

Rites of Passage in Larry McMurry's The Last Picture Show

by
D. Gene England

Having once surveyed the scholarship on Larry McMurry, I knew that the maturation theme in his works had been touched in a number of significant articles.¹ Yet much more could be said. As I was catching up on recent McMurry scholarship, I found to my pleasure a sound critical study, Charles Peavy's *Larry McMurry* for the Twayne U. S. Authors Series.² The find was a mixed blessing, however, for I quickly discovered that Mr. Peavy's coverage of the maturation theme is most thorough, leaving few of my observations about the book to be new. It therefore became my intention to comment on several significant contributions made by Peavy and then to move to several insights of my own.

Particularly significant as new contributions to McMurry studies are passages from interviews that McMurry has granted and draft versions of many of his novels. These new contributions are used by Peavy in two important sections of his work dealing with *The Last Picture Show*. In his second chapter, "McMurry's Novels," he accurately characterizes the novel's action as centered on "the sexual adventures and misadventures of Sonny Crawford as he struggles toward maturity in the emotionally crippling environs of Thalia."³ Peavy clearly identifies the plot as "concerned with the rites of passage of Sonny Crawford and his friend, Duane Jackson."⁴ In the summary and analysis of the plot, Peavy identifies a significant correspondence between the novel and traditional rites of passage: the presence in Sam the Lion and Genevieve of surrogate parents, who give in the one case fatherly advice and strict admonitions and in the other "motherly concern and affection."⁵ Such connections are further explored in Chapter Three "Major Themes in McMurry's Fiction," in which Peavy suggests:

The main action of the novel is concerned with the emergence into manhood of a high school senior, Sonny Crawford. His sophistication (or loss of innocence), as well as that of his peer group, is accomplished through sex. It is

through the medium of sex that the inhabitants of Thalia seek (and find) their identity.⁶

In this assertion Peavy has put the major concern in his exploration for rites of passage on the sexual. There is no denying the heavy emphasis on sexual experiences of all kinds, involving many characters, as fundamental experience in the lives of the youths of Thalia. Nevertheless, if the novel has significance in its treatment of the rites of passage, it should deal with more than sexual experience. It is the concentration on the sexual, I think, which leads Peavy to regard *The Last Picture Show* as less successful than the earlier McMurtry novels, *Horseman*, *Pass By* and *Leaving Cheyenne*, especially in characterization.⁷ Admitting that the characterization of the older women in Sonny's life (Genevieve and Ruth) does have "subtle nuance,"⁸ Peavy concludes his treatment of themes in the first three novels by the following assessment of McMurtry's early work:

The themes of loneliness and lost love recur in McMurtry's novels, but the most important theme in the first three novels is the male protagonists' achievement of manhood (with its accompanying loss of innocence). These males are accompanied in their rites of passage by women who are older or, as in the case of Molly [in *Leaving Cheyenne*], more sophisticated in their emotional maturity.⁹

Clearly, to him Sonny's rite of passage is sexual in nature, especially in his affair with Ruth Popper. Peavy insists at the same time that McMurtry is not guilty in the book of overemphasizing the role of sex in small town life, especially in the lives of young people: "Some of McMurtry's sexual scenes are high symbolic, all are important thematically, and none should be taken as sensational."¹⁰

Unfortunately, Peavy does not give any justification for that assessment. Before turning to the non-sexual experiences in Sonny's maturation, I want to consider this issue of sensationalism in the novel. For while it is true that a novel of maturation should have more than the sexual for a basis, the sexual should be seen as believable, as an integral part of the character's experience and not as exploitation by the writer. I concur totally with Peavy's judgment that the sexual experiences in the novel are accurate. Having passed my own adolescence in a small ranching and oil town of Texas in the 1950's, I was struck from my first reading of the book by the accuracy of McMurtry's capturing of the atmosphere of such towns and the poignancy of Sonny's sexual encounters. Concurrent with the first awakening of sex within me and many of my peers was the acquiring of an almost mythical name, Bila. That name, spoken secretly and with mysteriously dirty significance, conjured up notions of sex for youngsters having only the faintest notion of what

sexual intercourse actually was. Gradually as more and more of us passed through puberty, the name took on a clearer significance. Bila was the woman with whom some had, or claimed to have had, their first sexual experience. That Bila was a social outcast, a Mexican prostitute, made the experience all the more an adventure. The presence of Bila in my home town experience makes the Jimmie Sue episode (in which Duane and his friends try, over Sonny's objections, to introduce Billy to sex) an accurate picture of first sex. In Luling, Texas, my home, the next sexual episode for a young man was usually in the back seat of a car on Davis Hill—similar to Sonny's episodes with Charlene Duggs in the pickup truck. If not on Davis Hill the young men of Luling sought sex in a most convenient brothel some fifty miles distant in LaGrange. This is the "Chicken Ranch" now made famous by Texan Larry King in an article for *Playboy* and in the delightful musical "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas." Sonny and Duane's experiences in the houses of Wichita Falls are cold and impersonal; the LaGrange experiences seem less so, but that may have more to do with the general mythologizing that has been done about the "Chicken Ranch." For example, Miss Edna, the madam of the house, called Miss Mona in King's musical, frequently turned away young men who arrived too drunk to behave according to her rules of conduct. She once turned away a carload of freshmen from the University of Texas, saying, "Now ya'll go on back home, and come back anytime you're sober enough to enjoy yourselves." For a seamier if more exotic adventure than LaGrange, young men of Luling headed to the border cities of Mexico, just as Sonny and Duane do in their long trip to Matamoros. The bars and prostitutes of Boys Town in numerous Mexican cities gave Luling youth an introduction to pornography not so readily available as in American cities today. Like the Thalia boys, Luling's found the trip home from Mexico to be an almost unendurable combination of hangover and fear of venereal disease.

One last personal reminiscence seems necessary even if unsavory in order to establish that the sexual scenes of *The Last Picture Show* are not unrealistic. On an evening in the Spring in the late fifties, some fifty feet from one of the busiest highways in the nation, U.S. 90, more than twenty young men are reported to have stood in line outside the men's room of a service station, passing from one to another the condom used for sexual intercourse with a girl lying inside on sacks of feed. Little surprise then that nothing in McMurtry's novel seems gratuitous sensationalism to me.

If these examples suffice, Peavy's assessment of the sexual scenes

in the novel is valid. To be successful literature of rites of passage must have such correspondences for its readers. Beyond such correspondences, successful portrayals of the rites of passage must do more—must deal with features which go beyond the sexual awakening of the maturing individual. The mythological components of rites of passage are certainly more complex. If Sonny is indeed undergoing such rites, the reader should be able to see changes in him, new stages of his development, new insights which have come to him from the older and presumably wiser individuals with whom he comes in contact.

In his excellent article on the initiation themes in McMurtry's works, Kenneth W. Davis cites Mordecai Marcus and Ibad Hassan for definitions of initiation in fiction.¹¹ He is interested most particularly in Marcus's use of the concepts of tentative, uncompleted, and decisive initiations. These evaluations he applies to several types of initiations undergone by McMurtry's young heroes: sexual initiation, physical-challenge initiation, and initiation through encounters with death. In judging Sonny's experiences, Davis finds the sexual initiation to be "characterized by overlapping of the uncompleted and the decisive types."¹² More clearly decisive is the initiation undergone by Sonny in encountering death, twice, through the loss of Sam and Billy:

Sonny Crawford, at last, has experienced through a violent encounter with death, a decisive initiation which reveals to him a devastating vision of the impersonal cruelty of a fate which can strike down an innocent victim such as Billy.¹³

This discussion by Davis puts proper emphasis on the non-sexual initiation experiences in Sonny's life as being the more significant, or at least the more indicative that Sonny has indeed made a passage from the one stage of awareness to another. I think it necessary to explore the non-sexual initiation one step more. Davis's work deals with the initiation through the death of Sam and Billy, but he does not deal with the role of Sam as initiator. Peavy in his work labels Sam the Lion the father figure in Sonny's life, the surrogate father to replace Sonny's own weak and ineffectual parent. To be seen as the type of figure described by authorities of mythological structure, Sam needs further definition.

To get at the role I see for Sam in Sonny's initiation or rite of passage, I want to consider some insights provided by two prominent spokesmen on myths and their symbolic importance in the life and literature of man. Erich Neumann, the brilliant disciple of Karl Jung, details the role of rite in the education of young males by their

elders in tribal situations.

In its original forms, as a system of alliances among members of different age groups, the male group was organized on a strictly hierarchical basis. The rites that induct a man from one age group to another were accordingly rites of initiation. Everywhere these men's societies are of the greatest importance, not only for the development of masculinity and of the man's consciousness of himself, but for the development of culture as a whole.

This horizontal organization of age groups obviates personal conflict in the sense of a hostile father-son relationship, because the terms "father" and "son" connote group characteristics and not personal relations. The older men are "fathers," the young men "sons," and this collective group-solidarity is paramount. Conflicts, so far as they exist at all, are between the age groups and have a collective and archetypal, rather than a personal and individual, character. The initiations enable the young men to rise up in the scale and to perform various functions within the group. The trials of endurance are tests of the virility and stability of the ego; they are not to be taken personally as the "vengeance of the old" upon the young, any more than our matriculation is the vengeance of old men upon the rising generation, but merely a certificate of maturity for entry into the collective. In almost all cases, age brings an increase in power and importance based on the increased knowledge gained through successive initiations, so that the old men have little cause for resentment.¹⁴

Neumann's interest is centered on the father-son relationship existing between tribal elders and the young males to be initiated. He goes on to probe the elements of character, which in addition to physical elements, initiation rites were meant to improve:

Fire and other symbols of wakefulness and alertness play an important part in the rites of initiation, where the young men have to "watch and wake," i.e., learn to overcome the body and the inertia of the unconscious by fighting against tiredness. Keeping awake and the endurance of fear, hunger, and pain go together as essential elements in fortifying the ego and schooling the will. Also, instruction and initiation into the traditional lore are as much part of the rites as the proofs of will power that have to be given. The criterion of manliness is an undaunted will, the ready ability to defend the ego and consciousness should need arise, and to master one's unconscious impulses and childish fears. Even today the initiation rites of puberty still have the character of an initiation into the secret world of the masculine spirit. Whether this spirit lies hidden in the stock of ancestral myths, in the laws and ordinances of the collective, or in the sacraments of religion, is all one. They are all expressions, differing in rank and degree, of the same masculine spirit which is the specific property of the male group.¹⁵

The major function of tribal elders is identified by Neumann as instruction in the values of the tribe. Initiation becomes the method for such instruction. Neumann writes:

"The fathers" are the representatives of law and order, from the earliest taboos to the most modern juridical systems; they hand down the highest values of civilization whereas the mothers control the highest, i.e., deepest, values of life and nature. The world of the fathers is thus the world of collective values; it is historical and related to the fluctuating level of conscious and cultural develop-

ment within the group. The prevailing system of cultural values, i.e., the canon of values which gives a culture its peculiar physiognomy and its stability, has its roots in the fathers, the grown men who represent and reinforce the religious, ethical, political, and social structure of the collective.

These fathers are the guardians of masculinity and the supervisors of all education. That is to say, their existence is not merely symbolical; as pillars of the institutions that embody the cultural canon, they preside over the upbringing of each individual and certify his coming of age. It makes no difference how this cultural canon is constituted, whether its laws and taboos be those of a tribe of head-hunters or of a Christian nation. Always the fathers see to it that the current values are impressed upon the young people, and that only those who have identified themselves with those values are included among the adults. The advocacy of the canon of values inherited from the fathers and enforced by education manifests itself in the psychic structure of the individual as "conscience."¹⁸ (Neumann, p. 172-3)

To explore more particular information about the manner in which rites of passage serve man and his society, I wish to cite several passages from one of the most famous of the critics of myth, Joseph Campbell. According to him:

The tribal ceremonies of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, installation, and so forth, serve to translate the individual's life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms. They disclose him to himself, not as this personality or that, but as the warrior, the bride, the widow, the priest, the chieftain; at the same time rehearsing for the rest of the community the old lesson of the archetypal stages. All participate in the ceremonial according to rank and function. The whole society becomes visible to itself as an imperishable living unit. Generations of individuals pass, like anonymous cells from a living body; but the sustaining, timeless form remains. By an enlargement of vision to embrace this super-individual, each discovers himself enhanced, enriched, supported, and magnified. His role, however unimpressive, is seen to be intrinsic to the beautiful festival-image of man—the image, potential yet necessarily inhibited, within himself.¹⁷

Frequently for the individual to discover his role a guide is necessary. Campbell sees the function of that guide as comparable to that in modern society of the psychoanalyst:

His role is precisely that of the Wise Old Man of the myths and fairy tales whose words assist the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure. He is the one who appears and points to the magic shining sword that will kill the dragon-terror, tells of the waiting bride and the castle of many treasures, applies healing balm to the almost fatal wounds, and finally dismisses the conqueror, back into the world of normal life, following the great adventure into the enchanted night.¹⁶

From these discussions of certain initiation figures I would like to merge several into a composite that will serve for the pattern of Sam. The older men of the tribe, the Elders described by Neumann as "the fathers," must pass on the important spiritual elements of their society to the young men. The Wise Old Man described by Campbell

gives magic words or signs to the youngster being guided. Taken together these two figures become the Wise Elder. This image is apt for Sam the Lion.

The single most interesting scene in the novel to be considered for its ritualistic patterning is the trip to the stock tank. The fishing trip, like Hemingway's symbolic journey for Nick in "Big Two-Hearted River," places the initiate in nature, near the source of redeeming, purifying water. The brown water of a large stock tank is hardly a pure, or purifying, source, until it is seen in contrast to the deadness of the landscape around Sonny:

The gray pastures and the distant brown ridges looked too empty. He himself felt too empty. As empty as he felt and as empty as a country looked it was too risky going out into it—he might be blown around for days like a broomweed in the wind. (p. 217)¹⁹

Out in the open country the norther gusted strongly across the highway, making the truck hard to hold. Once in a while a big ragweed would shake loose from the barbed-wire fences and skitter across the road, only to catch again in the barbed-wire fence on the other side. The dry grass in the pastures was gray-brown, and the leafless winter mesquite gray-black . . . Except for a few sand-scraped ranch houses there was nothing to see but a long succession of low brown ridges, with the wind singing over them . . . Sonny sometimes got the funny feeling that he was driving the old truck around and around in a completely empty place. (pp. 15-16)

The contrasting mood at the tank is immediately apparent.

Sonny was stretched out on his stomach in the Bermuda grass along the base of the tank dam. The May sun on his back was so warm that it made him drowsy, and he was almost asleep . . . (p. 121)

Very central to the ritual to be played out in this natural haven for Sonny is the presence of his Wise Elder. Just as Ike McCaslin in Faulkner's "The Bear" has a spiritual guide in Sam Fathers, so Sonny has in Sam the Lion. That Sam is his leader is established in a most unusual act with phallic symbolic import—an act of imitation. Sam urinates from the edge of the stock tank, "watering the grass" he calls it. Soon Sonny follows:

In a moment he himself had the urge to water the grass in the way that Sam had, and he walked to the edge of the dam to do it. He felt warm and well and was faintly pleased by the spurt of his own water, even stretching himself a little to see if he could send a stream all that way to the foot of the dam. (p. 122)

Realizing that Sam has seen him, Sonny is at first embarrassed and then puzzled by Sam's reaction. The older man is reduced to tears from laughing and then he curses his old age. Because Sonny continues to be puzzled by these actions, Sam explains:

"I'll tell you what it was, son," he said, looking at Sonny a little ruefully. "Seeing you pissing off the dam reminded me of something . . . Reason I always drag

you all out here probably—I'm just as sentimental as anybody else when it comes to old times. What you reminded me of happened twenty years ago—I brought a young lady swimming here . . . We come out here swimmin' one day without no bathin' suits and after we got out of the water I walked off up there to piss. (p. 123)

In doing so, Sam accepted the lady's bet that he couldn't reach the water at the bottom of the dam, the target Sonny had tried to reach. In trying to find out more, Sonny learns only that the incident was felt by Sam to have been a craziness, as he calls it, to which he admits he might succumb again if the lady were available. He wonders if such craziness is being ridiculous, concluding finally:

"It ain't, really," he said. "Being crazy about a woman like her's always the right thing to do. Being a decrepit old bag of bones is what's ridiculous." (p. 124)

With the subject of such love before them, Sam turns their conversation to Sonny's affair with Ruth Popper:

"I don't exactly know what to do about her," Sonny said hopefully.

Sam the Lion laughed almost as loudly as he had on the tank dam.

"Don't look at me for advice," he said. "I never know exactly what to do about anybody, least of all women. You might stay with her and get some good out of her while you're growing up. Somebody ought to get some good out of Ruth." (pp. 124-5)

In this very important passage Sam has served as a Wise Elder for Sonny, whether he has intended to or not. In this important isolated spot, he has pointed out Sonny's imitation of his own actions. First in the act of urination from the dam and then in having a secret and "crazy" love. Before the two leave the discussion of such secrets, Sam gives Sonny a piece of information that can be identified as the kind of information the Wise Elder often passes to an initiate—an evaluation of the value of life, enigmatic as the statement may be.

"Is growin' up always miserable?" Sonny said. "Nobody seems to enjoy it much."

"Oh, it ain't necessarily miserable," Sam replied. "About eighty per cent of the time, I guess" (p. 124)

This scene rather dramatically reveals an initiation pattern, the passing of important insight from the Wise Elder to the initiate. Whether or not Sonny, as initiate, has learned from the information is a question best answered in examining his response to Ruth in the final scene of the novel.

Before dealing with that important passage, I should point out that the Sam-Sonny relationship later follows the pattern of a Wise Elder and initiate when Sonny assumes the role of Elder after the death of Sam. It is Sonny who takes on Sam's guardianship of the mentally retarded Billy. When Billy is killed by a truck, it is Sonny

who must perform a ritual:

Sonny didn't want to yell at the men again, but he couldn't stand to walk away and leave Billy there by the truck, with the circle of men spitting and farting and shuffling all around him. Before any of them knew what he was up to he got Billy under the arms and started off with him, dragging him and trying to run . . . Sonny . . . dragged him across the windy street to the curb in front of the picture show. That was as far as he went. He laid Billy on the sidewalk where at least he would be out of the street, and covered him with his Levi jacket. (p. 216)

The appropriateness of Sonny's carrying Billy to the picture show is clearly seen if we consider how important, how almost religious, is Billy's fascination with that place:

Of all the people in Thalia, Billy missed the picture show most. He couldn't understand that it was permanently closed. Every night he kept thinking it would open again. (p. 213)

One Friday evening, when Billy was allowed into the deserted theater, he was inadvertently looked in.

It was not until late that night, when Sonny got worried and began asking around that Miss Mosey thought of the balcony. When they got there, Billy was sitting quietly in the dark with him broom, waiting, perfectly sure that the show would come on sometime. (p. 214)

In the act of returning Billy to the picture show, Sonny has placed him as it were on an altar. Sonny has performed an important ritual act, showing that he has, if only instinctively, taken over some of Sam's functions.

To see if he has also assumed some of the wisdom of Sam such as that conveyed in the incident at the stock tank, it is necessary to consider Sonny's final return to Ruth. During the early stages of their affair, Sonny is surprised—then satisfied—that this older woman takes great satisfaction in having him as her lover. But Sonny shows little concern, little care for her as a person.

He does illustrate some guilt feelings when he will not participate with the young boys who copulate with the little blind heifer.

It had something to do with Mrs. Popper, though he was not certain just what. It didn't seem right to kiss Mrs. Popper and still fiddle around with heifers, blind or not. . . . He suddenly felt like he had graduated, and it was an uneasy feeling. (p. 86)

After Jacy shows an interest in Sonny, he is easily drawn away from Ruth, but he has a gnawing sense of guilt, as he and Jacy drive out to the lake.

It was exactly what Sonny wanted to do, but as he drove there his uneasiness increased. The thought of Ruth popped into his mind—They had seen each other that very afternoon, and had had an ardent, sweaty, good time . . .

Driving to the lake, it occurred to him that in a way he was bound to Ruth, but with Jacy sitting close beside him, light-voiced, her hair fragrant, her arm cool, it was hard to keep Ruth in mind. (p. 178)

Once Jacy has Sonny convinced of her love for him Ruth is excluded from Sonny's life but not his conscience:

After the first date with Jacy he did not once go back to Ruth's. He could not have faced her. At times he missed her, and he often missed making love to her, but he did not go back. Sometimes in the middle of the night he would wake up and feel nervous and ashamed. Late at night he could not help facing the fact that he has treated Ruth shamefully and probably hurt her very much . . . It wasn't right and it made him feel terrible, but at the same time he knew he wasn't going to quit going with Jacy. He was being unfair to Ruth, but what he felt for Jacy was beyond fairness. He had a chance to have something he had always wanted, and he wasn't going to pass the chance up . . . All the same, he hated being the cause of Ruth's suffering. The only way he knew how to handle it was just not to go near her, or to say anything to her, or to try to justify what he had done. (p. 180)

Subsequently, when Gene Farrow has broken up the marriage of Sonny and Jacy, Lois points out to him that he has been foolish: "You'd have been a lot better off to stay with Ruth Popper." (p. 197) Later as she and Sonny have made love, Lois tells him to stop worrying about how much he is worth to the woman, to stop having an inferiority complex about himself. Instead he should concentrate on how much worth he is to himself. When he appears saddened by the conversation, Lois asks:

"Why do you look so sad? You're fine, Sonny."

"I was just thinking of Mrs. Popper," he said. "I guess I treated her terrible."

"I guess you did," Lois said. (p. 201)

After Billy's death, Sonny, with no apparent motivation, returns to Ruth's house. Her angry outburst, including hurling Sonny's cup of coffee against the wall, shocks him especially when she concludes by accusing him of mistreating those closest to him:

I guess just because your friend got killed you want me to forget what you did and make it all right. I'm not sorry for you! You would have left Billy too, just like you left me. I bet you left him plenty of nights whenever Jacy whistled. I wouldn't treat a dog that way but that's the way you treated me, and Billy too." (p. 218)

Sonny had not thought of himself as deserting Billy, and he doesn't try to respond, defend, or excuse himself. Instead he experiences relief in having her so mad at him. He reaches for her hand, as if to resume the relationship as though nothing had happened. Ruth thinks to herself that after all that he had done to her had been because he was only a boy. Summoning strength from within her, she resolves to go through the experiences again, even if they must

eventually come again to a cruel separation:

All at once tears sprang in her eyes and wet her face, her whole body swelled. She knew she was going to have the nerve, after all, and she took Sonny's young hand and pressed it to her throat, to her wet face. She was on the verge of speaking to him, of saying something fine. It seemed to her that on the tip of her tongue was something it had taken her forty years to learn, something wise or brave or beautiful that she could finally say. It would be just what Sonny needed to know about life, and she would have said it if her own relief had not been so strong. (219-20)

The words don't come to her. She can only say, in the moving words that end the novel, "Never you mind, honey . . . never you mind." (p. 220)

Is this a scene that establishes any sense of maturity in Sonny? Certainly Ruth's characterization of him as a boy undercuts any estimation of his maturity. The sign of his maturity is seen in Ruth's response to him. She has exempted him from the necessity of an apology; yet she knows that he is sorry for what he has done. He has cared for her even if he has not been able to tell her so. He has learned from Sam that love, crazy as it is, is to be treasured. It may well be the twenty per cent of good that comes to each life—if Sam were right in saying that only about 80 per cent of life was miserable. Lois has told him that self worth is the most important thing in love. In returning to Ruth, Sonny is doing what he knew he should so long before. He no longer has a reason to feel ashamed of himself. He has, in returning, expressed his shame to Ruth, suffered her anger, and in taking her hand showed that he can be as Lois advised him, comfortable with himself. Ruth, with great insight, has been willing to take Sonny back, sensing his inability to express in words what he has gone through and what he has learned. In her own inability to say the words that will help Sonny know about life, she has seen how difficult such an effort is. Her final lines, then, exempt him from saying anything. His presence says it all, and he need not "mind" about the words.

From the elders around him, Sonny Crawford has learned enough to undergo many maturing events. He is at the end of the novel, although only a boy, one who has concern for others and who seems to have achieved a sense of self worth that stems from doing the right thing in a relationship with another person. The crucial act for Sonny is to resume his relationship with Ruth, not because there is no other relationship, but because Sam, Genevieve, and Lois have all shown him that there is something in the relationship for both of them—that Ruth deserves some good in life, maybe even the 20 per cent of good that a relationship with a silly boy will bring. At least

he by grasping her hand shows that the relationship is still alive for him. That is enough for Ruth. She has a sense of the change that has taken place in Sonny—he has learned to see the little good in life and to see the worth in accepting that little good from Ruth. He has through his Wise Elder Sam experienced a significant rite of passage.

Indiana State University

NOTES

- ¹The following are the most significant articles on McMurtry's use of rites of passage
Kenneth W. Davis, "The Themes of Initiation in the Works of Larry McMurtry and Tom Mayer," *The Arlington Quarterly*, 2 (Winter 1969-1970), 29-43.
Thomas Landess, *Larry McMurtry* (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1969).
Charles D. Peavy, "Coming of Age in the Southwest: The Novels of Larry McMurtry," *Western American Literature*, 4 (Fall 1969), 171-188.
²Charles D. Peavy, *Larry McMurtry*, (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977)
³Peavy, p. 34.
⁴Peavy, p. 35.
⁵Peavy, p. 35.
⁶Peavy, p. 53.
⁷Peavy, p. 36. In this statement Peavy is more generous than Landess who writes that the "characterizations are largely given to stereotypes." Landess, p. 28 (see note 1 above). Landess is particularly upset by the intrusion of sexual pursuit in the lives of Sonny and Duane immediately after the death of Sam the Lion, concluding that "one would have to conclude that the failure to dramatize the trauma of such an important event is inexcusable."
⁸Landess, p. 29.
⁹Peavy, p. 36.
¹⁰Peavy, p. 37.
¹¹Peavy, p. 53.
¹²Davis, p. 33 (See note 1 above).
¹³Davis, p. 33.
¹⁴Davis, p. 43.
¹⁵Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, (trans. R. F. C. Hull) (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 140-41.
¹⁶Neumann, p. 143.
¹⁷Neumann, pp. 172-73.
¹⁸Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 383.
¹⁹Campbell, pp. 9-10.
²⁰Larry McMurtry, *The Last Picture Show*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974). All subsequent references are to this paperback edition and are noted in the text by page references. I have chosen to use the paperback edition for the convenience of the many who may find that the original Dial Press edition is unavailable.