, trapping animals for furs, trading with the Indians, irrigating the land, and developing a town. Chance never accepts defeat. Instead, he welcomes new challenges. Frank Claymore in Kelton’s *Stand Proud* has the same pioneer spirit, but unlike Sam Chance, he becomes set in his ways as he ages. Neither of them let fear stop them from exploring new territory, surviving in the wilderness, or defeating the Indians.

## 5. END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Most of Kelton's characters are based on someone Kelton knew or heard of. Snort Yarnell is no exception. To a degree, Kelton based Snort Yarnell on Bellcord Rutherford, a legendary cowboy who worked on ranches in the Midland-Odessa Country. There were several Bellcord tales told among the old-time cowboys. The version Kelton told was of a boy who wanted a rope, so he climbed into the bell tower of a church and took the rope. Another story was that Snort was modeled after Bob Crosby, a famous roper from the 20's, 30's, and 40's—the equivalent of a rock star today. (Kelton "Fiction Writers are Liars and Thieves," 287-288). Snort Yarnell was mentioned briefly in *The Man Who Wrote Midnight*. Wes Hendrix points to where Ol' Snort once lived and says Snort was "left over from the open range times" and "wilder'n a peach orchard bear," He says Snort taught him a lot. He claimed Snort was born on the Chisholm Trail and "suckled by a longhorn cow." (Kelton 232-233).

<sup>2</sup>In one particular study done by Porter and his colleagues (1958), two rhesus monkeys with similar backgrounds were placed in adjacent chairs and administered twenty electric shocks. Basically, both monkeys had a lever and were delivered the same number of electric shocks, but only one monkey ("the executor") had the ability to control the period of time between shocks. The other monkey was given a nonworking lever. In other words, the other monkey could hit the lever as many times as he wanted, but it did nothing. Within a short time, the monkey with the working lever suffered from stomach ulcers; the strain of being responsible for his own comfort and that of his partner

was too much for him. The monkey with the nonworking lever did not develop ulcers. He was under less emotional stress than the executor monkey. In some of the experiments, the researchers varied the amount of time the monkeys spent strapped in their chairs prior to receiving the shock. The amount of stomach acid in the executor monkeys was found to be higher during rest periods —before the shocks were delivered. According to Brady, et al. in 1958, the anticipation of danger was more stressful for these animals than the experience itself. This correlates with studies that show that prolonged periods of stress were more difficult.

<sup>3</sup>*Horseman Pass By* was made into the movie, *Hud*, starring Paul Newman as Hud Bannon, Brandon De Wilde as Lonnie Bannon, and Melvin Douglas as Homer Bannon. The film received different reviews than McMurtry expected. The audience was impressed by Hud's callousness and sense of pride. He was morally repugnant, but the crowds found him charming and entertaining. His immorality went out the window and many viewed Hud as a Western hero. They liked the power he achieved and his persuasiveness. This was the image McMurtry was looking for. He knew the values of the younger generation had changed.

<sup>4</sup>Kelton's novel, *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, was loosely based on a cowboy strike that occurred at Tascosa, Texas in 1883. The cowboys lost the strike, but many never left. Instead, they took up land and ran their own cattle. Many of the large ranch owners regarded them as thieves. Pat Garrett who was famous by then for killing Billy the Kid, was hired to put a stop to it. (Kelton 291). Kelton created a character like Garrett named Lafey Dodge, but Kelton wrote that an elderly woman told him a story about a rancher Pink Higgins, a good friend of her father's. In real life, Garrett

confronted one of the main suspects. The two men drew six-shooters and the cowboy came out second. The gunfighter buried him where he fell. (291-292).

<sup>5</sup>Homosexuality was not a common subject among Western writers when *Leaving Cheyenne* was written in 1963. By the time McMurtry co-authored *Brokeback Mountain*, the Oscar-winning screenplay for Annie Proulx's short story with Diana Ossana in 2005, homosexuality was more commonly discussed, and the film, directed by Ang Lee, won many awards. *Brokeback Mountain* received the most nominations at the 78th Academy Awards, and won three: Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Best Original Score, while controversially losing Best Picture.

<sup>6</sup>McMurtry felt as though he had experienced the loss himself. He said, "It has embedded itself in the titles of my book, and just as I think I have worn the emotion out it seizes me again, usually at some unlikely moment" (ING, xxii, xxiii). It is this ambivalence that prompted McMurtry to write about his final parting from Texas in his collection of essays, *In a Narrow Grave*. In his last essay in *In a Narrow Grave* titled "Take My Saddle from the Wall: A Valediction," Larry McMurtry writes of his ambivalence toward Texas: "The reader who has attended thus far will have noticed a certain inconsistency in my treatment of Texas past and present—a contradiction of attractions, one might call it. 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*. Such contradictions are always a bit awkward to work with...What in this book appear to be inconsistencies of attitude are the manifestations of my ambivalence in regard to Texas—and a very deep ambivalence it is, as deep as the bone. Such ambivalence is not helpful in a discursive book, but it can be the very blood of a novel" (141-142). McMurtry has

won the Jesse H. Jones Award from the Texas Institute of Letters for three of his novels; in 1962, for *Horseman, Pass By*; in 1967, for *The Last Picture Show*; and in 1986, for *Lonesome Dove*. Both *Horseman Pass By* and *Leaving Cheyenne* involved McMurtry's ambivalent feelings about leaving the land, only to return to it in his dreams, in an attempt to resolve the ties that bound him to the West that he longed to get away from.

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