

AN EXPOSÉ OF MACHO CHARACTERS IN LOUIS L'AMOUR'S WESTERN NOVELS; *BRIONNE, THE CALIFORNIOS, AND HONDO*¹

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Abstract: Three novels entitled Brionne, The Californios, and Hondo written by Louis L'Amour reveal the hard life in the western frontier of America which was still wilderness. L'Amour shows the macho characteristics and attitudes through his macho characters. They apply the macho characteristics such as strength, bravery, virility, and manliness but remaining sensitivity. They also possess macho attitudes such as protective, honest, intelligent, with an aesthetic personality.

Key words: Macho, strength, bravery, virility, manliness, protective

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Historically, Machismo in America emerged when migrants came to America in the Seventeenth Century. Captain John Smith and his ship named 'Mayflower' sailed for Virginia with one hundred and forty people aboard. It took four months sailing and thirty-nine people had died on the voyage. It seemed among those who survived were John Smith, Thomas Morton, William Bradford, John Winthrop, Roger William. They became macho leaders and colorful figures of the colonial period. They were not only good sailor but they were also brave and strong.

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The characteristics of the immigrants were strong spirit to motivate and drive them to venture the new land. The hostile Atlantic waves had caused death to many of them on their exodus. Indians were also hostile at that period. That was why the only way for them was just to cooperate with the Indians who at any time could attack them with their poisonous arrows. John Smith of Virginia considered the Indians barbarous and savage, and he regarded the Indians as unregenerate, crafty, covetous, and malicious (Hine 1984:31).

During the eighteenth century some new people had moved to the West. These men were very brave, strong, and hardworking. Tindal (1989:41) said that 'most of these settlers who came to America were young males. They were under twenty-five years old'. These young males were tested on their personalities both their physical and non-physical strength. Those who were able to survive these requirements would become the winners as true macho males. Roberstone (1990:115) stated that the adaptation of backwoodsmen, frontiersmen, or the pioneers to the life in the wilderness was an important part of the creation of the wilderness myth of the American Character.

Related to those statements above, the writer of this study presents L'Amour's three novels, *Brionne* (1981), *The Californios* (1982), and *Hondo* (1976), as the objects to be discussed and analyzed. James Brionne, Sean Mulkerin, and Hondo Lane, as three protagonists within these three western novels, personify the true meaning of 'macho'. They also have 'macho' characteristics such as strength, courage, virility and manliness but retaining sensitivity. These characteristics support the image of the 'macho' male.

B. Method of research

This study is based on a library research conducted in different places. The primary data used in the analysis were taken from Louis L'Amour's three western novels: *Brionne*, *The Californios*, and *Hondo*. The secondary data were collected from journals, articles, and historical documents such as letters, autobiographies, and notes. The research applies multidisciplinary approach which emphasizes the disciplines, such as literature, culture, history, psychology, and sociology.

ANALYSIS

'Macho' is a word that is currently used in many countries in the world. The younger generation perceives this word to mean 'looking like a tough man', and believe that wearing jeans or 'looking like Rambo' makes one 'macho'. This is not the true sense of the word of 'macho' but is in fact, posturing characteristics of a 'macho' image in society.

According to The Random House Dictionary, 'macho' is 'a Mexican - Spanish adjective typifying male characteristics, as strong, brave, virile and manly but retaining sensitivity' (1986:858). These characteristics support the image of the 'macho' male.

It can not be denied that the characteristics of macho exist in many western novels. Cooper as the founder of western novel presented his heroes, Natty Bumppo, Chingachgook, and Uncas are men of the wilderness (Cawelti, 1978:195). Natty Bumppo fights the Indians in order to save the lives of the White American Settlers. However Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo does not always fight with the Indians, in fact he makes friends with the Indian chief Chigachgook and Uncas. By this friendship Cooper tries to bridge the wide misunderstanding that exists between the White and the Indian.

Generally, a western hero is handsome, young, well-built, expert in handling a pistol or rifle. He is also described as intelligent, protector, skillful in riding a horse and is a good fighter. As a hero, he is willing to defend the oppressed and protect the weak against the antagonists.

The theme the "strong" will survive and the "weak" will not, exists in many American Western novels. Murdering and taking revenge is not the belief of the novels heroes, those that are truly macho, but more attitudes of the weaker characters that only possess a sense of posturing macho. Louis L'Amour's novels are no exception; the heroes are strong in body and character and are survivors while the weak are not.

A. Protagonists as true machismo

James Brionne is a hero, in the novel of the same name *Brionne* which is described as a protagonist. He is tough, tall and wide-shouldered. His face is weathered from years of serving as a Major in General Ulysses

Grants army, fighting the Indians. There is something in his demeanor that makes his enemy think twice about attacking him.

After the death of his wife, Brionne decides to take his son Mat into the wilderness of the 'West' to rebuild their lives. This shows strength, both interior and physical, to Brionne's friends to his son. This indicates that Brionne, as a male, performs the attitude that is expected of him. He chooses a path, whereby he will indoctrinate these macho attitudes to his son.

His past experiences, gives Brionne the ability to think quickly and makes good decisions. He determines to build strength in his son, both physically and emotionally. Brionne thinks it was the good way of teaching his son the macho image he has of himself.

It is characteristic of the macho character that Brionne teaches Mat to protect people. The opportunity to teach Mat this lesson was when they traveled on a train. When grass-fire threatens to engulf the train, Brionne instructs Mat to take care of the only female passenger - Miranda Loften.

'It's grass fire, Mat, his father said, 'you to take care of this lady. She doesn't know about such things and she may be frightened. But stay inside the car' (L'Amour 1981:24).

In a macho manner Brionne takes complete control of the situation, leading the other passengers in fighting the fire. In the sustained 'spirit' of machismo, Brionne actually wanted Miranda to take care of his son, but was unable to admit that truth to either his son, or Miranda. Brionne's energy and ability to the train and all the passengers are exhausted.

Not only a tough guy, Brionne is also very adaptable and able to plan quickly, without consultation – subjected only to his male pride. Brionne shows his macho ability from the very beginning until the final chapter.

In the novel entitled *The Californios*, a person that is the main character is Sean Mulkerin, who is the son of Jaime and Eileen Mulkerin. Sean was not only a sailor but also a reliable cowboy. In the true "macho" imagery of L'Amour's heroes, Sean was strong in body, bold, and gallant. He was handsome; his face showed strength coupled with kindness. Friends and enemies gave careful consideration before challenging Sean, in any respect. Once Tomas Alexander warned Andreas Machado of Sean's strength and ability, he also advised Machado to be careful toward Sean

Mulkerin because he was severely strong and very vigorous in fighting. 'Be careful Senor. He is very strong and a good fighter. If I were you, I would shoot him from far off' (L'Amour 1982:74).

Although a younger version of Brionne, - Brionne and Sean shared the same characteristics and personality traits – Sean too epitomizes the meaning of the term Macho. He was a strong man, and also reliable. He knew the ways of the mountain and the forests, he was confident in any given situation whether on land or sea. In his youth he was able to kill wild animals such as mountain lions. He could wade through dangerous waters, without hesitation, and faced every situation with courage and determination. Sean's father, Jaime Mulkerin, was not only a sailor, but also had served in the army, and was reliable hunter, instilling the macho characteristics into Sean, and then adequately training his son in the ways and meaning of true machismo. There is no reason to be worried about Sean, since he can handle some troubles that might occur. Sean had enough experience and his male pride would automatically response to it. Besides that, he was strong, brave, and good in fighting. So it seemed to be all right for Sean in the forest, because he could survive and fight against Zeke Wooston followers. Wooston has a big body, tough and cruel. He has great power and has a lot of money that is why he is easy to hire bandits to kill anybody.

The main character of the novel entitled *Hondo* is a man called Hondo Lane. He is a half Indian by breed, and lived with an Apache Indian tribe, for five years. He has a weathered and strong like facial appearance of an adventurer. There is no tenderness reflected in his face. He has only tenacity, strength, and virtues.

He had Indian background, and that is why Hondo Lane was able to feel and recognize dangerous situations quickly. Hondo was not only tough, but also brave. He wandered alone through the Indian areas that were known to be savage and wild. From his experiences in living with the Indians for five years, he learned how to hunt and tame wild animals. Hondo perfected these skills and became more adaptable than most men.

Hondo's characteristics and personality were truly within the destination of macho. He is not only tough and brave but his also very strong. Living with the Indians he had learned how to use an axe. The Indians wondered and were amazed at his ability. The way in which Hondo

swung his axe to split woods struck people with amazement. The swing of Hondo's axe was certain, and rhythmical.

'His first swing of the axe split the chunk he had chosen. Methodically he went to work, and for a few minutes she stood watching him. There was a beautiful and easy rhythm in his movements. He handled his body as if it were all one beautifully oiled and coordinated machine. Nor was he awkward on his feet, as are so many riding men. He moved, she thought, like an Indian' (L'Amour 1976:18).

Like Brionne who teaches his son to be a tough boy, Hondo also teaches Johnny Angie's son, the way of the wilderness. He teaches him how to split wood with a clean cut. Angie lived with her little son in the middle of savage desert, and Hondo saw Johnny had no male and role model to follow, took it as his responsibility to teach and train Johnny in the ways of a man. Hondo is not only a good fist-fighter but he is also a gun fighter. He has a principle to be a good, either fist-fighter or gun fighter. He never applies tricky ways to fight against his enemy. Once, he killed three men in a gun fight, since then he was famous as the killer from the Brazos.

B. Antagonists posturing macho image

Unlike Brionne, Cotton Allard as antagonist in *Brionne*, seems the posturing characteristics of a macho in society. Cotton Allard is the male antagonist in the novel *Brionne*. His physical appearance also epitomizes the macho characteristics and traits. He is young, strong, muscular, and tough, but Cotton Allard is the antithesis of 'Brionne' in personality. Cotton Allard was not of good moral standing, poorly educated, expressing his maleness by means of fear. It was Cotton Allard who caused the death of Brionne's wife, in an attempt to giving revenge to Brionne.

Cotton Allard came to Brionne's house to take revenge. Unfortunately, he did not find Brionne at home Allard killed Brionne's wife, taking what he could from the house, before setting it alight. Cotton Allard and his friends, sought revenge for any perceived wrong-doings, and acted in a manner that was more like a posturing of the macho image, of Brionne.

Cotton Allard knew Brionne as a brave man. He also recognized that he did not possess Brionne's courage and defeated his enemies. Devoid of

principles, and perhaps even conscience Brionne's things, he moved and left the place because he could not find Brionne. Cotton Allard is not a man worthy of emulation. His misguided sense of male pride and masculine virility, make him uncharacteristically macho in personality.

Cotton Allard was more 'savage' than the Indians. He killed people without a second thought, caring less, if the victim was a man, woman, or child. He felt disappointed because the opportunity to kill Brionne and Mat had not presented itself. He vowed to kill Mat, as Mat had witnessed Allard murder Mat's mother. Allard felt it necessary, for his own protection – a cowardly decision – to kill Mat, even before he killed Brionne. Allard's only means of problem – resolution lay at the end of a gun.

'Cotton's killed twenty-five, thirty men I know of nine of them in face up gun battles-and he's killed four, five women, but none of them ever made him think twice. Only that Brionne woman (L'Amour 1981:56).

Brionne instilled fear into Cotton Allard, as someone is fearful, when someone recognizes traits in another that someone does not possess. Brionne possessed all that Allard pretended to possess – bravery, strength, male pride, and masculine virility. Thus fearless only before those weaker than himself, Cotton Allard was fearful of Brionne and thought twice when the opportunity to kill Brionne, arose. Although Allard looked dangerous, he recognized that the strengths and skills of Brionne, paled in comparison. That is why Allard still hesitated to attack Brionne.

Both James Brionne and Cotton Allard have the same physical appearance as macho characters, but they are of different moral standards and attitudes. In other words, James Brionne keeps the true macho characteristics, but Cotton Allard is against them.

Zeke Wooston had great power since he was a little boy. When he was grown up, he was respected by many people. That is why he is very proud of his power, even many people are afraid of him. As antagonist in *The Californios* he did not have macho characteristics. He had just had posturing one, he was a kind of tricky person. Wooston was not only a tricky person, a cruel man, a smuggler, and a greedy man but also a man who could easily lose his temper.

Another bad traits of Zeke Wooston is even though he does not like Machado one of his followers he needs Machado's help very much to get the gold in the mountain; he does not want to be disputatious toward Machado. Wooston realized that he might not continue his journey to the mountain because he did not have enough followers.

'Wooston was angry, but he had no wish to have trouble with Machado, whom he might need very badly. But he did not wish to pursue a chase into this wild country with only his own group. There were too few of them' (L'Amour 1982:110).



As a thinking of having macho qualities, Wooston should have paid attention to other people whoever they are. Yet in the story, it is told that Wooston did not care about Russel's condition. What he cared about was that he did not like if failures and mistakes happened. As the result of that, he would not let Russel live longer. However, for Sean's friends, Wooston was not more than a thief because Russell also hunted for the gold.

Like Wooston as antagonist in *The Californios*, Silva is an antagonist in *Hondo*. He was an Apache man that was being frightened both friends and enemies. He had a tall and muscled body and he was also broad – chested which reflected his strength and his tenacity. Silva was not as tall as Hondo Lane but his body was strong and powerful. His environment and his way as Indian apaches life is really reflected in his appearance.

Generally, the men of Apache were not too tall but they were extremely strong and tough. They had also amazing courage, that was something that needed by a man to be considered as "macho". Silva was brave and tough but he hated a small boy named Johnny. At the time Johnny pointed his gun at Silva who was grasping his mother. Unexpectedly, the gun exploded and hit Silva's head. It was shocking to everybody including Vittorio, an Indian Apache chief. Vittorio made Johnny his brother by blood so Johnny would be under his protection. Johnny was called a small warrior of the Moon Dog Lodge of Chiricahua Apache. This made Silva hate him more because Johnny pointed his gun at him who was grasping his mother.

As antagonist, Silva had a bad attitude to women. After the accident, Silva came several times to Angie's home and intimidated her. Once, he said to Angie. "May be soon you be squaw"(L'Amour, 1976:92). Angie does not like Indian particularly Indian Apache. Besides she loved Hondo

Lane. This contradicted to Vittorio's speech that "an Apache woman for an Apache man – a white woman for a white man" (L'Amour, 1976:77). Silva acted without knowing by the Indian chief, Vittorio he went to Angie's land to investigate what she was doing. He really wanted to rape Angie while her husband went away. This attitude also contradicted to the characteristics of macho characters that should have protected woman from dangerous situations.

Watched by the chief of Indian Apache, Vittorio and other Indians, Silva and Hondo were fighting in the Apache. If Hondo is the winner, he will be free. He will die if he loses. This is the way of Indian Apache to decide who the macho one is. With his macho sensitivity, Hondo felt the sharp point of the knife rip his shirt, then he stomped down hard with his boot on Silva's bare foot and slashed with his knife's edge. Silva twisted away but the knife left a red line that rapidly turned red with blood along his shoulders.

'Hondo pressed forward against the haft, holding the knife in the wound to prevent its withdrawal. They went to the ground and Hondo caught Silva's hair and forced his head back, exposing the brown throat, then he put the edge of his knife against the throat of the Indian and looked up at Vittorio (L'Amour 1976:113).

For an Indian Apache, a man who won the fight, though he was enemy would be respected as a warrior. Silva was defeated by Hondo. The Indians really kept their promise, so Hondo was set free. Silva left the place and planned to take revenge. This was not the concept of Macho. Unfortunately, taking revenge was not the belief of the truly macho character, but more of the attitudes of the weaker character who only possess a sense of posturing macho.

Hondo Lane joined the military service. As a soldier, he had to come to an Indian area, and the purpose to come this area was to evaluate white people who lived isolated from others in an area which was still uncivilized. Luckily he knew a lot about the savage and wild Indian areas. This indicated that Hondo had macho characteristic, he came to the dangerous areas because he had to rescue white people from the savage Indians.

At last Silva led his people to fight against military. He met Hondo in the battle who also led the military. This made him very happy because Silva

got the chance to take revenge he really wanted to kill his big enemy Hondo. Silva had bad temper that made him weak in the battle; he could not control his emotion to defeat his big enemy. So unluckily for him, Silva could not kill Hondo; instead he was killed by Hondo in the fight.

C. Skillful in using weapons

Historically, the firearms came from Europe. Many people used the firearms to defend their homelands. Some explorers and settlers used them to protect themselves from the wild animals and enemies. Russel (1967:232) stated that for over two hundred years the European powers were contending among themselves to control the New World, while also battling the Indians who fought a losing fight against those who encroached on their lands. He also explained that the Laws prohibiting of selling arms to the Indians, the white man's desire for furs and the Indian's for firearms resulted in a brisk trade. Then, typical transaction between Dutch Settlers and their Indian neighbors was to exchange twenty Indian beaver pelts for one firearm.

Both pistol and rifle became the symbol of the Macho Character of the western cowboy in the past. The west part of America such as California, Texas and other land areas were still wild and fierce. In the time where Indians were still nomads, they fought against the white man entering their land. Therefore the guns were needed to protect from the bandits or the Indians.

Holding a gun, Brionne stepped forward and bent his head down so that he could stay close to the ground. It seemed that Brionne always considered his every single step. It was also because of Brionne's carefulness so that he could defeat his Indian enemies one by one. His careful and quick movement enables him to easily observe his enemies and hear any sounds that were caused by the bandits or the Indian enemies.

When Cotton Allard pointed his gun to Brionne, Brionne's reaction was sudden and quick because he has learned all of that when he was in St. Cyr. His movement was just like a dozen of guns that were ready to spew their bullets. James Brionne threw his gun forward so that it crashed the pistol that was in the hand of Cotton Allard. Then, turning his body, Brionne kicked the stomach of his other enemy until he was tossed aside to the

corner of the room. That even was beyond the expectation of Cotton and his friends. James Brionne was able to face all of them that were also tough enemies.

Brionne found his son and Miranda being captured by The Allards. This kind of situation forced Brionne to have a fight with Cotton Allard. The tricky Cotton felt certain that he was able to defeat Brionne. But Brionne was also cunning so that he could not be cheated by Cotton's sly trick. Brionne was also cunning so that he could not be cheated by Cotton's trick. Brionne was very careful toward Cotton's dirty trick.

'Brionne's gun was in his hand, too, and he looked across the room at Cotton. 'You are the gun fighter', he said'. Holstered guns Cotton suggested', grinning, but it was an evil grin'. 'He was superbly confident. In this business of the fast draw, he had seen no one who could equal himself and he was sure this Virginia soldier could not' (L'Amour 1981:145-146).

Cotton, being very confident toward his own ability, felt certain that he was able to defeat Brionne. But, what actually happened then was beyond his expectation because he found himself facing an enemy who turned to be considered much tougher than himself. That is why cotton moved as quickly as he could. Finally, Brionne stopped moving by giving Cotton a straight shot between his eyes. Cotton Allard was dead instantaneously. After Brionne shot directly between Cotton's eyes, Brionne had given proof that he was a very tough man because he himself was able to defeat Cotton and release his son.

In another L'Amour's novel *The Californios*, Sean Mulkerin as the leading character was described as very skillful in using the gun. On riding a horse, Sean is always ready to use his gun because his life at sea, mountain and dessert made him fully realize the danger which could happen to him at anytime. Therefore wherever he went he was always carries his gun.

He learned a lot from his experiences in his sea voyage, herding the cattle in the mountain and in hunting. Sean was very familiar with the west wild land in all situations. To protect himself from danger threat, Sean had more than one gun. Sean had a pistol bought in Panama and a rifle handy in wherever he chooses to go to.

He was not only skillful in using guns, but also skillful in modifying the guns and fixing them. Sean was very careful in traveling such as when he went to the mountain to find the Old man, a mysterious Indian-man who knew the place of the gold by using spiritual power. Sean was always alert knowing that he was always followed by Zeke Wooston and his friends. Besides that Sean was very sensitive and skillful in avoiding danger. He moved so fast whenever hearing a suspicious sound. Sean always loaded his gun to anticipate the existence of danger that might come at anytime especially when he seeks for gold in the mountain.

‘Sean took up his Colt rifle and moved away from the fire, but after a few minutes he was back. ‘Seems quiet enough,’ he said ... ‘They sat together, talking very little, enjoying the night, the rest, and the fool as well as the smell of wood-smoke and coffee’ (L’Amour 1982:107).

Even in a relaxing situation, Sean was always alert to face all the possibility of the danger that could happen at anytime. His skill in using guns was beyond any doubt. When he came across with Zeke Wooston and Andres Machado and their men who followed him, they are all bandits. They wanted to kill Sean. Sean was fully self confident. In such a situation, he was quite sure to defeat his enemies. Machado admitted Sean’s skill as a sharp shooter. Because Machado still remembered how fast Sean shot Velasco’s chest and made him fall the ground. Velasco was one of Zeke Wooston’s men.

In another of L’Amour’s novel, *Hondo*, as the leading character, Hondo Lane was described as very smart and skillful in using guns too. He had lived with the Indian Apache for five years and was respected and feared by his enemies. His name is quite familiar to the cavalry who evacuated the population in the remote area where the Indians live. Hondo Lane dared to travel alone crossing the area because he was very skillful in using his guns.

On his adventures, Hondo Lane was usually accompanied by his dog, Sam, to cross the land carrying a message from General Crook. This message is related to the white people who lived in isolated place. Although Hondo often got troubles on his way he could save himself. He often fought against the Indians who came across on his way. As a good shooter he could always escape from the Indian’s attack though he had to loose his horse in one

occasion. Besides escaping from the Indian attack, Hondo killed the Indians who attacked him.

Although Hondo Lane was a good shooter, he was very careful in doing something. Before he left the place where the two Indians were lying, Hondo checked for sure that they had died. In that time, it was not familiar for a man to put a gun on the right waist. This means that Hondo Lane could use guns with both hands. Only few could do the same thing and that is why he is considered skillful with guns.

‘His boots were worn and scuffed. And there was a place on his left thigh where the jeans had been polished by the chafing of some object. A place that might have been made by a holster. Only this man wore his gun on his right side. Had he, then, worn two guns? It was unlikely. Not so many men did’ (L’Amour 1976:15).

Hondo was always with his gun even when he was sleeping. He believes that the attitude was necessary for a man living in a wild area such as where the Indians lived. No wonder if Hondo was always alert in order not to be shot first by his enemies.

CONCLUSION

L’Amour’s macho characters such as: James Brionne, Sean Mulkerin, and Hondo Lane consistently show great respect for the frontier environment and an ingrain desire to pursue what they believe to be right and just. They are prepared to stand and fight for their beliefs, regardless of the challenges they must surmount. The three macho characters do not die in the course of their battles, but they are always prepared to die, bravely and honorably, for which they believe in. They also usually stand alone in facing their enemies prove that they are macho males.

True machismo has been shown by Brionne, Sean Mulkerin, and Hondo Lane both physical and non-physical. Unlike James Brionne, Sean Mulkerin, and Hondo as protagonists who have true machismo, however Cotton Allard, Zeke Wooston and Silva do not have the moral standard and attitudes of true macho characteristics that mean they only have the posturing characteristic of machismo.

The concept to macho changes from era to era. In addition to L'Amour's novels: *Brionne*, *The Californios*, and *Hondo* represent the nineteenth century. Nowadays there is a modern macho which portrays his era. Sylvester Stallone is one example of modern macho with his movies such as *Rambo*, *Rocky* and *Cliffhanger*. He is a tough guy who protects the weak. Thus machismo still exists in American society.

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