

# Hondo Short Guide

## Hondo by Louis L'Amour

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">Hondo Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>

## Characters

Hondo's characters are mainly stereotypes: the strong, proud Indian chief; the waiting and willing frontier woman; the worthless gambling husband; the hotheaded, revengeful Indian brave. In the character of Hondo, the independent yet lonely gunman, nevertheless, L'Amour introduces enough innovations to make Hondo perhaps the most memorable of L'Amour's many characters. One innovation is the aforementioned combining of freedom-loving and home-building elements in Hondo's personality. Another is Hondo's mediation between the white and Apache worlds. Having lived with Indians, Hondo uses their methods to survive — traveling with his eyes always on the horizon, covering his tracks — to beat the Apaches at their game of silent, deadly warfare. Hondo values the Indian ability to live in harmony with the demands of the harsh Arizona desert but never abandons his own people and even serves as a scout for the cavalry, fighting marauding Indians.

## Social Concerns

Hondo Lane, the main character of Hondo, like most L'Amour heroes, abandons the solitary life to marry a good woman, homestead and build up civilization. As a loner, he exemplifies the American values of courage, independence and self-sufficiency, while as a builder, he upholds such traditional middle-class American values as honesty, industry, loyalty, and love of family. Thus, the L'Amour hero unifies the opposing needs of the American character, needs established early by colonists desiring freedom from European constraints yet still working toward a civilized community.

Angie Lowe, Hondo's lady-love, likewise plays out what for long was recognized as the proper woman's role, whether on the frontier or in the suburban home: She keeps up her ranch and raises her child well. L'Amour uses Angie's father as mouthpiece for his own values, which reflect those of the 1950s: "To each of us is given a life. To live with honor and to pass on having left our mark, it is only essential that we do our part, that we leave our children strong. Nothing exists long when its time is past. Wealth is important only to the small of the mind. The important thing is to do the best one can with what one has."

There is, however, a darker vein in Hondo's character and in L'Amour's fiction which reveals a dark side of American society: the acceptance of violence as a means to resolve conflict.

This violence, L'Amour claims, is necessary, for "a man must live as he must." The hero can be kind, gentle, and just, but these qualities must be deeply hidden and guarded so that he can deal with the harshness of men and the elements. To defend one's community, one must fight and kill. L'Amour never recognizes the irony of a peace founded on violence. Yet as Tom Sullivan has observed, Americans, living through the economic prosperity of the 1960s-1980s and also the violence of Vietnam, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador, can find reassurance in a Louis L'Amour western that violence is necessary to maintain the good life.



## Techniques

The strength of L'Amour's fiction lies in its action, its use of detail, and its description. Hondo begins tensely with a group of Apaches tracking Hondo.

L'Amour increases the tension by writing short, bare sentences. The typical pattern of a L'Amour plot is a building of tension to an action-packed, violent encounter which resolves the tension and then a new build-up of tension every three or four pages.

L'Amour is also known for packing his novels with factual detail, in Hondo's case with information about the desert, Indians, ranching and weather.

These details are interesting, and they also validate the moral pronouncements of the narrator. If the narrator knows so much about life on the frontier, then he must also know much about life in general.

Perhaps L'Amour's greatest power as a novelist lies in his evocation of scene.

He describes the Arizona desert as a land of "beige-gray silences" where "cotton-ball bunches of clouds" drift in the sky's "brassy face" and saguaros dot the landscape like exclamation points. At times L'Amour's description sinks to the banal — Hondo's body works like "one beautifully oiled and coordinated machine" — but in many cases his description helps the reader see, feel, hear, and taste the life of the desert.

## Themes

One important theme of *Hondo* is the need for both men and women on the frontier, the male and female principle balancing so that home can be established. The narrator tells the readers that "There were things a man must face and things a man must do that no woman could understand, just as the reverse was true." Yet, as in the preceding sentence, L'Amour's sympathies and emphasis is clearly on the male — the silent, strong, capable John Waynetype (Wayne played the title role in the film version of *Hondo*) — rather than the female, who L'Amour portrays as drawing her strength from the male.

Another important theme is the judgment of men based on their motives and actions rather than on their races or affiliations. Both whites and Indians have good and bad men. Vittorio, the leader of the Apaches, is an intelligent warrior and is also sympathetic to Angie who is raising a son alone on the frontier. His heir-apparent, Silva, in contrast, is bloodthirsty, cruel, and lustful. *Hondo's* obviously admirable qualities of caring and protectiveness are opposed by Ed Lowe's (Angie's first husband) greed and vindictiveness. *Hondo* himself has loved the squaw Destarte and the white Angie, both sympathetic characters because of their willingness to work and to love.

In one of L'Amour's frequent moralizing passages, he tells the reader "to judge no man or woman by a grouping, but each on his own character, his own ground."

# Adaptations

Hondo was made into both a motion picture and a television series. Of the more than thirty of his works which have been turned into motion pictures or television productions, L'Amour said the movie Hondo was his favorite because it most closely follows the book. L'Amour sold the film rights to Warner's for \$4,000. Released in 1953, it was directed by John Farrow and starred John Wayne, Geraldine Page, Ward Bond, and James Arness. The silent but strong Hondo character nicely fit the film persona of John Wayne.

The television series based on Hondo was less successful: It lasted only one season (1967-1968).



## Literary Precedents

Frontier tales became popular in the United States with the legends that grew up around real-life heroes such as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Sam Houston. James Fenimore Cooper was one of the first to tap into the desire for frontier stories with his *Leatherstocking Tales*. L'Amour's fiction fits somewhere in between the literary quality of Cooper and that of the dime novels of the turn of the century; he is the fictional heir to Zane Grey, though he has said that he dislikes being pigeon-holed as a modern-day Zane Grey. Like Grey and other western writers (Max Brand, Ernest Haycox, and Luke Short), L'Amour creates a romanticized, popular epic version of the West, not as it was but as he thinks it ought to have been.

Current writers who treat the West in less formulaic and idealized fiction include John Seelye (*The Kid*, 1972), E. L. Doctorow (*Welcome to Hard Times*, 1960), A. B. Guthrie (*The Big Sky*, 1947 and *The Way West*, 1949), and Frederick Manfred (*Riders of Judgment*, 1957).

Guthrie, for example, presents the march of civilization as uncertain, confused and complex, while Manfred is more skillful than L'Amour in exploring motivation and interpersonal relationships.

As far as literary precedents for Hondo in particular, the strong, silent, lonesome hero has many forebears.

One critic, Loren D. Estleman, sees many parallels between Hondo and the title character of Jack Schaefer's *Shane* (1949). Thus, while L'Amour's fiction is neither highly original, literary nor complex, its entertainment value has made L'Amour the most popular western writer of all time.



## Related Titles

The Hondo character first appeared in the short story "The Gift of Cochise," originally published in Collier's in July 1952 and collected with other short stories into War Party in 1975. It, too, was adapted into a film — Hondo and the Apaches — which MGM released in 1967.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994