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The (Wild) Subject of the American Frontier in John Williams' "Butcher's Crossing"

Master Thesis

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Abstract

The American Western is one of the most prominent and evocative genres and its central figure of the cowboy has had cultural significance throughout the world ever since the 19th century. This MA paper analyzes the role the American Frontier and the image of the cowboy plays in the construction of personal and national identity in John Williams' *Butcher's Crossing*. To carry out this analysis, I rely on William Cronon's reconceptualization of humanity as part of the natural world and the natural world as in part a cultural construct. Furthermore, I use Will Wright's concept of the cowboy as a representation of the market individualism that underlies the creation of the United States of America. By looking at the interplay between the characters and the wilderness Frontier they are in, I analyze how one constitutes the other and vice versa. In this novel the journey into the American Frontier as a quest to discover self-identity raises questions about the fundamental ideas that we ascribe to the American West.

1. Introduction

The West is a key part of the United States, both as a geographical region and as a part of the American national mythology. Ever since the first Europeans set foot in the Americas, exploring and moving deeper westward into the North American continent was the emphasis for settlers. First, the colonial empires, such as England, France, and Spain, later the newly founded United States of America made it their key focus to expand west from the Atlantic Ocean through the Appalachian Mountains, the prairies, the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. In 1728, George Berkeley, an Anglo-Irish bishop wrote "Westward the course of empire takes its way" (Hine R. & M. Faragher 2007:1) having moved to the American colonies in that same year. As the United States of America won its independence from Great Britain, the idea of expanding westward gained even more popularity, as the concepts of the American Frontier and Manifest Destiny were developed and became a key part of the American national identity. The frontier – "a dividing line between white colonization in the settled are and Indians in the wilderness" (Rundbell 1959: 15) – kept moving further from the eastern coast as American settlers advanced westward. This expansion was driven and justified by the idea that the American people had an implicit right and duty to expand the territory of the United States west, disregarding and even brutally suppressing any resistance from the Native American inhabitants of the continent. By 1846, the American commitment for expansion was officially expressed in the United States House of Representatives by Representative Robert C. Winthrop as "the right of our manifest destiny to spread over the whole continent" (Pratt 1927: 795). Examining these ideas, Gary J. Hausladen remarked that the West is not simply "a real geographical region, [but] a mythic concept" (2003: 1) that has become an essential part of American identity. By the end of the 19th century, the American Frontier had reached the Pacific Ocean and Frederick Jackson Turner could define the importance of westward expansion by claiming that "the advance of the Frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines" (1893). Thus, westward expansion became not only a historical narrative, but a national myth, defining the rise of the United States from a small colony on an unexplored continent to an independent country equaling Europe in size.

As Americans ventured further away from the settled East Coast, stories of their exploits and discoveries rose in popularity. Beginning with stories of Daniel Boone's expeditions into what is now Kentucky in the 1760s, stories of Frontier exploration became a staple of American literature with the historical Frontier romances of James Fenimore Cooper in the first half of the 19th century (Wright 2001: 6). The popularity of Westerns rose even further with the introduction of dime novel Westerns, which were pocket-sized, cheap, and often serialized (Paul 2014: 336). As the United States of

America and its cities industrialized and grew in size, so grew the popularity of narratives about rough and rugged individuals surviving the pre-industrial Frontier (Ibid.). With the advent of radio, film, and then television in the 20th century, Westerns maintained their hold on American storytelling. According to Will Wright, even as the genre declined in popularity towards the end of the 20th century, the imagery of rugged cowboy individualism propagated by Westerns maintained its influence in American novels and Hollywood action movies: "Most American popular stories, then, are in some sense versions of Westerns, because they are always versions of individualism" (2001: 9).

Pioneers, frontiersmen, then cowboys were the drivers of American expansion as the first people to enter the newly opened Frontiers, which is why they are most often the protagonists in Western stories. Will Wright's concept of the Cowboy Myth explains the deep connection the United States has to the solitary survivalist figure: the imagery of the Wild West cowboy is a reflection of individualist market ideas (freedom, rationality, autonomy, opportunity), which were at the core of the founding of the United States, so "the cowboy represents the American idea, not just American history" (2001: 1-2). The image of the cowboy, the stories of his exploits and adventures, and the values they reflect are at the core of how we think about the United States of America. The cowboy in these stories is adept at surviving Frontier conditions: he knows the paths that others do not, he is able to hunt and forage for sustenance, he is able to interact with the Native Americans, but, most importantly, he is able to bend the Frontier to his will through violence. Many scholars have noted violence as the key characteristic of Westerns: "Westerns by and large still are 'fantasies of legitimized violence' and 'moralistic aggression'" (Cawelti cited in Paul 2014: 342). Wright notes that "violence is necessary in the dangerous wilderness where law and government are absent" (2001: 38), emphasizing the narrative emphasis on the dichotomy of orderly, lawful civilization and the wilderness, where might is right. Interestingly, Heine Paul notes that the prevalence of narratives where violence (most often against the Native American population of the Frontier) is necessary and regenerative for the United States – the destruction of Native Americans or the Frontier wildlife is the driving force of the growth of the country. Simultaneously, these narratives of destruction are often overlooked in scholarly analysis and popular discourse, as the "descriptions of raw violence in contrast to other [less violent] texts' more sanitized representations of westward expansion inconveniently point to – rather than obscure or rationalize – the brutality of the 'Indian Wars'" (2014: 336-339).

John Edward Williams' *Butcher's Crossing*, published in 1960, is a Western that reflects on the violent nature of the Frontier and frontiersmen, thus emphasizing the understated destruction of the American nation-founding mythos. While lecturing at the University of Denver, Williams developed an interest in the conceptualization of the West. In an interview, Williams stated that:

“There’s a very real sense in which ‘The West’ does not, did not ever, exist. It’s a dream of the East – almost as if the East made up the West” (Wakefield 1981: 19). This statement reflects his conception of the narrative of *Butcher’s Crossing*. The novel follows Will Andrews, a Harvard student who, driven by the ideas of the Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, leaves Boston to explore the West in order to discover himself. The story begins with Will’s arrival to the hunting town of Butcher’s Crossing, situated at the Frontier in Kansas, where he meets a buffalo hunter, known simply as Miller, and embarks on a buffalo hunting trip to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. The story is set in the early 1870s, when buffalo hunting had already started to dwindle due to mass extermination of the animal for its fur, but Miller’s knowledge of a pristine valley full of buffalo in the then-unincorporated territory of Colorado promises the experience of true wilderness and financial profit. Initially inept at wilderness survival and hunting, Will develops the necessary skills to survive in the wild, but his youthful optimism is crushed as the hunters have to weather a rough winter in the Rocky Mountains and, upon their return to civilization, they find out that the buffalo skin economy had crashed. Although Will’s primary expectation was to return from the wilderness having found his true self, the novel ends with him leaving the town of Butcher’s Crossing and riding off into the West.

John Edward Williams’ works did not attract much popular attention, so critical reception of this novel has also been sparse. Academic discourse on Williams’ work is focused on his direct, precise literary style, combined with his faithfulness to lived experience as a writer. Dan Wakefield called Williams a “plain writer” (1981: 12) in reference to his plain style, while Anthony Hutchison focused on his critique of ideas of Transcendentalism by juxtaposing them to the lived experience of the Western Frontier (2020: 239-240). Academic attention given to *Butcher’s Crossing* draws the connection between the ideas of the West as a land of personal and national development, particularly those of the Transcendentalists, but they omit the key role the image of the cowboy played in creating the myth of the West.

Williams wrote 3 other novels besides *Butcher’s Crossing*, which gained recognition only decades after their publication. His debut novel, *Nothing but the Night* (1948), did not get much attention and Williams eventually dismissed his first novel himself as his views on what a novel should be changed (Robson 2019). The two novels following *Butcher’s Crossing*, *Stoner* (1965) and *Augustus* (1972), did not sell successfully either. *Stoner* sold less than 2000 copies when it was published, while *Augustus* (1972) got Williams some critical acclaim, as he received the 1973 National Book Award for it – a literary award for American writers for books published in the U.S. - , but the award was split between Williams’ *Augustus* and John Barth’s *Chimera*. The shared award is the only major acclaim for Williams’ writing during his lifetime. After Williams’ death in 1994, he “appeared doomed to near-oblivion – omitted from every list, popular or scholarly” (Ibid.), but the

resurgence of his 1965 novel *Stoner* in the 2000s led to increased attention to his literary works and republishing of all four novels by various American publishers (Ibid.).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role that the image of the American Frontier plays in the construction of personal and national identity. This analysis will rely on William Cronon's conceptualization of wilderness as a cultural creation that reinforces individualism and Will Wright's analysis of the cowboy as a shorthand for the ideas of market individualism. The next section of this paper will discuss the aforementioned ideas. The theoretical overview will be followed by analysis of *Butcher's Crossing*, conclusions, and a summary in Lithuanian.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Wilderness as a Cultural Creation

William Cronon has written multiple books on the effects of colonial and American settlement of the current-day United States of America. His work as an academic and as a member of the non-profit organization Trust for Public Land is focused on conservation and preservation of American wilderness. In this MA paper I will rely on his reconceptualization of wilderness in his seminal 1996 essay *Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*. His critique of the way we tend to romanticize pristine nature and conceptualize it as separate from human interference invites us to rethink wilderness: not as a place untouched by civilization and a retreat from society's problems, but as "a profoundly human creation" (1996: 7), upon which we have placed our views and ideas of what nature, and humanity, should be.

One of the key ideas underlying Cronon's essay is that wilderness is not a specific set of objects, but a concept to which we ascribe values. Those values are fluid and often change. For example, until the 18th century, 'wilderness' was used to describe desolate, savage, barren landscapes, such as the desert that Moses wandered in; John Milton's Eden is surrounded by a wilderness that is almost uninhabitable when Adam and Eve are banished from Eden. In short, wilderness was a place "to which one came only against one's will, and always in fear and trembling" (1996: 9). In the 19th century, however, the view on wilderness and being 'wild' changes drastically. Rather than avoiding wilderness, writers and travelers began seeking out remote parts of the American continent in search of "those rare places on earth where on had more chance than elsewhere to glimpse the face of God" (1996: 10). This change was driven by powerful artistic and philosophical images coming from Europe, particularly the Romantic concept of the Sublime.

By Edmund Burke's definition, the Sublime – "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 1998: 33-34) is a pleasure associated with the terror one experiences when faced with the vastness of nature. By experiencing vastness or greatness that overwhelms us by its size, we face "that which seems to endanger survival" (Morley 2010) and experience emotions so powerful, that they may transform us. Burke, however, notes that if pain or danger is too close, the experience is negative, "but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful" (Burke 1998: 34). Immanuel Kant built on Burke's ideas and noted that the Sublime comes from our inability to grasp the magnitude of Nature, but through this inability "we come to a recognition of our limitations, and so transform a sense of negative insufficiency into a

positive gain: such experiences serve to establish our reasoning powers more firmly within their rightful, although diminished, domain" (Morley 2010). So, a rising number of people would look to the wilderness for experiences that, although described as inciting fear and terror, eventually result in pleasure. The expanding United States offered many Sublime landscapes, from the Appalachian Mountains to the Great Lakes and the Grand Canyon, just to name a few. Thus, by 1862 Henry David Thoreau would already view the wilderness in a positive light, as "the preservation of the world" (Cronon 1996: 10).

At the same time as the idea of the sublime was developed and popularized, the American continent was being explored deeper and deeper west. This coincided with the rising popularity of primitivism, which Cronon defined as "the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (1996: 13). The American myth of the Frontier expressed this idea best, as by the time Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his Frontier Thesis, the wild American country was seen as the place where a distinctly American nation and culture were born and kept renewing with every progression westward (Ibid.). In essence, the Frontier myth stipulated that a distinctly American way of living arose from the clash of European civilization and the North American wilderness, which forced the civilized Europeans and their descendants to confront nature and learn how to survive in it. By the 1890s, the American Frontier was declared closed, both by the United States government and Frontier scholars, Frederick Jackson Turner included. Cronon emphasizes the thinking that with the disappearing Frontier, a part of American identity would be disappearing as well, which is tied to efforts to protect American wildlife: "to protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation's most sacred myth of origin" (1996: 13). Preservation by National Parks is one aspect of wilderness protection or preservation, but another, equally as important aspect was cultural preservation, particularly in writing.

Cronon draws attention to the tendency of people living in the East Coast of the United States to single out the Frontier as "the last bastion of rugged individualism" (Ibid.). Accordingly, as the Frontier disappeared due to Americans settling the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, more writers and thinkers lamented the disappearance of the frontiersmen that embodied the masculinity they deemed to be gone. This thinking supposes that "modernity [and] civilization contaminated its inhabitants and absorbed them into the faceless, collective, contemptible life of the crowd" (Cronon 1996: 14). This outlook was especially prevalent with upper class men of the east, who were worried about the feminizing tendencies of civilization and were looking at the Frontier as a source of masculinity (Ibid.) – thus, the men who benefitted the most from industrialization and the advancement of civilization through the Frontiers of America, were ironically the ones most obsessed with retreating to the wild. As the frontier experience is defined by being in the wilderness, a new

focus towards preserving wilderness remains arose: on a national level, natural parks, such as Yellowstone and Yosemite, were founded; rich individuals sought out their own wilderness experience by buying up land and creating "enormous estates in the Adirondacks and elsewhere […], cattle ranches for would be rough-riders" (Cronon 1996: 15). First of all, this approach turned the wilderness from a place of labor and a permanent home for Frontier settlers into a place of recreation for people seeking to escape the confines of civilized life for a few weeks. But, more importantly, this outlook reinforced the idea that there is a pristine wilderness, completely disconnected from human influence, in which the good qualities of humanity are present – all one needs to do is find it and be changed for the better.

Cronon's primary point is that no matter the outlook on the American Frontier, the "wilderness represents a flight from history" (1996: 16). People view it as the primordial land in which our original selves can be found; as the savage land that needs to be transformed by civilization and facilitate the transformation of civilization; or as the land where men can drop the shackles of civilization and be free. It is always an escape from the troubles of the current world, harkening to a greater past. This greater past of the wilderness is the standard to which we compare our current situation, whether it be in the 18th century, or the 21st. Cronon argues that such thinking embodies "a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural" (1996: 17) which puts us at an impasse: we look to the wilderness as the example, but by this same logic, we must exclude ourselves from it, as our very presence in the wilderness taints it (Ibid.). By excluding ourselves from the wilderness – from nature -, we exclude ourselves from the responsibility for the way we affect nature; by conceptualizing an ideal, primeval world of the past, we leave ourselves no room to think about solutions to the problems confronting us in the present (Ibid.).

This attempt to flee from history often leads to solutions that are not viable, as they boil down to not using nature, being exempt from it, as if humans can be separated from the wild completely (Cronon 1996: 20-21). Cronon's critique offers an alternative: rather than viewing the wilderness as separate from the human, we should look at how the human influences the wilderness and vice versa; rather than lamenting the disappearance of a past full of pristine nature, we should work to adapt to the changes we have enacted upon nature in order to minimize the adverse effects we have on the planet. Primarily, he offers to focus on responsible use of nature: by accepting that the pristine wilderness of the Frontier fantasies is not compatible with the reality we live in, we should focus on how and how much we use nature and its resources (Cronon 1996: 22). Additionally, he offers to focus on the wilderness that surrounds us in everyday life, rather than trying to recreate the vast sublime wilderness of Frontier fantasies (Ibid.). This would enable us to view the natural landscape that encompasses everything from the prairies and canyons to the cities and the suburbs, each

different, but part of one whole. This outlook would enable us to take responsibility for our actions, past, present, and future, and to work for a more sustainable world. The alternative William Cronon offers “means never imagining that we can flee into a mythical wilderness to escape history and the obligation to take responsibility for our own actions that history inescapably entails” (1996: 25).

2.2. The Cowboy and the American National Myth

Will Wright is a sociologist whose work on American literature focuses on the Western. In his book *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory*, he conceptualizes the cowboy as the embodiment of the ideas of market individualism. Similarly to Cronon, Wright looks at the imagery of the Frontier West and how it constitutes our ideas about the United States, but his focus is on the socioeconomic dynamics of the United States. He views Westerns and their imagery as reflections of social theory, particularly of market individualism. He argues that the cowboy can be used to understand the ideals which were at the basis of the founding and growth of the United States. Furthermore, the Western can be used to critique market relations (Race 2002: 117).

Wright's conceptualization of the Western and the cowboy offers insight into the ideas at the core of American society. He claims that all of the Wild West imagery (wilderness, lone cowboy, ranchers, gunfighters, Native Americans, settlers) tells a story that, at its core, reflects the ideas of market individualism, which are at the basis of the founding of the United States. Market individualism's development tracks back to Thomas Hobbes' and John Locke's political ideas, which were then applied to economic analysis by Adam Smith and put into effect most directly in the United States, as Thomas Jefferson – one of the Founding Fathers and the 3rd president of the United States of America – was a proponent of these ideas (2001: 3-4). In the 17th century, Hobbes developed the idea of the social contract – that people would come together and sacrifice some of their freedom to have a governed society, which would benefit all -, which was then modified and popularized by Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* (2001: 16). The social contract was a political theory, but it was lacking an economic basis of functioning – this was conceptualized in the 18th century by Adam Smith. Smith introduced the idea of a laissez-faire market, which would regulate itself with limited governmental interference through competition (Ibid.). The political and economic ideas that formed market individualism rely on the ability of individuals to own private property – the individuals would be equal to each other in their right to own workable land, which would sustain them as owner-workers (2001: 4). As Wright (2001: 16) summarizes:

> Civil society would emerge from rational individuals pursuing their private interests through market order and competition. All individuals would have an equal opportunity to own private property, and all individuals would be free to maximize that property.

Simply put, everyone is equal in their opportunity to have private property, with which they can pursue their interests, primarily expanding that property.

Market individualism, however, had some drawbacks. First of all, it was predicated on an agrarian market economy in which people own the land in order to sustain themselves by farming it,

as owner-workers. However, partly due to the ideas of market individualism, an urban industry rose, which replaced the agrarian economy and produced a class division between owners and workers: owners could monopolize property and production, while workers had to work for the owners just to survive (2001: 5). So, instead of providing equality of opportunity, market individualism led to class inequality in the cities. Secondly, the idea of equality through owning property rested on the implicit "assumption of an open frontier – endless free land" (2001: 4), as to the aforementioned philosophers, ownership of property was primarily ownership of workable land (2001: 19).Wright emphasizes that these ideas were cultivated in Europe, but they always had the image of American wilderness as the land of new beginnings, where such endless frontier of workable land could be found (2001: 18).

Individualist ideas influenced the American Revolution and its aftermath, so American institutions were created with an individualist market society in mind (2001: 19). Wright notes Jefferson's deep belief in the agrarian culture, based in small frontier farms, as the key to a civil society (2001: 49). Importantly, other major figures in American legislature and civic life of the time, such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine, supported Jefferson's beliefs, so early American laws attempted to ensure the availability of land to individuals (2001: 19). Even as the United States had reached the Pacific Ocean, the Homesteading Act of 1862 provided American citizens the possibility to claim workable land, echoing Jefferson's agrarian sentiments. Wright argues that this social myth of an equal agrarian society is best reflected in Westerns and that the main hero of such stories - the cowboy - represents the individualist ideas upon which America was founded.

As the American frontier moved further West, "the West took over the frontier myth, defining the frontier imagery, and the cowboy became the mythical hero, the hero of individualism" (2001: 6). The cowboy has remained an integral part of American storytelling to this day, whether it be in movies, television, literature, fashion, or political discourse. Wright's conceptualization, the mythical cowboy is defined by his qualities, primarily strength, honor, independence and wilderness identity, rather than his job: he "often is a gunfighter, sometimes a gambler, and he may be a rancher, sheriff, or scout, even an outlaw" (Ibid.). In general, Westerns – stories of the cowboy - contains a lone individual; a frontier community in need of help; greedy villains (often hailing from the industrialized cities of the East Coast); the individual reluctantly agreeing to help, often due to having fallen in love with a local; the cowboy defeating the villains, winning the admiration of the community, but refusing power, either joining the community as an equal, or leaving the community for the frontier (2001: 7). However, due to the prominence of the cowboy image and stories about cowboys in American storytelling, there are many variations to these dynamics. Native Americans may be present, whether noble or savage, the citizens may be decent or corrupt, the hero may fight alone or with help, the hero may not be fighting for a just community, but fighting to escape the oppressive rules of society (Ibid.).

However, there is one unalterable aspect of the cowboy in every story: "…all the variations always remember that the cowboy needs a frontier" (Ibid.). The cowboy, embodying individualistic values and bringing equality and civic society from the wilderness to the agrarian settlers of the frontier, is a representation of the social myth that was the foundational basis to American society. In essence, "the cowboy myth offers a metaphorical shorthand for thinking about our society" (2001: 11).

Cronon and Wright look at the American frontier from different perspectives, but they both recognize the imaginative power that the stories about the frontier hold to this day. For Cronon, the frontier and the West form the environmental ideas that shape our view on conservation and human responsibility towards nature. For Wright, the frontier, with a cowboy trekking through it, helps understand the social myth upon which America was founded, and which shapes American lives to this day. These conceptualizations of the West will be key to my analysis of *Butcher's Crossing*.

3. Analysis

3.1. Searching for Self-Identity in the Frontier

Will Andrews sets out on his journey to the American Frontier driven by the ideas popular in 1860s and 1870s, primarily the idea of finding yourself in the American wilderness. Will is a son of a Unitarian minister and a Harvard student, so he represents the Bostonian middle-class. Although he reaches the Frontier town of Butcher's Crossing without a clear plan of action, he quickly finds Miller, a hunter and a frontiersman, who entices him to go on a buffalo hunt in a valley in the Colorado mountains. They are joined by Charley Hoge, Miller's long-time friend and hunting companion, and Fred Schneider, an expert skinner. Even though the plan was to hunt for a few weeks and return to Butcher's Crossing before winter hits, Miller's relentless obsession with killing all of the buffalo in the valley leads to the hunting team getting snowed in in the valley and remaining there throughout the winter and early spring. The wilderness of the Frontier is a constant danger, so the team returns from the valley having lost Schneider and their cart with buffalo skins in a river crossing accident. In town, they discover that the buffalo hide economy has completely collapsed, so their expedition and Miller's relentless destruction of buffalo has gone to waste. The novel ends with Will leaving Butcher's Crossing, but not heading home, as he rides westward – back into the Frontier.

Will's journey to Butcher's Crossing – a Frontier town two weeks' journey from Boston – is a quest of self-discovery. At Butcher's Crossing, Will is unable to give a definite answer when asked about the purpose of his journey. When his motives are questioned by J. D. McDonald, the town's hide man and Will's only lead to the Frontier, he answers vaguely: "I came out here to see as much of the country as I can" (Williams 2014: 19) and asks the hide man about someone to talk to about the Frontier. McDonald initially tries to talk Will out of this and talks of the hunters – who are the backbone of his business – with contempt and superiority, drawing a clear line between the hunters ("hard cases" (17), "trash" (20)) and himself and Will, educated men from the East Coast, supposedly "men with vision" (17). McDonald insists that Will should not mix with the hunters, lest he decides to join them and become the aforementioned trash, and suggests an alternative way of making a living in the Frontier: to work as a clerk for McDonald and stake out land claims in the town. This plan is based on multiple assumptions: that the hide economy will stay viable and profitable, and that the development of a railroad will go through the town, which would turn Butcher's Crossing from a hide town into a booming Frontier town. However, Will does not budge, so McDonald then suggests talking to Miller, a hunter who does not work for McDonald, but is described as not "as bad as the rest of them" (20). The next day Will finds Miller at the town's saloon, where he is sat at a table with Charley Hoge, a one-handed religious man, and Francine, one of the town's prostitutes. Immediately upon striking conversation, Miller questions Andrews about his motives for approaching Miller,

assuming he is there to talk Miller into working for McDonald. Andrews responds that he is here to learn about the Frontier and "didn't want to be tied down" (26) by working for McDonald. Miller continues questioning Will's motives, assuming that he is here so he could use his journey as entertainment: "… what'll you do? Go back and brag to your kinfolk? Write something for the papers?" (30). The same distinction that McDonald proposed is reinforced by Miller, who views the Harvard-educated Will as an outsider in the town. Will's answer is vague: to see the country "for myself" (31).

Although Will's answers are vague, his internal monologue suggests a more definite view: before answering McDonald, Will's mind wandered westward and the idea of wildness, which represents "a freedom and a goodness, a hope and a vigor [and] the source of the preserver of his world" (18). These ideas are juxtaposed with the descriptions of the busy streets of Boston, with buildings packed side by side, and plotted fields, villages, and towns. Miller's suspicions are also based on an East-West, civilization-wilderness juxtaposition between Will's three-year spell at Harvard and Miller's own basic education: "I learned myself to read one winter I was snowed in a trapper's shack in Colorado. I can write my name on paper. What do you think you can learn from me?" (30). Will's true expectations of this Frontier expedition are made clearer by how quickly he agrees to go on a hunting trip with Miller. Miller tells him of a valley in Colorado that he saw in 1863 filled with buffalo, which the hunter assumes has been left untouched, unlike the surroundings of Butcher's Crossing. Even though ten years have passed since then, Miller believes that no one has found the valley, and it takes a couple of sentences for Will to suggest funding a hunting party and coming along. Even Charley's recollection of how he lost his hand in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado does little to discourage Will, as immediately after Charley concludes the story, Will asks Miller: "All right. When will we be leaving?" (38). After they agree to the deal, Miller sets out to a neighboring town for supplies, while Will spends six days in Butcher's Crossing waiting for the hunter and thinking about the Western Frontier. As Will gazes out the window westward, he remembers how he used to do the same in Boston, but looking eastward at the Atlantic Ocean, which "choked and dizzied" (43) him with its immensity – an experience of the Sublime that he seems to be seeking to experience again in the Western Frontier. Will thinks of the sailors and explorers that braved the Atlantic in search of new land and finds similarities in his experience staring at the vast horizon of the West:

> The little town that held him had seemed to contract as the dark expanded; and he had, at moments, when his eye lost a point of reference, a sensation like falling, as the sailors must have had in their dreams in their deepest fears (44).

His memories of Boston provide another key reason for his journey – the ideas of the Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson and his ideas only come up once in the novel when

Will is waiting for Miller's return, but they significantly inform Will's worldview. Upon talking to Charley Hoge, who only engages with Will after being informed that Will's father was a Unitarian minister, Will realizes that his Bible knowledge is sparse because his father encouraged his readings of Emerson over Bible study. Emerson's concept of becoming a transparent eyeball is singled out and it lies at the core of Will's decision to come West: "he was nothing; he saw all; the current of some nameless force circulated through him" (48). Through unbiased observation of his surroundings, Will should be able to feel the force of life and through it, discover himself. That observation always points westward, where Will feels a glimpse of something "as beautiful as his own undiscovered nature" (Ibid.). So, Will's answers to McDonald and Miller are truthful – he did come here to see as much of the country for himself -, but they omit the philosophical background of Transcendentalism, which reveals that discovering the Frontier country is supposed to lead to Will's self-discovery. Thus, coming to Butcher's Crossing and quickly agreeing to embark on a hunting trip that is based on a 10-year old hunter's memory is Will's chance at testing Emersonian ideas in real life.

3.2. Return to Pristine Nature

From the very start of their journey, the wilderness is harsh and uncomfortable. Will is in pain even before the first day of travelling is done:

> The heat throbbed against Andrew's body, and his head pounded painfully with the beat of his pulse; already the flesh on his upper thighs was tender from rubbing against the saddle flaps, and his buttocks were numb on the hard leather of the seat (76).

The journey is not only uncomfortable, but slow and monotonous: "among the slow hollows and crests, Will Andrews found himself less and less conscious of any movement forward" (86). The excitement of seeing the Frontier is slowly being replaced by apathy, which overtakes Will: "day by day the numbness crept upon him until at last he numbness seemed to be himself" (87). Although they see some buffalo and even some River Indians, the majority of their two week journey to the mountains is described as a repetitive cycle:

> The reality of their journey lay in the routine detail of bedding down at night, arising in the morning, drinking black coffee from hot tin cups, packing bedrolls upon gradually wearying horses, the monotonous and numbing movement over the prairie that never changed its aspect, the watering of the horses and oxen at noon, the eating of hard biscuit and dried fruit, the resumption of the journey, the fumbling setting up of camp in the darkness, the tasteless quantities of beans and bacon gulped savagely in the flickering darkness, the coffee again, and the bedding down (96)

As the hunting party spends the winter in the valley, the monotonous wait leads to isolation and silence. While Miller spends everyday hunting for food, the rest of the party spend their time in silence at the camp, which Will "came to accept [and] tried to find meaning in" (236). As spring comes around, the snow starts to melt with "an agonizing slowness" (241). The waiting is emphasized by Will's internal monologue, as multiple times throughout the winter, the passage of time dissolves into longer periods: "week by week, and at last month by month, the men endured the changing weather" (239); "the days became weeks" (241). The detailed focus on the physical and mental toll of surviving in the Frontier surpasses Will's initial excitement for the wilderness. Thus, when the men return to Butcher's Crossing, Will returns having drastically changed physically: his face overgrown with a beard and long hair, his skin hardened to the point where he can't distinguish a facial expression. John Williams' description of the realities of living in the wilderness stand in stark comparison to the idealized view of the Frontier that many thinkers in the 1860s and 1870s maintained.

While Miller's actions physically shape the wilderness of the Western frontier, Will Andrews participates in the shaping of the Frontier as an idea. Throughout his journey to the Frontier, Will

compares his experiences in the Frontier with the ideas and representations of wilderness that he has seen or experienced while living in Boston. When they enter Colorado territory, Will compares the landscape he sees with "the sharp engravings he had seen in books, in magazines, when he was at home in Boston" (80), he then does the same upon seeing buffalo bones in the prairie: "he called to his memory the engravings that he had seen in books" (90). Will set out to the Frontier with an already established set of qualities that he expects from the wilderness. Those qualities are formed not from experience, but from the narratives disseminated in Boston – one of the oldest American cities. Ralph Waldo Emerson's narrative about finding yourself through observation of the wilderness is based on Emerson's experiences around Walden Pond in Concord (current day suburb of Boston). The engravings Will recalls also had to be made in an industrial city, where mass reproduction is possible. Interestingly, both times, Will's representations of the wilderness and the reality clash: "but the thin black lines [of the engravings] wavered upon the real grass before him, took on color, then faded" ; "that uncertain memory and the real bones would not merge" (90). More important, however, is Will's belief that once he reaches the Frontier as he imagines it, it will lead to self-discovery. Before leaving Butcher's Crossing, Will talks to Francine about the Frontier and they both claim that the wilderness will change Will. Francine enjoys the fact that Will is unlike the other men in the Frontier town, who are rough and weathered. In particular, she focuses on the softness of Will's hands and laments the change that will happen once will departs to the wilderness: "The wind and sun will harden your face; your hands will no longer be soft" (67). This simple metonymy foreshadows Will's becoming a rugged solitary frontiersman. Francine, who has lived in Butcher's Crossing for two years, has witnessed the toll living near and in the wilderness takes on people, making them rough as people, not just physically – Schneider's interaction with Francine is an example of that. Schneider approaches Francine, asking for her services and insists she agrees when she tells him she is not working at the moment, as he views her as nothing more than her profession: "I ain't seen a better looking whore since I was in St. Louis" (61). Francine's interactions with Will explain what she means by talking about Will's soft hands: he is respectful and even awkward around her, not even able to sleep with her when she asks him to stay with her until he departs. Will has an innocence to him that the hunters in the town no longer have.

To Will, however, the change he is looking for is based on Transcendentalist ideas, not real life experience. He is not trying to become a frontiersman, rather, he is in pursuit of a self-identity: "I will only become myself!" (67.). The hunting trip provides Will with the ability to observe the assumedly pristine natural world, after which he expects to understand himself more, if not completely. However, his assumption is consistently rejected in the story. As they approach the Rocky Mountains, Will anticipates "a richness and a fulfillment for which he had no name" (121). His

experience in the valley, however, does not justify his expectations, as he can feel that he has changed, but the change confuses Will: “his features [were] unfamiliar to him; he wondered how he looked; he wondered if Francine would recognize him if she could see him now” (175). During the winter, Will questions the expectations he had of the journey before departing: “What had he thought then? What had he been? How had he felt? He thought of himself now as a vague shape that did nothing, that had no identity” (237). Instead of finding himself, Will ends up even more confused and unsure of his identity. He walks out into the snowy valley, as if in a last attempt to prove the veracity of the Transcendentalist idea that observing nature in its pristine condition will lead to discoveries about yourself. Instead, the immensity of the valley dazes him and as he tries to orient himself, the whiteness blinds him. Will is able to return to camp, but the brightness of the snow blinds him to the point where his “eyes were so burned that he could see nothing, not even in brief glimpses” (239) and needs three days to recover his eyesight. The valley rejects Will’s attempts at observing it and afterwards he does not step into the valley – the idea that Will had about the wilderness as a meaning-forming experience is utterly rejected.

For Miller, the journey to the valley is primarily a business transaction: hunt as many buffalo and earn as much money as you can. As the hunting party enters the valley, they find the valley full of buffalo to the point where thousands of buffalo look like “a great body of water moved by obscure currents” (135). The key characteristic of this valley is its pristine quality: “A quietness seemed to rise from the valley; it was the quietness, the stillness, the absolute calm of a land where no human foot had touched” (134). This stillness is breached by the hunting party’s entry into the valley and the party’s descent is described as a procession – suggesting a funeral – , which foreshadows the destruction that will unfold in the coming months. Once in the valley, the party set up camp and prepare for the hunt. Miller explains that they crossed the only entryway to the valley, so the buffalo have no chance of escaping. Although Miller initially talked about hunting for “a week or ten days” (38) or “a thousand hides, […] maybe more” (59), as soon as they are in the valley, Miller suggests a much larger hunt: “If we had to, we could stay here all winter picking them off” (143). On the first day of the hunt, even though Schneider asks to start slowly, so that Will could learn how to skin buffalo, Miller turns into an efficient killing machine that cannot be stopped or distracted. As Will tries to talk to Miller, the latter stares “through him, blankly, as if he did not exist” (155) – the only thing that exists is the prey. Miller’s hunting is methodical – taking down the most active buffalo in the herd one by one - , even rhythmical: “Miller shot, and reloaded, and shot, and loaded again” (156). To Will, the rhythm of shooting and the death of buffalo seems “like a dance, a thunderous minuet” (157) – it is as if a spectacle, a ball room dance, that Will can observe. Schneider tries to talk Miller out of killing too many buffalo in one go, as the entire party will not be able to skin all of the carcasses

the same day, to which Miller responds with intimidation, reasserting his initial proposition that he is in charge of the hunt. To Miller, Schneider's plea is but a distraction and may scare the buffalo out of their stupor – Miller's focus on exterminating the herd is punctuated with a threat to the skinner: "If these buffalo spook, I'll shoot you" (158). Will observes Miller's killing and sees Miller not as a man driven by greed or anger, but as an "automaton" (Ibid.) – a killing machine that kills for the sake of killing, kills as "a mindless response to the life in which Miller had immersed himself" (159). Will's observation is reinforced, as Miller eventually misses a shot and the herd runs away. The hunter, empty eyed and disassociated, simply says: "I thought about it. […] If I hadn't thought about it, I would've got the whole herd" (Ibid.). Miller's obsession with killing every single buffalo for the sake of achievement – this would have been his biggest herd – stands in stark contrast with how the Native Americans would hunt buffalo and utilize every part of the felled animal: in Miller's own words, "there ain't a part of him you can't use for something" (91).).

Even though the Native Americans are mentioned in the novel scarcely, as a remnant of the past, their shadow hangs over the story. Whereas a single killed buffalo would be used in its entirety for weapons, toys, jewelry, even fertilizer for the Natives; to the white hunters who took over the Western Frontier, the mass extermination of buffalo for their hide is nothing but business and, to the likes of Miller, a personal achievement. Miller's description of how the Natives use a buffalo carcass reflects Cronon's idea of responsible use of nature as an alternative to the destruction wrought on the land by Miller. The absence of Native Americans in the story emphasizes the toll that American expansion took on the native population. Furthermore, the buffalo economy itself reflects the extractivism philosophy that drove the growth of the United States: in order to grow quickly and at a large scale, resources have to be taken in unsustainable ways, which hurt and even destroy the local ecosystems. The collapse of the buffalo economy and move away from buffalo skins at the end of the novel reveals another key difference between the Native Americans and the settlers. While buffalo hunting is a form of survival and sustenance for the Native Americans, the settlers view buffalo as goods to be traded until they are extinct or their skin is no longer profitable.

Miller's obsession with wiping out the buffalo in the valley is against his best interests. During their first conversation, Miller told Andrews how the Kansas prairies looked four years ago, when Miller first arrived at Butcher's Crossing: "My God! You should have seen this country then. In the spring, you could look out from here and see the whole land black with buffalo, solid as grass, for miles" (32). Now, he has to embark on a dangerous journey just to hunt and earn a living, not realizing that he is part of the reason why buffalo are going extinct. Miller's role in the destruction of a whole ecosystem is made more evident in the valley, where he is the only hunter and manages to reduce the buffalo population from around five thousand to a couple of hundred in twenty five days (192-193).

And even then, Miller attempts to stop the remaining buffalo from escaping the valley, failing only because a snowstorm hits the valley, and the men have to scramble back to camp to survive. So, Miller's obsessive buffalo hunting physically endangers himself and his crew. His propensity to kill also endangers his way of life: as a Frontier hunter, he relies on wildlife for basic survival, such as food and clothing, and to make living, as the only three occupations Miller has ever mentioned are beaver trapping, mining, or hunting game (32). Paradoxically, Miller's greatest skill is destroying his livelihood and the wilderness in which he feels most at home. Miller is not cognizant of this contradiction because he does not realize the part he plays in the disappearance of his lifestyle. No matter how much he laments the disappearance of fertile hunting grounds, he chooses to escape the consequences of his actions by remembering the past, rather than participate in more sustainable hunting practices.

In the end, Miller's violence proves to be pointless, as upon their return to Butcher's Crossing, McDonald informs them that the buffalo hide economy has collapsed: "The bottom's dropped out of the whole market; the hide business is finished" (292). McDonald has tens of thousands of buffalo hides that he bought, but cannot sell. Most importantly, Miller's obsession with destroying the buffalo once again harms him and his hunting team, because the collapse of the market happened over the winter – if they had not gotten snowed in, they would have been able to sell the thousand or so hides at a good price. Instead, they have around three thousand hides still left in the valley that no one wants to buy. The slaughter of the buffalo seems to have brought ruin to the entire town, as the prospective railroad got built elsewhere. The land McDonald owns is worthless, so all of his business ventures collapsed in less than a year. The collapse of McDonald's businesses means the collapse of the town itself: the town is deserted, everyone having moved out or about to move.

3.3. A Cowboy Western

Butcher's Crossing opens with a wagon pulling into the town of Butcher's Crossing in the Kansas prairies. From the very beginning, the setting of an American Western story is being established: the town is a rudimentary Frontier town, consisting of a scattering of tents and six roughly built buildings, bisected by a dirt road. The town is lethargic, as there are almost no people around and the ones that are there move unhurriedly or sit in the shade. The town is situated deep in the Western Frontier territory – it took Will Andrews "nearly two weeks, by coach and rail" (8) to get here from Boston. The town's distance from the cities of the East Coast is punctuated by the simplicity of means in Butcher's Crossing. The furniture in the hotel consists of "a narrow rope bed with a thin mattress, a roughly hewn table with a lamp and a tin wash basin, a mirror, and a straight chair" (Ibid.); the windows of the buildings use cloth instead of glass; the food served at the hotel is lukewarm and mushy. John Williams' attention to detail reinforces the feeling of a barely civilized town, which is a typical setting for a Western. When Will leaves Butcher's Crossing with the hunting party, they immediately get off the road and step foot into the prairie and move towards the Colorado Rocky Mountains. They pass by the ruins of a homestead in the plains – evidence of a failed attempt to settle the wilderness, which, as Miller explains, happens a lot: "Gave it up. Lots of them have tried it, but don't many make it" (76).

The American Frontier is marked by a tension between settlers trying to establish homesteads or towns and ruthless nature, which rejects anyone who is too weak to endure it. Butcher's Crossing is exemplary of this tension, as it grew from "three tents and a dugout" (16) and has the potential to grow more if the railroad network, a symbol of United States development that connects the established states with the newly founded states, expands. The railroad means quicker access to goods, more people coming into town, and, of course, further growth of the town to accommodate new settlers and the businesses that service them. McDonald firmly believes that the town will grow, thus he has staked out land around Butcher's Crossing and urges Will to do the same, rather than go into the Frontier. McDonald's business ventures in Butcher's Crossing reveal another thematic tension that is often seen in Western stories: the capitalist businessman versus the working folk of the Frontier town. McDonald's primary business is in buffalo hides, as he has an office and brining pits on the edge of town. He buys hides from the local hunters – whom he hires and sends out in teams -, tans and cures them by his office, then sells them for a profit in Kansas City. This is how McDonald controls the primary economy of Butcher's Crossing. Furthermore, the aforementioned staked land is a bet on the town's growth that poses little risk to McDonald: "all you have to do is sign your name to a piece of paper at the State Land Office. Then you sit back and wait" (16). But if the risk pays off, McDonald will also be in control of land lots in a rapidly growing town.

The hunters in Butcher's Crossing, much like the town itself, exist on the threshold between civilization and wilderness. Their livelihood depends on the interplay of a market system and the wilderness. The market system provides a livelihood: hunters sell their hides in a Frontier settlement; then those hides are cured, tanned and sent to a city; there the hides are made into expensive clothing that can be sold in a national or international market of goods. As long as there is a demand for hides, the hunters can make a living. This system, however, is already jeopardized, as J. D. McDonald has inserted himself into it and instead of letting the hunters sell their hides and compete in an open market, he buys them at a fixed price: "They do the work, and he gets all the money. They think he's a crook, and the thinks they're fools" (31). McDonald despises the hunters he employs, because they are "just living off the land, not knowing what to do with it" (Ibid.), even though it is precisely because of these hunters that McDonald is able to run a business. United States can expand West and new towns can be founded only due to the frontiersmen that McDonald despises, as "the American West is constructed as the site of individual and collective quest for land and dominance" (Paul 2014: 314). Collective conquest and control of the land comes only after individual conquest of land – such as Miller's conquest over the buffalo valley.

J. D. McDonald insists that going out to hunt into the Frontier will ruin Will. However, when asked who could tell Will about the Frontier, the hide man singles Miller out as "not as bad as the rest of them" (Williams 2014: 20), even though Miller has been living in the Frontier for most of his life. Thus, Miller is representative of a balance between surviving in the wilderness and life in the civilized world of a small Frontier town. The main difference between the other, unnamed hunters of the town and Miller is his refusal to work for McDonald: "McDonald's been trying to get me to head a party for him for two years now" (26). Freedom and equality are two qualities that are always associated with the image of the cowboy (Wright 2001: 4) and Miller's refusal to work for McDonald is symbolic of this: Miller chooses to do things his own way, saying "I hunt on my own or I don't hunt at all" (Williams 2014: 32). Miller's unique status in the town and in the eyes of McDonald is signified by his ability to negotiate with the hide seller the price of buffalo hides the hunting party plan to bring back from the valley. Even though Will funds the hunting trip, Miller makes it absolutely certain that he would be in charge: "It would still be my hunt, you understand" (35). Miller is able to refuse any financial subjugation because his skill and expertise puts him above other hunters – in a market society where all hunters would be free to choose when they work and set their own price, Miller would outcompete the others. His abilities in the Frontier enable him to skirt the capitalist dynamic of working for someone else, even though that is the only way of making a living in Butcher's Crossing.

Once Will Andrews and Miller agree to go on the hunt, Miller quickly proves why he is able to remain independent and still make a living in the frontier. Firstly, the hunter already has a plan of getting to the valley, including what supplies they will need for the journey, how many people they need, and how long they will be on the road. He hires Schneider, an expert skinner – "You're the best there is" (59) – and is able to talk him into going to the Rocky Mountains, even though Schneider tries to refuse at first. Hiring the best skinner available mirrors his own skill: the best hunter around needs the best skinner around to match his output. Furthermore, once they are in the Frontier, Miller's knowledge is constantly displayed in his advice to Will, who has never been in the wilderness of the Frontier. Will transforms into a capable frontiersman only because of Miller's advice, which ranges from instructions on how to control a horse or track buffalo in the prairie to how to drink water after a bout of thirst or how to not get dizzy up in the mountains. Lastly, Miller is the one leading them through the prairie and the mountains. It is his steadfastness and skill that leads the team to water when they are almost dying of thirst: while Schneider is scared of the risk the Frontier poses and insists on turning back, Miller does not give in to panic and steadily leads the team to water. After the thirst scare, Miller is able to find water "when to Schneider and Andrews it seemed impossible that it could be found" (119). The team's need for water does not detract from their end goal – the buffalo valley – and they reach the mountains in fourteen days, just as Miller had anticipated when planning the journey: "a couple of weeks to get there, a week or ten days on the kill, and a couple of weeks back" (38). Miller's Frontier skill is proven again when they look for the passage into the valley through the mountains. The rest of the team, whether the experienced Schneider, Miller's companion Charley, or the observant Andrews, can only follow Miller and be dumbfounded when Miller points out where the pass is: "For a moment, none of them moved. Where Miller pointed was no different than any of the places along the unchanging stretch of mountainside" (127).

All of these cowboy qualities (life on the threshold of civilization and wilderness, freedom and independence, survival skills) are secondary to the fundamental quality of the cowboy – individualism. The deeper into the wilderness they move, the further away the men move from each other, physically symbolizing the retreat into themselves that the wilderness forces them into.

Schneider is the most pronounced example of the drawbacks of individualism. As soon as the team enters the prairie, Schneider's separation from the team is emphasized, as he rides further away from the team and his reluctance to communicate is made clear: "seldom did he look at any of the others, and he did not speak unless it was necessary" (88). This is juxtaposed with Miller's movements through the prairie, who, like Schneider "spoke very little, as if hardly aware of the men who rode with him" (87), but for a completely different reason, as he is leading them on a route only he is able to perceive, with his animal-like senses. Simply put, Miller isolates himself so he could focus on

leading the group, thus working for the benefit of everyone, while Schneider isolates himself for the sake of self-isolation. Schneider's self-centered attitude becomes more pronounced once the hardships of the journey take hold. When the team faces thirst, Schneider does not just insist on going back, but also refuses to share water to let the animals drink, even though he knows they would not last the day otherwise. He says "If you think I'm going to use water for anything except myself, you -" (110) before getting cut off by Miller. The hunter, whose attitude is focused on ensuring the entire team makes it, has to intimidate Schneider into giving the remaining water from his canteen and even then, Schneider pleads not to use that water for the animals. During the snowstorm that would shut the team in the valley for the winter, Schneider completely cuts himself off from the team, refusing to work together with Will and Miller to make buffalo hide bags that would save them from freezing: "From here on in, I take care of myself. That's all I give a damn about" (211). Throughout the winter, Schneider is with the team only at night, when all of them sleep in their makeshift shelter, spending the rest of his time alone, away from camp. The extremity of his self-isolation is punctuated by him talking to himself:

> Through his apparent resolve to have little do with the others of the party, he got into the habit of talking to himself; once Andrews came upon him and overheard him speaking softly, crooningly, as if to a woman (232)

Although Miller excuses Schneider's tendency to isolate and talk to himself as a necessary coping mechanism – "A man by his self gets to doing that" (233) -, Schneider's actions come into stark contrast with Miller's, who leaves camp every morning and comes back late in the afternoon. His absence is for the good of the party – he goes out to hunt for food and scavenge for firewood, thus providing for everyone.

However, Miller also represents some negative aspects of the cowboy trope. It is Miller's insistence on staying and hunting far longer than he had initially suggested that causes the hunting party to get stuck in the valley for more than half a year. For all the good his wilderness skills and expertise do to the team, he too isolates himself from the team to the detriment of the party. Once the team is prepared to hunt the buffalo in the valley, Schneider asks Miller to start the hunt slowly, so Schneider could train Will to skin the killed buffalo. Miller, however, is obsessed with taking down as many buffalo as possible and simply ignores any reasoning Schneider gives: "We'll skin all we shoot, Fred. No matter if I shoot from now till tomorrow". The first day of the hunt stops only when Miller misses a kill and the remainder of the herd runs away and Miller laments that he could have killed the entire herd of 250-300 buffalos.

The massacre of the buffalo reveals a feature of the cowboy trope that had not been discussed yet – the propensity for violence. As Will Wright discusses, the cowboy must have "a special skill at violence" (2001: 15), which is most often used to save the community from threats to the social order. John Williams' novel reveals the other side of cowboy violence – the one that is aimlessly enacted on nature for the sake of personal gain. In comparison to Schneider, Miller seems to be a positive representation of the cowboy: a strong leader, knowledgeable and able to survive any hardship, representing freedom and individual choice. However, once his irrational ambition to kill all the buffalo in the valley takes hold, these qualities turn Miller from an exemplary cowboy to an automaton, who enacts "destruction as a cold, mindless response to the life in which [he] had immersed himself" (Williams 2014: 159). Whereas before Miller's steadfastness and leadership helped the hunting party survive the journey through the prairies, once in the valley, it makes it impossible to talk Miller out of slaughtering the buffalo. Miller refuses to listen to any reasoning, even as Schneider and Charley – Miller's friend and companion, who is terrified of the winter in the mountains – grow restless and question him. Miller cannot give any definite answer, besides saying "We're going to stay" (184). Miller uses his buffalo hunting knowledge to turn into an efficient killing machine that turns "the herd of some five thousand animals [to] now less than three hundred" (188) in 25 days. With so little of the original herd left and winter approaching, the buffalo are trying to leave the valley and Miller refuses to let a single one of them leave. Schneider questions Miller's decision: "But what's the use? […] What the hell's the use? It ain't going to kill you to let a few of them get away" (193), but Miller, obsessively focused on pushing the buffalo away from the passage out of the valley, continues commanding Will and Schneider, seemingly not even aware of Schneider's questions. Throughout their winter in the valley, Miller is the only one who enjoys life in the wilderness and when Schneider confronts him, the hunter brushes all of his complaints away: "Fred, I swear you ain't got a cheerful bone in your body. Why, this ain't bad; we're set now. […] This is good living. You got no call to complain" (232). Lastly, Miller's individualistic choices affect not only him, but others around him, which Miller never addresses. The consequences of Miller's decisions affect Charley Hoge the most. Charley has been part of Miller's hunting trips for more than 10 years and lost his hand to frostbite in the Colorado mountains on one of those trips. Initially, Charley tries to refuse going on the hunting trip with Will and Miller, but Miller brushes off his companion's anxiety: "It'll be all right. […] This time of year, it's almost warm up there; there won't be no snow till November" (38). Throughout the story, Charley never doubts Miller's decisions, trusting his friend's judgement more than Schneider's worry. As the snowstorm hits, Charley breaks down - "God help me. Lord Jesus Christ help me. God help me" (203) – and Miller has to carry him back to the camp. For the rest of the story, Charley remains a broken man, coping with his experience

by turning to alcohol and the Bible. At the end of the novel, Will Andrews talks to Charley, and he talks as if they had not yet gone to the mountains:

> ‘We’re going on a hunt,’ Charley Hoge continued in his singsong voice. ‘You, and me, and Miller. Miller knows a skinner he can get in Ellsworth. It’ll be all right. I’m not afraid to go up there any more. The Lord will provide.’ (308)

As Charley is talking to Will, his eyes are “like bits of empty sky, […] there was nothing behind them” (Ibid.). The emptiness in Charley’s eyes suggests that he has lost his mind. Ironically, once Miller leaves town, Charley blindly follows him, as he always had, even when it is against his best interests.

4. Conclusions

The American Western is one of the most evocative genres in American culture, as it reflects the history and ideas behind the finding and development of the United States of America and its culture. John Williams' *Butcher's Crossing* (1960) uses key aspects of the Western to question the assumptions made about the role of the Frontier in building personal and national identity. The analysis of the novel focuses on the images of the cowboy and the Frontier in the construction of personal and national identity. The analysis relies on William Cronon's critique of prevalent views of humans as separate from nature and Will Wright's conceptualization of the cowboy as the representation of American ideals.

Firstly, William Cronon's *The Trouble With Wilderness* emphasizes the necessity of viewing humanity as a structural part of the natural environment, as the ideas and actions of people have a significant effect on nature. The slaughter of buffalo signalizes the direct impact irresponsible use of natural resources has on nature. But, most importantly, it is the ideas about nature and the effects of wilderness on individuals that set the story in motion, as Will comes to Butcher's Crossing driven by the idea that the will discover himself in the Frontier.

Furthermore, Will Wright's *Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy & Social Theory* provides a conceptualization of the Western and the cowboy as shorthands for the ideas that underlie the creation and development of the United States. John Williams' *Butcher's Crossing* questions the ideals behind the image of the cowboy, primarily by focusing on the destruction that an individualistic frontiersman with an exceptional skill at violence can bring.

This MA thesis focused on the role the American Frontier plays in the construction of personal and national identity. The contrast between Will's initial assumptions of what the Frontier experience will bring him and the disastrous effects the hunting trip had not only on Will, but the rest of the hunting party and the town, reveals that the American Frontier as an idea and the American Frontier as an experience are vastly different. Not only does Will not discover himself in the Frontier, but he returns to it, seemingly to follow in Miller's footsteps and to bring violence to the land.

Santrauka lietuviškai

Vesternas yra vienas dažniausiai pasitaikančių ir vaizdingiausių žanrų Vakarų literatūroje. Kaubojaus, kaip pagrindinio vesterno personažo ir atstovo, svarba ne tik Amerikoje, bet ir visame pasaulyje, išliko nuo 19-ojo amžiaus. Šis magistro darbas analizuoja kaip ribinė zona tarp civilizacijos ir laukinės gamtos, bei kaubojaus įvaizdis daro įtaka individualaus ir nacionalinio identiteto formavimuisi Džono Viljamso romane "Butcher's Crossing". Analizei pasitelktos Viljamo Kronono idėjos apie gamtos ir žmogaus sąryšį ir bendrumą, bei Vilo Vraito požiūris į kaubojų, kaip į individualistinės ekonomikos, kurią grįstas JAV įkūrimas, atstovą. Žvelgiant į santykį tarp veikėjų ir laukinės gamtos kurioje jie yra, analizuojama kaip veikėjai paveikia gamtą ir kaip gamta paveikia veikėjus. Šiame romane kelione į ribinę zoną tarp civilizacijos ir laukinės gamtos siekant suprasti save tampa pagrindu kvestionuoti tas idėjas, kurias mes priskiriame Laukiniams Amerikos vakarams.

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