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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Shaping the American National Identity: Reality and Myth of the Western Frontier

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

Abstract

The territorial expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century caused major political, social and cultural changes within the American nation. In 1893, American historian Frederick Jackson Turner put forward the idea that the American frontier gave rise to the establishment of the most salient features of American national identity — individualism, exceptionalism, self-reliance, and the emergence of American democratic order. But despite its enormous impact on the following generations of historians, Turner's thesis overlooked a number of historical facts and impacts of the Frontier that could potentially undermine his statement, namely the indigenous genocide and devastation of the natural environment. His essay thus formulated the myth of the West, as it largely represented the American's imagination of the frontier and its experiences.

This thesis examines the relation between the history of the United States' territorial expansion and its mythologic representation, focusing on the political and cultural dynamics of the nineteenth-century America. It presents a close analysis of the frontier mythology and the Manifest Destiny ideology, and their impact on the formation of American national identity.

The thesis is divided into three chapters composed of further subchapters. The first chapter examines Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis, focusing on its connection to the myth of the West. It presents an account of the tragic influences of the frontier on Native Americans — a topic largely neglected by Turner in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History".

The second part of the thesis analyses origins and influences of the Manifest Destiny — the idea that Americans and their government were destined to establish political control over much of North America. The impact of this doctrine on the formation of American cultural heritage will be demonstrated on the works of art by Emanuel Leutze, John Gast, Asher Brown Durand and George Caleb Bingham.

The final chapter focuses on the Frontier literature and its place within the American literary history. It presents a close analysis of Mark Twain's travelogue *Roughing It* as an example of the

Frontier literature. Twain's travelogue is used to demonstrate the disentanglement of the myth of the West and the objectives promoted by the Manifest Destiny, namely civilisation and progress.

The main goal of this paper is to reveal the difference between the historical and mythological impacts of the Frontier on the formation of American nation. By contrasting the historical accounts with the artistic and literary representations, this paper demonstrates the coexistence of two Wests in the nineteenth-century: historic and mythic.

Abstrakt

Územní expanze Spojených států v devatenáctém století způsobila velké politické, sociální a kulturní změny týkající se amerického národa. V roce 1893 americký historik Frederick Jackson Turner předložil myšlenku o tom, že americká hranice dala vzniknout nejvýraznějším rysům americké národní identity — individualismu, výjimečnosti, soběstačnosti a vzniku amerického demokratického řádu. Navzdory svému obrovskému dopadu na následující generace historiků však Turnerova práce přehlédla důsledky vymezování hranic a řadu historických faktů — konkrétně domorodou genocidu a devastaci přírodního prostředí —, které by mohly jeho prohlášení potenciálně vyvrátit. Jeho esej formuloval mýtus Západu, protože do značné míry definoval americkou představu hranic a „teorii hranice.“

Tato práce zkoumá vztah mezi historií územní expanze Spojených států a její mytologickou reprezentací se zaměřením na politickou a kulturní dynamiku Ameriky devatenáctého století. Představuje podrobnou analýzu hraniční mytologie a ideologie o „zjevném předurčení“ (Manifest Destiny) a jejich dopad na formování americké národní identity.

Práce je rozdělena do tří kapitol obsahujících další podkapitoly. První kapitola se zabývá tezí Fredericka Jacksona Turnera a zaměřuje se na její propojení s mýtem Západu. Zabývá se tragickým vlivem amerických hranic na domorodé Američany, což je téma, které Turner ve své „teorii hranice“ a díle Význam hranice v americké historii do značné míry opomíjí.

Druhá část práce analyzuje původ a vliv přesvědčení o „zjevném předurčení“ (Manifest Destiny). Tato myšlenka spočívá v tvrzení, že Američané a americká vláda byli předurčeni k politické nadvládě nad Severní Amerikou. Dopad této doktríny na formování amerického kulturního dědictví je demonstrován na uměleckých dílech Emanuela Leutzeho, Johna Gasta, Ashera Browna Duranda a George Caleba Binghamy.

Poslední kapitola se zaměřuje na literaturu Západu a její místo v americké literární historii.

Představuje podrobnou analýzu cestopisu Marka Twaina *Roughing It* jako příklad literatury Západu.

Twainův cestopis slouží k demonstraci rozuzlení mýtu o Západu a cílů prosazovaných Manifest

Destiny, konkrétně civilizace a pokroku.

Hlavním cílem této práce je najít rozdíl mezi historickým a mytologickým pojetím hranic a analyzovat jejich dopad na formování amerického národa. Na kontrastu historických faktů a jejich uměleckého a literárního ztvárnění tato práce poukazuje na existenci dvou amerických Západů v devatenáctém století: historického a mytického.

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Introduction

The line between the historic reality of the American West and the mythology associated with it remains blurred for many Americans. After Frederick Jackson Turner made his speech on the significance of the American frontier in 1892, early twentieth-century historians favourably assumed his idea that the frontier experience enabled the American people to unite into a nation the identity, culture and institutions of which were essentially different from the traditional European ones. The frontier allegedly gave rise to the establishment of such American national features as exceptionalism, individualism and promptitude. But by centring his thesis around the idea of Americanisation, Turner overlooked various historic facts and tragic influences of the westward expansion that could undermine his principal objective. Turner's seminal essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" represented the Americans' imagination of the frontier which was mainly comprised of myths and tales of the West.

This thesis aims to analyse the relation between the history of the westward expansion and its mythology, focusing on the political and cultural dynamics of the nineteenth-century America. It will present a close examination of the origins and influences of the frontier myth and the doctrine of the Manifest Destiny based on the case study of the nineteenth century artworks and the literature of the West. In order to demonstrate the impact of the frontier mythology on the formation of the American cultural and national identity the representation of the Manifest Destiny doctrine will be examined in the paintings of Emanuel Leutze, John Gast, Asher Brown Durand and George Caleb Bingham. Finally, the ironic portrayal of the frontier experiences in Mark Twain's travelogue *Roughing It* will be proved to contribute to the disentanglement of the myth of the West.

The first part of this thesis will present an analysis of Turner's seminal essay and its connection to the Frontier myth. In this chapter, I will contrast "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" with the arguments of the late twentieth century New Western Historians,

emphasising the discriminatory character of Turner's statements. An historical account of the most tragic effect of the westward expansion — the Indian genocide — will be discussed as a topic neglected by F. J. Turner.

The second chapter will focus on the ideology of the Manifest Destiny and its representation in the nineteenth century works of art. The analysis of the Manifest Destiny doctrine through the framework of art allows a better understanding of the rapid popularisation of the ideals of civilisation, progress, nature as the space of individual freedom, and the faith in Providential mission of the American nation promoted by the doctrine. The chapter will aim to prove that the paintings of the Manifest Destiny made a significant contribution into the rise of the romanticised notion of the American frontier, by portraying the forceful acquisition of Indian lands as a noble mission designed for the United States by the Almighty. Manifest Destiny artworks amplified the uniqueness of American historical, cultural and natural aspects, strengthening the nationalistic values of American people.

The final section will be dedicated to the disentanglement of the myth of the West and the Manifest Destiny ideology based on the analysis of Mark Twain's semi autobiographical travelogue *Roughing It*. Twain's ironic representation of the frontier environment will be shown as the more negative attitude towards the lawless, chaotic nature of the frontier life, deprived of civilised manners and fixed norms of behaviour. Contrasted with the artworks described in Chapter 2, Twain's book will be viewed as presenting an opposite perspective on the romanticised notion of the West. The analysis of Twain's travelogue will shed light on the means by which the American individualism and promptitude came into existence.

My reading of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier thesis and the myth of the West was influenced by critical approaches in a number of works of cultural history which included, among others, Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, *Toward A New Western History*, edited by Patricia Nelson Limerick, and *Making*

America: the Society and Culture of the United States edited by L.S. Leudtke. The main sources for the analysis of the paintings in Chapter 2 are Patricia Janis Broder's *Great Paintings of the Old American West* and Barbara S. Groseclose *Nineteenth-century American Art*, as well as a multitude of other scholarly essays on the Manifest Destiny and its portrayal in popular culture. For the analysis of Mark Twain's *Roughing It* the main works consulted will be Martin Procházka's *Ruins in the New World* and *A Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain* edited by Forrest G. Robinson.

Chapter 1: American Frontier and the Myth of the West

1.1 The American Frontier

The word *frontier* is commonly defined as a border between two countries.¹ Thomas Nail, a political philosopher, goes beyond this simplistic meaning, characterising the frontier as a function of the border, which is “not the strictly spacial exterior of some static wall, but rather the foremost part of the border’s process of continual motion.”² The frontier then is a zone, rather than a line, characterised by an internal and external process of disjunction and indetermination.³ The frontier moves just as the border does, and occurs wherever colonial power expels a native population.

In the history of the United States, the frontier came to signify a three-century long period, defined by the westward movement of the European settlers. The frontier occurred as a zone of encounter between the civilised colonists and Native Americans. Besides the territorial expansion of the United States, the frontier also entailed the establishment of American nationalistic values and ideas. For centuries, it represented the place of freedom and opportunity, a proof of American triumphant exceptionalism.

Having begun in the seventeenth century, the frontier was a process of settling the Atlantic coast of the Northern American continent by European colonists. The frontier was gradually shifting to the West as the restless and adventurous pioneers were escaping the old centres, sometimes with the goal of obtaining more freedom, sometimes trying to secure more room for themselves and their cattle. For a generation after the revolution, Maine was a frontier country beaoning settlers from New England from 1790 to 1800. The second frontier took place across the Alleghenies when

¹ “Frontier,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed July 3, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/frontier>.

² Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 47.

³ Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 46.

Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio joined the union, followed by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.⁴ Finally, the third frontier began around 1840 and allowed the migrants to settle the lands spreading to the Pacific Ocean. Yet, the difference between the three periods was not merely a matter of geography. According to Allan Nevins, the three frontiers varied in terms of motives and the migrants' mentality: while the first frontier had been tied closely to Europe, the Mississippi Valley was independent, and self-sufficient with the settlers looking more to the West than the East.⁵

Historians point out that the frontier settlers were a varied body of men who, however, could be divided into three groups. The first group consisted of hunters and trappers — the wilder pioneers, usually unmarried, who strongly resembled Indians in dress and manners; the second group was constituted by hunters and farmers — unlike the first group who lived in cabins, they built comfortable log houses and were occupied with growing grains and fruit, fishing, looking after cattle and hogs; finally, the third group included farmers as well as doctors, lawyers, storekeepers, editors, preachers, mechanics, politicians, and land speculators — they were the ones who enabled the furnishing of a vigorous society.⁶ The farmers were the most important of the settlers as they promoted the development and flourishing of agriculture, and, later, the process of industrialisation. As the towns were becoming bigger, the settlers from the third group were turning into people of wealth.

The end of the frontier was proclaimed by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago during the World Columbian Exposition. In his paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, Turner concluded that the settlers' return to primitive conditions on the frontier allowed the detachment from the Old World patterns. This “perennial rebirth” ultimately led to the emergence of the exclusively American character.

⁴ “American Frontier,” Britannica, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-frontier>.

⁵ Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commager, *The Pocket History of the United States* (New York: Overseas Editions, 1942), 150.

⁶ Nevins and Commager, *The Pocket History of the United States*, 151.

According to the historian, the frontier was the line of the most rapid and effective Americanisation; it was, at the same time, the meeting point between savagery and civilisation which eventually led to the growth of nationalism and the evolution of American political institutions.⁷

In his speech, Turner articulated the American national ethos, portraying it as a product of the frontier. Wilfred M. McClay, an American academic, claimed that Turner's thesis was largely a response to the problematic situation within the society that followed the closing of the frontier caused by the tension between the traditional idea of America as the land of opportunity and the emerging sense of the closed, finished nation.⁸ By closing "the first period of American history", Turner implied the beginning of a new era for the American nation.

Turner characterised the frontier as a place where the American nation came into being, with all its characteristic features: dominant individualism, the sense of exceptionalism, a strong desire for freedom, and the inquisitiveness and acuteness of mind. While putting the question of American nationalism in the foreground, Turner's thesis simplified the issues of Indian genocide, nature destruction, and other negative side effects of the westward expansion. The Frontier myth translated the application of violence into an indispensable part of formulating the American national identity.

As Richard Slotkin put it:

The American must cross the border into 'Indian country' and experience a 'regression' to a more primitive and natural condition of life so that the false values of the 'metropolis' can be purged and a new, purified contract enacted. Although the Indian and the Wilderness are the settler's enemy, they also provide him with the new consciousness through which he will transform the world.⁹

While Turner's thesis was extremely influential, turning Western history into primarily Frontier history, many of the later scholars have criticised it for being overly simplistic and placing

⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm>.

⁸ Wilfred M. McClay, "Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis and Its Critics," YouTube video posted by *Hillsdale College*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poqjvZwGObo>.

⁹ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 14.

too much weight on the frontier — as a Western man, Turner expressed a certain regional bias portraying the West as the most important American region.¹⁰ Turner's thesis, centred around the importance of American frontier on the creation of the characteristic traits of American nationalism, presented a one-sided perspective on the topic, overlooking the aspects of violence, environmental violation and the multi-ethnic character of the frontier settlers. Moreover, his statement on the closing of the frontier in 1890 proved wrong in the twentieth century, as the West was still characterised by a continued regional growth and instability.

In 1980s, the New Western History emerged as a movement among historians whose aim was to redefine the meaning of the frontier, and shed light on the aspects neglected by Turnerians — race, class, gender and environmental issues in the trans-Mississippi West. According to Patricia Limerick, New Historians did see the “process” at work in the West that had affected other parts of the nation and the world, but they characterised this process by such terms as invasion, conquest, colonisation, exploitation, development and expansion of the world market, seeing the term “frontier” as nationalistic and often racist.¹¹ New Western Historians emphasised the involvement of diverse groups of people in the process: including women as well as men, Indians, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, Afro-Americans; they also aimed at breaking free from the old models of “progress” and “improvement”, crystallising the fact that some roads of Western development led to failure, injury and violence.¹²

The focus on the multinational character of the frontier, boosted by the increased migration during the Gold Rush, undermined Turner's statements about the dominating American character of the frontier and his homogenous vision of the frontier processes. The Gold Rush, for instance, beacons immigrants from all over the world: Latin America, Asia, Europe, as well as Australia and

¹⁰ McClay, “Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis and Its Critics”.

¹¹ Patricia Nelson Limerick, “What on Earth Is the New Western History?” *Trails: Toward A New Western History*, eds. Patricia Nelson Limerick et al. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 85.

¹² Limerick, “What on Earth Is the New Western History?” 86.

New Zealand. The non-English-speaking migrants, especially Mexicans, the Chinese, and African-Americans were often becoming victims of various acts of violence on the frontier, which substantially questions Turner's portrayal of the frontier's social dynamics as a version of the melting-pot theory.¹³

In his paper, Turner collected the existing sensations and fantasies about the frontier that were circulating within the society at the time. As a result, Turner's thesis articulated the myth of the West which, however, did not present a realistic historical account of the frontier life. Besides undermining the contribution of multiple ethnic groups in the settling of the West, and dismissing the aspects of environmental destruction and the indigenous genocide, the Frontier thesis foregrounded the agrarian aspects of the expansion, neglecting the fact of growing industrialisation and urban life experiences.

1.2 The Fate of the Native Americans

What Turner referred to as a "free land" in his thesis, was a territory inhabited by Native American tribes. A crucial part of the American expansion westward consisted in frontier settlers replacing the local population on their own land by engaging in various forms of active genocidal campaigns. The elimination of the indigenous people was a process facilitated by war, forceful relocations, genocidal violence, destructions of food sources and traditional ways of life. This aspects contributed to a tremendous decline in the population of native Americans in the whole Western Hemisphere which came to be known as the worst human holocaust the world had

¹³ Philip Gleason, "The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion," *American Quarterly*, 16.1 (1964): 22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2710825>.

witnessed. By 1900, the number of Indigenous population in the United States — total of 600,000 individuals in 1800 — reached its lowest point of around 237,000 people.¹⁴

Native Americans, immersed into their traditional lifestyle and culture, were an obstacle on the U. S. way to active territorial expansion in the nineteenth century, as their tribal ways contested with the American ideals of progress and civilisation. At the beginning of the century, the United States, under the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, endorsed a policy that Indian tribes would either assimilate into American culture or would have to move west of the Mississippi River. Though the official Indian Removal Act was only signed in 1830 under the administration of Andrew Jackson, between 1800 and 1810 Indians were forced into ceding 100 million acres in the Ohio River valley.¹⁵ The loss of so much land led to the devastation of the traditional Indian culture of hunting and food production. Deprived of the opportunity to provide for themselves through the traditional means, and being now in close proximity to the white settlements, the Indian tribes became more dependent on white trade to obtain basic food and domestic supplies. This had an eminent impact on the dynamics of Indian life: deprived of independence, and struggling to cope with the cultural stress, natives were becoming addicted to alcohol sold to them by the European settlers, which resulted in a long-lasting problem of alcoholism.

From 1870s, American citizens were expanding into Indian territories by sectioning off their plots of land with barbed wire. As a result, Natives were cut off from their hunting grounds, migratory patterns, and from each other.¹⁶ The traditional Indian lifestyle was also challenged by rapid linking of the West to the East by means of rail networks, market systems and extractive

¹⁴ David Michael Smith, “Counting the Dead: Estimating the Loss of Life in the Indigenous Holocaust, 1492-Present,” 7, <https://www.se.edu/native-american/wp-content/uploads/sites/49/2019/09/A-NAS-2017-Proceedings-Smith.pdf>.

¹⁵ James West Davidson et al., *Nation of Nations* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1990), 284.

¹⁶ Nail, *Theory of Border*, 184.

industries. The reformers relied strongly on the spread of education, citizenship, and allotments to force the Indians out of their lands.¹⁷

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorised the government to grant Indian tribes lands west of the Mississippi. The decision was met with confrontation by many of the tribes, eventually leading to armed conflicts, the most forceful of which was the Seminole War of 1835-1842. The Seminoles refused to abandon their lands in Florida, which resulted in the fierce war costing the United States more than \$20 million, and the lives of more than 1,500 soldiers.¹⁸ Though no peace treaty was reached, by 1842 the war was over with most Seminoles relocated from Florida to Oklahoma.

In the decade following 1830, around 100,000 Eastern Indians were moved to the West. This forceful relocation of Indian tribes came to be known as the Trail of Tears, as around 15,000 Indians died on the way due to exposure, starvation and disease.

The most violent confrontations with Indians took place in the second half of the nineteenth century when the white settlers became attracted to the gold and silver discoveries in the lands beyond the Mississippi. The Indians who inhabited the Great Plains interfered with the settlers' ambitions of gold mining, which led to a series of genocidal campaigns, including wars and massacres of the indigenous population.

A strategic move towards the elimination of Plains Indians by the United States government was slaughter of the bison. As the principal source of food and raw material, buffalo was the most important element of the Indian lifeline enabling the tribes to remain their sovereignty.¹⁹ By promoting bison hunting the U. S. government intended to weaken the Indian population. As a

¹⁷ Davidson et al., 690.

¹⁸ "The Seminole War," *Florida Department of State*, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://dos.myflorida.com/florida-facts/florida-history/seminole-history/the-seminole-wars/>

¹⁹ Adrian Jawort, "Genocide by Other Means: U. S. Army Slaughtered Buffalo on Plains Indian Wars," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, accessed July 8, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160702224953/http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/05/09/genocide-other-means-us-army-slaughtered-buffalo-plains-indian-wars-30798>.

crucial element of culture and lifestyle for native Americans, buffalo was hunted almost to extinction by the American soldiers in the second half of the nineteenth century. By 1893, the number of buffalo was reduced to less than four hundred, leaving Indians no other choice than to move to reservations, as they became unable to provide for their families in their former territories.²⁰

The weakening of Indian population by means of buffalo slaughter gave advantage to the American army during the Indian Wars which intensified in the late nineteenth century. The growth of settlers' sentiment for Indian Removal from the Great Plains led to a series of military conflicts, the most fierce of which were the Sioux Wars between the United States and the Sioux tribes. The major engagements of the war included the Grattan Massacre in 1854, Fetterman Fight in 1866, Battle of the Rosebud in 1876, Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. The Wounded Knee Battle, the final armed conflict between the U.S. army and the Sioux, occurred on December 29, 1890, and resulted in the massacre of 300 Indian men, women and children. The massacre at Wounded Knee came to represent the end of Indian wars and the beginning of reservation era.

American westward expansion, romantically considered the destiny of the United States, in reality stood for a violent destruction of Native American population. The few tribes that survived though the American frontier were forever deprived of the grandeur of their territories and traditional ways of life, forced to remain in the specially designed reservations.

1.3 The Frontier Myth, or the Myth of the West

The American West can hardly be perceived as merely a geographic or historic region. It should rather be defined as a continuous process of social, cultural and technological interactions,

²⁰ Jawort, 'Genocide by Other Means.'

which is ultimately inseparable from its mythological aspect.²¹ Richard Slotkin defined myths as “stories drawn from a society’s history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolising that society’s ideology and of dramatising its moral consciousness.”²² Translating a historical event or period into a myth results in a simplification of various historical complexities and contradictions, and leads to the creation of nationally significant heroes. The mythical narratives are then used as powerful tools to unite nations culturally — emphasising the common heritage of the people — and politically — justifying certain events, e.g. Vietnam War in the twentieth century was often referred to as the New Frontier.

When Frederick Jackson Turner produced his speech on the significance of the Western frontier in 1893, he transcribed the history of the frontier into a myth, formulating one of the most important narratives of the American nation. The Frontier myth emerged from the idea of the West being a land of endless opportunity and freedom, a place where people could reinvent themselves and start anew. People’s ideas and imagination were fuelled by the works of writers and artists who popularised the romanticised West in their works.

Central to the Frontier myth were Western heroes — courageous frontiersmen exploring the land, fighting Indian savages, destined to achieve any set goal. Among the most famous Western heroes were: Daniel Boone, a backwoodsman, whose adventures in the West were transcribed into a myth by John Filson, Christopher “Kit” Carson, a frontiersman depicted largely in dime novels as a man capable of achieving any task, and Buffalo Bill, an American soldier and showman who contributed to the spread of the Frontier myth through his *Wild West shows*. Western heroes were usually forged by means of exaggerations and idealisations of their achievements which might, or might as well not, have occurred in real life. The heroes were becoming such during their own

²¹ Martin Procházka, *Ruins in the New World* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia Books, 2012), 117.

²² Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5.

lifetime, as the stories of their adventures and glorious achievements were spreading across the country through tall tales and dime novels.

In the twentieth century, the Western myth began to be largely represented in cinematography, giving way to the emergence of the Western genre. Western movies depicted life in the West with cowboys, outlaws, dusty salons, savage Indians and hardworking miners. Similarly to the works of art and literature, cinematographic representation of the West differed from the historical realities of the frontier, as it overlooked the environmental destruction, indigenous massacres and violence towards other ethnic groups.

The Western myth allowed the violence that took place at the frontier to gain a noble meaning as it was considered necessary for achieving the nation's divine mission. The Frontier myth, along with the doctrine of the Manifest Destiny, enabled the shift of focus towards the achievements, rather than failures and the negative influences on the defeated parties. It was a crucial factor in the establishment of American national identity, as the myth represented the historical heritage of the nation, emphasising such American traits as exceptionalism, individualism and strenuousness.

Chapter 2: Manifest Destiny

2.1 Origins and Influences

The acquisition of the western lands by the United States was justified by the concept of the Manifest Destiny – the idea that Americans and their government were destined to establish political control over much of North America and to stretch their territories from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. The term “manifest destiny” was first used by a Democrat journalist John L. O’Sullivan in 1845. In his article on the annexation of the Republic of Texas to the United States of America, O’Sullivan wrote that it was Americans’ “manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”²³ The term coined by O’Sullivan was favoured by historians, as it allowed them to replace the complexities of American ideology, federal policy, demographic dominance, settler action and military conquests with one simple paradigm.²⁴ While Manifest Destiny was never adopted as an official policy of the United States, it encompassed the idea of racial superiority, American exceptionalism, nationalism, and was used to justify the U.S. military expansionism.

The beliefs contained by the concept of the Manifest Destiny had begun to develop long before 1845. As early as 1630, a Puritan leader John Winthrop described the Massachusetts Bay Colony as “a city upon a hill”, and expressed his belief that the actions of Pilgrims of the Plymouth Colony and the Puritan immigrants who followed them to America were blessed by God himself.²⁵ Almost a hundred years later, in 1726, the Irish philosopher George Berkeley wrote the poem “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America” which presented America as the

²³ John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no.1 (July-August 1845): 6, <https://pdcrodas.webs.ull.es/anglo/OSullivanAnnexation.pdf>.

²⁴ Andrew C. Isenberg and Thomas Richards Jr., “Alternative Wests: Rethinking Manifest Destiny,” *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 1 (February 2017): 17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26419725>.

²⁵ Shane Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 14.

endpoint of human government and culture.²⁶ Berkeley's line "Westward the course of Empire takes its way"²⁷ suggested the inevitability of the America's westward expansion and contributed to the shaping of American nationalism.

In 1776, Thomas Paine, a journalist and a political thinker, published his tract *Common Sense* in which he argued for American independence from Great Britain. Paine wrote that the Americans had it in their power to begin the world again, as God had granted them His affection:

The Almighty hath implanted in us these inextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes. They are the guardians of his image in our hearts. They distinguish us from the herd of common animals. The social compact would dissolve, and justice be extirpated the earth, or have only a casual existence were we callous to the touches of affection. ²⁸

The independence from Britain which had been predicted by Paine reassured the Americans that the intents and actions of the United States were guided by Providence. The growth of the country's population after the Declaration of Independence in 1776 fuelled the desire for territorial expansion. The American westward movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century was justified by John Quincy Adams who, in 1811, wrote:

North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs. For the common happiness of them all, for their peace and prosperity, I believe it is indispensable that they should be associated in one federal Union.²⁹

The course of American expansion in the nineteenth century was set by the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States from France in 1803. The Louisiana Purchase extended the Western limits of the United States which had been earlier defined by the Mississippi River. As the United

²⁶ Procházka, *Ruins in the New World*, 22.

²⁷ George Berkeley, "On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America," *Bartleby*, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.bartleby.com/270/13/15.html>

²⁸ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Philadelphia: W. & T. Bradford, 1776), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm#ability>.

²⁹ John Quincy Adams, "To John Adams from John Quincy Adams, 31 August 1811," *National Archives*, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-2020>.

States secured islands of New Orleans and the West bank of the Mississippi, the spirit of national pride was strengthened, and American political leaders became determined to take more actions to fulfil the nation's noble destiny.³⁰ However, the Americans' opinion on the westward expansion differed. While some believed that the U.S. had the right for the whole North American continent, others were convinced that it was a small republic that had been destined for the American nation. The argument the latter used was that the rivers and mountains were barriers, impassable obstacles rather than temporary hindrances; the secessionist used geography to maintain the logic of two U. S. republics on the continent.³¹ As there was no unity in the ways the Americans thought of the westward expansion, the nation was weakened by the division in political views. Andrew C. Isenberg and Thomas Richards Jr. argued that

When O'Sullivan coined the term 'manifest destiny' in 1845 he hoped to replace these weaknesses with an illusion of strength. He meant manifest destiny not only as a description of the expansion of the U.S. nation but as an assertion of U.S. nationalism.³²

The most active supporters of the Manifest Destiny practiced land speculation and were the proponents of Indian removal.³³ The doctrine was directly connected to the idea of economic prosperity which at the time relied heavily on settling and cultivating the untamed lands. Since Indians failed to use the American soil rationally they were believed to not hold title to the territories they inhabited.³⁴

While a form of Indian removal was first proposed by Thomas Jefferson, it was under Andrew Jackson's administration that it came to fruition.³⁵ The Indian Removal Act was signed on May 28,

³⁰ M. B. Deopujari, "America's Manifest Destiny & Mexico," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 28 (1966): 489, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44140483>.

³¹ Isenberg and Richards, "Alternative Wests," 16.

³² Isenberg and Richards, "Alternative Wests," 16.

³³ "Manifest Destiny and Indian Removal," *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Manifest-Destiny-and-Indian-Removal.pdf>.

³⁴ Alice Beck Kehoe, "Manifest Destiny as the Order of Nature," *Nature and Antiquities* (University of Arizona Press), 190, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183gz2c.13>.

³⁵ "Manifest Destiny and Indian Removal".

1830, and authorised the president to grant Indian tribes unsettled western prairie off the territories of frontier.³⁶ The removal was allegedly to benefit both white and Indians:

It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilised, and Christian community.³⁷

Even though Jackson promised to provide the removed Indians with all the necessary supplies such as clothing, arms, ammunitions, and maintain the support for at least a year after their arrival to the new territory, the removal act was met with resistance and opposition from many Indian tribes. By 1835, Jackson became less conciliatory when speaking of Indian affairs — having faced the opposition, the President claimed it to be a fact that the Indians could not live in contact with a civilised community and prosper.³⁸

The forced relocation of the Indian tribes in 1830s, which most severely affected the southeastern tribes of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, and Seminole, came to be known as the Trail of Tears. The term invokes the collective suffering of Indians during the removal era, and refers to the physical trail that consisted of several overland routes and one water route that stretched across portions of nine states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee).³⁹ Despite Jackson's promise, the tribes were not sufficiently provided with the necessary supplies which resulted in many Indians perishing on the forced migration due to disease and starvation. It is estimated that out of 100,000 indigenous people that were subject to forceful relocation, 15,000 died during the journey west.⁴⁰

³⁶ "Indian Removal Act," *Britannica*, accessed June 29, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-Removal-Act>.

³⁷ Andrew Jackson, "Andrew Jackson's Speech to Congress on Indian Removal," *National Park Service*, accessed July 3, 2021, https://www.nps.gov/museum/tmc/MANZ/handouts/Andrew_Jackson_Annual_Message.pdf.

³⁸ "Manifest Destiny and Indian Removal".

³⁹ Elizabeth Prine Pauls, "Trail of Tears," *Britannica*, accessed 1 July, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Trail-of-Tears>.

⁴⁰ Pauls, "Trail of Tears".

Besides the forceful relocation of Indians, Manifest Destiny was ultimately used to justify the war with Mexico that followed the annexation of Texas in 1845. Mexico saw the annexation of Texas as an act of aggression from the side of the United States, and broke all diplomatic relations with it.⁴¹ The conflict over the land between the Sabine and the Rio Grande rivers continued, and resulted in the Mexican-American War which lasted from 1846 to 1848. The United States characterised the war as a divine instrument for spreading American ideals to the Pacific coast.⁴² According to M. B. Deopujari, Mexico fell victim of the Manifest Destiny – an imperialistic concept that was essentially the expression of militant nationalism.⁴³ The acquisition of former Mexican provinces on the Pacific coast revived American patriotism, and meant the fulfilment of the Americans' Manifest Destiny.

2.2 Expression in Popular Culture

Even though the doctrine was primarily used to justify political decisions of the United States' government, it was crucial for shaping the national identity of the country with rapidly growing territories and population. The fulfilment of the Manifest Destiny ultimately meant the emergence and strengthening of such characteristic features of the American nation as exceptionalism, determinism and opportunism. The doctrine found its way to masses by being visualised in the works of nineteenth century artists, whose illustrations of the Manifest Destiny were strengthening the Americans' understanding of it. In their paintings, frontier artists depicted the new realities of American life. The artworks of the era were educating people on the specifics of the frontier life, promoting the wonders of Western nature, and emphasising the importance of the expansion on the national scale.

⁴¹ Robert W. Johannsen and Pedro Santoni, "America's Forgotten War," *The Wilson Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (Spring, 1996): 98, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40259181>.

⁴² Deopujari, "America's Manifest Destiny & Mexico," 6.

⁴³ Deopujari, "America's Manifest Destiny & Mexico," 7.

The nineteenth-century Western American artists recognised their mission as chroniclers of the changing West, documenting the events of settlement and industrialisation of the former wilderness.⁴⁴ The first generation of the frontier artists derived inspiration for their paintings from Western expeditions they participated in. Artists like George Catlin, Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, and Frederic Remington, who were widely published in the East, encouraged westward settlement by depicting the mysterious and magnificent Western lands.⁴⁵ Late nineteenth-century artists shifted their focus towards the changes that had taken place: they visualised the spread of civilisation and the transition of Indian culture from self-sufficient and independent to the defeated one.⁴⁶

The nineteenth century Western paintings illustrate the vibrancy and complexity of the West before it hardened into myth — they depict the rolling frontier line that changed the meaning of the West claiming it to be the future of the American nation.⁴⁷ Yet, the spread of civilisation and progress across the American continent went hand in hand with violence, death and the attempts of deracination of the West's native inhabitants. Artists like John Gast and Emanuel Leutze illustrated the process of the westward expansion with emphasis on the pioneers fulfilling the American Manifest Destiny, fortifying the American's sense of national unity and exceptionalism.

The concept of the Manifest Destiny also found expression in earlier Western artworks that focused on the depiction of the specific nature of the frontier life. Regional artist, like George Caleb Bingham, introduced Easterners to people's lifestyle on the frontier, emphasising the sense of liberty and democratic order in the area. Landscape artists like Thomas Cole and Asher Brown

⁴⁴ Patricia Janis Broder, "Introduction," *Great Paintings of the Old American West* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1979), 7.

⁴⁵ "About Western Art," *The James Museum*, accessed July 1, 2021, <https://thejamesmuseum.org/about-western-art/>.

⁴⁶ Broder, "Introduction," 8.

⁴⁷ Barbara S. Groseclose, *Nineteenth-century American Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 246.

Durand depicted the grandeur of the American nature, while amplifying the advantages and disadvantages of spreading technological progress and taming the wilderness.

American Western Art — a genre defined primarily by its subject matter rather than style — played a crucial role in constructing the people’s ideas of the West while fortifying the confidence in the Manifest Destiny. Characterised by the union of romanticism and realism, the nineteenth-century western art aimed at documenting the details of costume, artefact, and physiognomic likeness while at the same time capturing the sense of the spirit of the West.⁴⁸ According to Patricia Janis Broder, the art of the old American West is among the most valuable cultural treasures as it doesn't only record the visual changes on the face of the American continent, but also testifies to the changing ideals and beliefs of the American people.⁴⁹ The following subchapters of this paper present a closer look at some of the most prominent artworks of the nineteenth century that visualised the Manifest Destiny through different genre and style.

***2.3 Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way* by Emanuel Leutze**

In one of his speeches, John Quincy Adams claimed that the whole North America appeared to be destined by Divine Providence “to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religion and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs.”⁵⁰ This idea found expression in Emanuel Leutze’s mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way* currently displayed in the House of Representatives’ chamber in the United States Capitol Building. Painted in 1861, the mural is one of the most notable

⁴⁸ Broder, “Introduction,” 8.

⁴⁹ Broder, “Introduction,” 9.

⁵⁰ Matthew Baigell, “Territory, Race, Religion: Images of Manifest Destiny,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1990): 12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3109013>.

illustrations of the Manifest Destiny that visualises the unity, power and history of the American nation.

Born in Germany in 1816, Emanuel Leutze moved to Virginia with his parents at the age of nine. Growing up, Leutze was receiving instruction in art from John Rubens Smith, until in 1841 he went for further study to Düsseldorf. Leutze resided in Europe for over a decade, improving his artistic skills in hopes of receiving commissions for work in the Capitol.⁵¹ But it was not until 1861 that Leutze signed a contract with Captain Meigs to paint a fresco on the topic of emigration. Leutze based his first sketch of *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* on such thorough studies that the trip he made to the West after the commission had been confirmed, to gain first hand information about the country, did not necessitate any important changes in the sketch.⁵²

Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way depicts a crowd of pioneers crossing the continent towards the golden land of California. The portrayed figures represent authentic American types: frontiersmen, farmers, pioneers.⁵³ In the centre, a large father figure is depicted accompanied by his wife and children. His right hand is pointing towards the promised land. The mother, with a baby on her lap and her hands folded in prayer, is dressed in white, red and blue, representing the American Madonna. The scene on the right side of the mural includes wagons, children, women and men undertaking a difficult journey: many vehicles are being destroyed, animals perish and some pioneers die.

The centre of the painting represent the turning point of the journey — the ones who have survived can see the destined land from the peaks of the rocks. The painting thus depicts a divide between the suffering of the dark past, and the promising future.⁵⁴ The grim, dark colors on the right

⁵¹ Raymond Louis Stehle, “‘Westward Ho!’: The History of Leutze’s Fresco in the Capitol,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 60/62 (1960/1962): 307, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40067235>.

⁵² Stehle, “Westward Ho!” 310.

⁵³ Richard Murray, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way,” Youtube video posted by *Smithsonian Education*, 4:07 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yfkvIQqu7s>.

⁵⁴ Murray, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”.

side are contrasted with the bright, golden light on the left. The land the pioneers are heading to is depicted as pure and uninhabited, this is signified by two men cutting down trees to make a path for the newcomers. Their final destination — San Francisco Bay — is painted at the bottom border of the mural, picturing also the portraits of William Clark, an American explorer who, along with Meriwether Lewis, led the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803-1806 reaching the Pacific waters in Oregon, and a backwoodsman Daniel Boone who initiated the settlement of Kentucky, and was one of the first folk heroes of the American West.

The left and right borders of the painting link the scene of the painting to the significant historical and mythological figures and events of the world. The left border shows the Three Wise Men who visited Jesus in Bethlehem, Moses crossing the Red Sea, and the Greek Jason and the Argonauts sailing home with the golden Fleece. The right border, in its turn, depicts the portrait of Christopher Columbus, Hercules creating the pillars of Gibraltar the American replica of which is the San Francisco Bay, and the spies of Eshcol carrying the fruit of the Promised Land. The depiction of the Israeli spies with a cluster of grapes connects the conquering of the West with Jewish mythology, comparing the colonisation with the return of Israelites to the Promise Land. By making references to prominent historical and mythological figures, the painting suggests the spirituality and righteousness of the United States' westward expansion.

Juxtaposing the images of suffering and success, the past and the future, the heroes of the Old World and the discoverers of the New World, Leutze's painting portrays the transformation of the Western history into a myth which synthesises Ancient Greek, Judaic, and Christian mythologies. The painting symbolises the ideas conveyed by the Manifest Destiny, illustrating the unity and strength of the pioneers, while at the same time depicting nature and Indians as ultimate enemies that have to be fought on the way to spreading progress and civilisation.

2.4 *American Progress* by John Gast

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States had become a major industrial power. The American economic and technological systems were contrasted with the traditional European ones, which were now viewed as less efficient.⁵⁵ Progress was defined as an application of technology for both physical and moral improvement of the human race. While physical improvements included better communications, electric power and entertainment, the moral improvement meant the reduction or cure of human suffering which was made possible by medical advancements.⁵⁶ The spread of technological innovations for the benefit of the humanity was one of the main objectives of the Manifest Destiny doctrine. In his book on the American progress *Dominance by Design*, Michael Adas writes:

Many nineteenth-century advocates of expansion envisioned the drive across the continent as part of a larger global progression that would soon encompass societies more worthy than those of the rapidly disappearing Indians who had proved incapable of fulfilling the promise offered by the emissaries from the city upon the hill. [...] The ideological imperatives that nature was to be mastered, resources exploited to the fullest, and technologies invented as these enterprises required had become defining sources of Americans' sense of themselves as an exceptional people.⁵⁷

The American political and educational institutions, democratic way of life and rapid technological progress were shaping American national identity in the nineteenth century. The United States' citizens were self-consciously embracing their exceptionalism, believing that their form of government was superior to any in history and that they were a chosen people.⁵⁸ Since they managed to make use of all the natural resources of their land and succeeded in achieving high

⁵⁵ Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 85.

⁵⁶ "Asher Durand, *Progress* (1853)" Arthur Chandler, accessed April 17, 2021, <http://www.arthurchandler.com/durand-progress>.

⁵⁷ Adas, *Dominance by Design*, 74.

⁵⁸ Peter S. Onus, "American Exceptionalism and National Identity," *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012) : 79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/664594>.

technological and social progress, the Americans considered it their duty before God to spread knowledge and experience across the whole continent.

The illustrations of the Manifest Destiny often included the depiction of physical movement of pioneers, as well as an allegorical progress of American nation. One of the most prominent allegorical portrayals of the westward expansion is John Gast's painting *American Progress* which was commissioned by a publisher of a popular western travel guidebook *Croftt's Western World* George Croftt in 1872. Croftt wanted to publish a chromolithograph which would include various aspects of the Western frontier, and express its development in space and time; his design of the painting was drawn from his personal experience, and aimed at illustrating the theme of continental infilling and the procession of civilisation.⁵⁹ Art historians say that even though as far as art is concerned *American Progress* is not a work of great distinction, it has a tremendous importance as a popular allegory which

amalgamates the idea of America's Manifest Destiny with an old republican symbol (the goddess Liberty, now identified as Progress) and associates progress with technological change [...]. The painting clearly conveys the dominant culture's attitude towards nature, Native Americans, and, more generally, linear change and improvement through science and technology.⁶⁰

Similarly to many paintings of the Manifest Destiny era which reinforced the westward historical, political and psychological orientation of the nation, *American Progress* is meant to be read as a map with the West on the left and the East on the right.⁶¹ Gast's painting depicts the American land stretching from the Atlantic ocean in the East to the Pacific waters in the West, with the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains in between the two coast. All the people, animals, cars and trains are moving in the westward. The pioneers are led by an angelic female figure —

⁵⁹ Valerie J. Fifer, *American Progress: the Growth of the Transport, Tourist, and Information Industries in the Nineteenth-Century West, Seen Through the Life and Times of George A. Croftt, Pioneer and Publicist of the Transcontinental Age* (Chester: Globe Pequot Press, 1988), 203.

⁶⁰ Merritt Roe Smith and Leo Marx, *Does Technology Drive History: the Dilemma of Technological Determinism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 10.

⁶¹ Roger Cushing Aikin, "Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation," *American Art* 14, no. 3 (2000): 80, www.jstor.org/stable/3109364.

Liberty — who holds the innovative telegraph wire in her left hand and a school book in her right hand, expressing the Americans' goal of spreading education. The angelic figure of Liberty disperses the clouds as she moves forward, bringing the light of progress and knowledge to the wild western lands. The territory behind her is already enlightened, enjoying the fruit of civilisation. In contrast to the escaping Indian tribes depicted in the left corner of the painting, immigrants are depicted as invincible, while the frontier prose accounts speak of sickly, yellow-faced pioneers, suffering from diseases brought on by insalubrious climates and the rigours of travel.⁶²

On her way westward, Liberty pushes Indians and bison out of the picture. “The star of the Empire” which Liberty bears on her forehead is too much for the natives — they flee from the wondrous vision.⁶³ This detail represents the way in which the idea of progress in the nineteenth century America was used to eliminate native Americans who were seen as hostile savages, a threat for civilisation. The mass killing of buffalo by the U.S. Army was a means of removing Plain Indians from their lands — the slaughter of bison left the tribes without the most important source of food and domestic supplies. The depiction of the escaping Indians and animals indirectly symbolises the genocide of Native Americans caused by the slaughtering of buffalo, their forceful relocations and reoccurring wars between the tribes and the settlers.

American Progress portrays a scene of promise — a wilderness which is about to be converted into paradise by means of advanced machinery.⁶⁴ It celebrates technology, and chronologically depicts various stages of the development from stagecoaches to wagons and stream trains. According to Valerie Fifer, Crofutt was well aware of the lack of uniform progression of economic development and transport technology inherent to highly contrasted landscapes and frontiers of the West, which inspired him to commission a painting that incorporated hunters,

⁶² Groseclose, *Nineteenth-century American Art*, 166.

⁶³ Smith and Marx, *Does Technology Drive History*, 9.

⁶⁴ Robert Mugerauer, *Interpreting Environments: Tradition, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 83.

prospectors, farmers, early cabins, covers wagons, stagecoaches, Pony Express, and transcontinental railroads.⁶⁵ Progress is thus portrayed as a natural, inevitable process of technological evolution.

John Gast's *American Progress* visualises a number of processes that were contributing to the shaping of American national identity. The advance of civilisation in the East amplified the idea of American exceptionalism, which, being used in the Western environment, ultimately resulted in imperialism and racism towards Native Americans. Gast's painting, considered one of the most important representations of the Manifest Destiny, depicts the ways in which the doctrine aimed to unite the East and West of the United States, and was strengthening the belief in the American nation's social, political and economic superiority.

2.5 *Progress* by Asher Brown Durand

The process of American progress found expression in many landscape paintings of the Manifest Destiny era, the creators of which desired to portray the ways in which civilisation was taking over the wilderness. One of the most famous landscape paintings of the Manifest Destiny is *Progress* painted by Asher B. Durand in 1853 which, unlike most of his paintings that focus on depicting the grandeur of pure, untamed nature, illustrates the advance of technological progress in the former Indian territories. In his painting, Durand expressed the ideas of the Manifest Destiny through poetic representation of nature, attention to detail and the use of celestial tones of light. Commissioned by a broker Charles Gould, who later became treasurer of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad, *Progress* is symbolic of American industrial growth and power.⁶⁶ The painting is said to

⁶⁵ Fifer, *American Progress*, 203.

⁶⁶ Susan Danly and Leo Marx, *The Railroad in American Art: Representation of Technological Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 53.

be “an uncharacteristically bold endorsement of the Manifest Destiny belief in the United States expansion to the Pacific”.⁶⁷

Asher B. Durand was associated with the Hudson River School — a group of the nineteenth century landscape artists whose works illustrated the uniqueness of idealised American nature under the influence of Romanticism. In his landscape paintings, Durand aimed at portraying the glory of God through nature. The artist considered it his goal to depict the communication of the divine moral truths within external landscapes.⁶⁸ While most of Durand’s work emphasise the beauty of untamed nature, *Progress* puts the focus on the advance of civilisation in contrast to the innocence of wilderness. The painting shows an optimistic vision of industrialisation processes, and it is thus often viewed in opposition to Thomas Coles’ *The Course of Empire* which expresses a more negative perspective on the expansion of the United States.

The landscape in *Progress* can be divided into two contrasting parts: the advance of civilisation in the background and the decay of the old order in the foreground. The horizon in the centre of the landscape is illuminated by celestial light which confirms the presence of Almighty in the land and his blessing of the pioneers’ actions. Americans are moving in stagecoaches from the lower right corner towards the bay, following the road of progress. In the distance, the city and its industrial developments merge into the illuminated sky, water and mountains. On the left side of the painting, a group of Indians are watching the progress. They are depicted in a savage state, with nature around them painted in dark, grim colors of decay. Critics believe, that *Progress* depicts three historical periods of the United States: Indians in the foreground represent the past; the light of dawn in the centre stands for the present — the inhabitation of the land by Euro-Americans; the

⁶⁷ Grace Glueck, “Communing With Nature on a Grand Scale,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/30/arts/design/30dura.html?searchResultPosition=2>.

⁶⁸ Donald A. Ringe “Painting’ as Poem in the Hudson River Aesthetic,” *American Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 1960): 77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2710191>.

telegraph poles and the traveler at the bottom of the road symbolise the America's future.⁶⁹ Provided with a spacial location on canvas, future is embodied in vast territories that are brought under visual and symbolic control.⁷⁰

The use of celestial light in *Progress* represents the Divine presence and God's blessing. It affirms the Americans' moral and legal right to former wilderness due to their intelligence and determinism. The native Americans who neither managed to subdue the land nor make it bloom are portrayed as living in a timeless, ahistorical present, without any sense of development.⁷¹ The forest that surrounds Indians is in decay — the trees are broken and dry, there is no soil for harvest. They are standing in the darkness, passively observing the embodiment of progress.

Progress is said to tell a purely American story “out of true American facts, portrayed with true American feeling.”⁷² The painting thus visualises “American” as synonymous to progressive, advancing and developing. By neglecting side effects of rapid industrial development such as deforestation and pollution, *Progress* creates an idealised idea of the American present and future. Yet, the presence of Indians in the picture adds a melancholic tone to the scene. It proves the idea that the Old has to be sacrificed for the New — the better — to advance.

The Manifest Destiny artworks were usually presenting a tailored, idealised version of the frontier, emphasising the merriment of life and the divine presence in the acquired land. But as seen in the examples of John Gast's *American Progress* and Asher B. Durand's *Progress*, artists did not restrain from including Native American figures. Yet, in both Durand and Gast Native Americans are merely part of the America's dark past who are neither trying to become part of the present, nor are they invited to do so. Thus, the representation of Indians in the nineteenth-century paintings

⁶⁹ David Park Curry, *American Dreams: Paintings and Decorative Arts from the Warner Collection* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1997): 31.

⁷⁰ Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press), 76.

⁷¹ Baigell, “Territory, Race, Religion,” 17.

⁷² Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze*, 75.

illustrate the ways in which the desire for territorial expansion led to the growth of racism within the American nation.

2.6 *The Jolly Flatboatman* by George Caleb Bingham

The westward expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century created a distinct social and cultural difference between the East and the West. The expansion complicated the relationship between local and national culture, and put forward the question of how to sustain a sense of shared identity across the enormous territory. Angela Miller states that one of the solutions to the rising issue was to imbue the region with national significance – proclaim the West as the future seat of empire.⁷³ In pursuit of this goal, American artists of the nineteenth century were encouraged to depict the scenes of Western life and nature. As one of the most prominent regional artists, George Caleb Bingham played a crucial part in spreading the romanticised visions of the newly acquired territories. While Bingham’s artworks are not direct representations of the Manifest Destiny — unlike Gast’s or Leutze’s — they contributed to shaping nation’s idea of what influence the doctrine had on people’s everyday life, emphasising the simplicity and merriment of residing in the newly acquired territories.

The national recognition came to George Caleb Bingham with his genre scenes that featured life on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. The representatives of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C believe that Bingham’s lively compositions still remain the most important portrayals of life at the gateway to the Western frontier.⁷⁴

⁷³ Angela Miller, “The Mechanisms of the Market and the Invention of Western Regionalism: The Example of George Caleb Bingham,” *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1992): 9, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1360485>

⁷⁴ “George Caleb Bingham’s Great American Masterpiece, *The Jolly Flatboatmen*, is Acquired by the National Gallery of Art, Washington,” *National Gallery of Art*, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.nga.gov/press/2015/acquisition-bingham.html>.

Born in Virginia in 1811, George Caleb Bingham was brought up in Missouri after his family moved to Howard County in 1819. Bingham began his career as a self-taught portraitist, and it was not until 1840s that the artist began improvising with genre subjects. His vivid representations of the unique ways of the Western life gained for him the title of “The Missouri Artist” in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The society of the Western frontier was a new, culturally original social body which demanded new forms of vernacular expression. Yet, the easterners believed that the West’s assimilation into the nation involved the imposition of a normative frame of reference within which local elements could be situated – for that reason they crafted an image of the West and the frontier that suited their needs.⁷⁵ As a westerner, Bingham realized that his artistic success was fully dependent upon the Eastern Establishment. The artist had to accommodate his subjects and style to the wishes of the American Art Union, an organisation responsible for the promotion of fine arts in the United States, which encouraged paintings that depicted happy scenes of Western everyday life and engaged the viewer without evoking painful emotions.⁷⁶

Bingham’s *The Jolly Flatboatmen* was painted in 1845-46 and purchased by the American Art Union in the year of 1846. The painting was an immediate success, and the AAU even had it engraved for their membership and distributed to around ten thousand members around the country.⁷⁷ *The Jolly Flatboatmen* is an oil painting that depicts a group of men who are relaxing after the hard work of rowing the flatboat. Bingham built up the composition by combining the various sketches of attitude he had observed in the behaviour of the westerners.⁷⁸ Even though every man is portrayed as a unique figure with a different facial expression, pose and mood, they all

⁷⁵ Miller, “The Mechanisms of the Market,” 3.

⁷⁶ Stephen C. Behrendt, “Originality and Influence in George Caleb Bingham’s Art,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23530572>.

⁷⁷ Fern Helen Rusk, *George Caleb Bingham: The Missouri Artist* (The Hugh Stephens Co., 1917), 34.

⁷⁸ Rusk, *George Caleb Bingham*, 35.

contribute to a unified triangular arrangement. While in reality the flatboat workers were usually brutal, rough men, Bingham's characters are depicted as positive, merry people who are enjoying their days on the river. The men are singing and dancing, using a saucepan instead of a drum which adds a comical effect to the scene. The painting presents a friendly view of the West and expresses optimism about the possibilities of the region.

The Jolly Flatboatmen does not use strongly contrasting colors which contributes to the harmonious mood of the painting. The depicted scene combines the dynamism of the dancing man and the elegant stability of the scenery – the perfectly still river allows the reflection of the cloudless blue sky. While the lively men represent the liberty and freedom of spirit that the West offers, the tranquil river and forests amplify the serene beauty of American nature. Angela Miller delineated the relation between Bingham's balanced compositions and his political views:

properties of restraint, stability, balance, order, and hierarchy parallel the ideals and social motives espoused by his beloved Whig party. His pyramids contained the variety of western types within an overall order in a manner that is structurally analogous to how the federal perspective of the East contained and organized the heterogeneity of western life.⁷⁹

Created primarily for the Eastern audience, *The Jolly Flatboatmen* features the river as an important nationalistic element. Midwestern rivers were crucial forces for the westward expansion as they connected the East to the West and enabled trade between the regions. With the lack of technological infrastructure in the West, the physical and economic integration of an expanding nation depended upon rivers. The flow of market goods through the Mississippi and Missouri rivers created economic interdependencies that drew the West out of regional isolation and tied it to eastern institutions.⁸⁰ The ports on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers were the subjects of pride for the westerners, and the boatmen were seen as heroes. Unlike in Bingham's balanced paintings,

⁷⁹ Miller, "The Mechanisms of the Market," 10.

⁸⁰ Miller, "The Mechanisms of the Market," 8.

the Midwestern rivers imposed many obstacles and dangers. The major obstructions were snags and sawyers which could pierce and sink boats causing damage of property or even loss of human life.⁸¹

Bingham was committed to economic progress and internal improvements of the Western regions.⁸² By idealising the images of the West in his paintings he was encouraging people to investigate the new territories. Franklin Kelly, the chief curator of the National Gallery of art, believes that *The Jolly Flatboatman* is one of the most important American paintings, as it was created to support the notion that “the West was there for us to take, for American expansion.”⁸³ Bingham’s portrayal of the flatboatmen promoted the national expansion and the ideology of the Manifest Destiny by constructing the ideal of the free, independent, hard-working and democratic identity of an American citizen.

2.7 Afterword

As one of the most important ideologies of the United States, the Manifest Destiny fostered the development of new themes in American art which amplified the national character of American people. The selection of paintings discussed above show that the doctrine found expression in various artistic genres reaching audiences of different social ranks and statuses: from politicians in the Capitol to the members of American Art Union and the readers of western guidebooks. The visual representations of the Manifest Destiny enabled a rapid promotion of its objectives by making the perception of such complex notions as civilisation, progress and westward expansion more accessible. The examination of the Manifest Destiny artworks demonstrates that even though

⁸¹ Nancy Rash, “George Caleb Bingham’s ‘Lighter Relieving a Steamboat Aground’,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2, no.2 (Spring, 1988): 22, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3108949>.

⁸² Rash, “George Caleb Bingham’s Lighter Relieving,” 23.

⁸³ Randy Kennedy, “National Gallery Buys George Caleb Bingham’s ‘The Jolly Flatboatmen’,” *The New York Times*, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/arts/design/national-gallery-buys-george-caleb-binghams-the-jolly-flatboatmen.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

they aimed at amplifying the national importance of the West, the context within which they were produced prove that the significance of the Western regions was always contingent upon the Eastern approval.

Chapter 3: Disentangling of the Western Myth in *Roughing It* by Mark Twain

3.1 Regional Literature and the Frontier

The American territorial expansion of the nineteenth-century accompanied by the rapid technological progress entailed a prominent transformation of the American national consciousness. There were two co-existing responses towards the newly emerged circumstances. Firstly, the increased importance of industrialised cities evoked a collective sense of nostalgia for rural life. Big cities produced a strong sense of anxiety, causing many people to believe that “the source of national wholeness” resided in the countryside.⁸⁴ At the same time, the settling of the Western territories necessitated the recognition of new ways of life and new emerging cultures. The need to normalise the differences and place them within the national context increased the importance of regional literature the goal of which was to find the innovative ways of engaging with social concerns and novel cultural developments. According to Stephanie Foote,

Nation building, immigration, and imperialism demanded mechanisms for making sense of foreigners, or for assimilating new kinds of people within a narrative of American identity. Regional writing was a genre that was especially interested in representing non-normative communities or cultures to a national audience.⁸⁵

Regional writing, which aimed at nationalising the social and political differences of new areas became one of the most prominent genres of American literature in the late nineteenth century. While at the beginning of the century it circulated in local venues and comprised tall tales, frontier stories, and dialect sketches, with the rise of national magazines in the second half of the century regional writings became more refined, containing rougher signs of the frontier humour tradition.⁸⁶ Regionalism, a term used interchangeably with local color in the nineteenth century, was redefined

⁸⁴ Stephanie Foote, “The Cultural Work of American Regionalism,” *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 29.

⁸⁵ Foote, “The Cultural Work of American Regionalism,” 30.

⁸⁶ Foote, “The Cultural Work of American Regionalism,” 30.

by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse in the twentieth century as a “more serious, more sympathetic, and less stereotypical way of writing about region.”⁸⁷ Local color stories were responding to the nostalgic tendencies of the society, trying to preserve the traditions, customs, dialects and characters of specific regions.

The rise of regional writing initiated a change in the American literary tradition. It promoted the emergence of new literary themes, forms, subjects, regions, authors and audiences. The works of the period no longer portrayed polite, grammatically correct young people as the main characters, they were no longer set in exotic places, and did not rely only on female audience.⁸⁸ The documenting of the rapidly changing aspects of American life in different parts of the country was carried out by educated frontiersmen, adventurers and journalists.

In the nineteenth century, under the influence of the Western myth, the frontier came to represent a form of the American Dream — it was believed to be a bountiful place of endless opportunities and freedom. Thus, the language of the American frontier became filled with images of abundance, plenitude, and exotic varieties of life.⁸⁹ While earlier writers that dealt with the Western theme, like James Fenimore Cooper, contributed to the establishment of the Frontier myth by focusing on the idealistic depiction of nature and noble portrayal of Indians, the authors of the late nineteenth century were leaning more towards realism.

A specific genre of the Western fiction, particularly famous during the second half of the nineteenth century, was dime novel. Characterised by low production prices and accessibility, dime novels contributed to the popularisation of the Western legends and stories of outlaws, cowboys, Indians and settlers. These novels promoted the fictionalisation of frontiersmen like Buffalo Bill,

⁸⁷ Donna Campbell, “Realism and Regionalism,” *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 93.

⁸⁸ Nina Baym, et al., *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Volume 2, Third Edition (New York: Norton & Company, 1989), 3.

⁸⁹ Martin Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, ed. Justin Quinn (Prague: Karolinum, 2011), 117.

Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok and others, playing a curial role in the creation of the Western hero ideals.

A characteristic way of speaking on the Western frontier was marked by an excessive use of exaggerations, hyperboles and overstatements which came to be known as tall talk. Tall talk was “a language of jokes, blurred, ambiguous meaning, humour, and irony. [...] The most important features of tall talk are comical or grotesque metaphors and similes, often graded into metaphors.”⁹⁰ In fiction, tall talk gave way to the emergence of tall tales — a kind of folk genre on the frontier characterised by exaggerations or “violent understatements”⁹¹. Tall tales included incredible elements in the description of events, while at the same time insisting on their factualness and credibility.

The frontier experience was the central topic in the works of writers like James Fenimore Cooper, whose novels illustrated the specifics of colonist and indigenous life from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, Bret Harte, whose short stories portrayed the romantic figures of the West and the California Gold Rush, W. D. Howells, who was concerned with the economic transformations and moral conditions of the rapidly growing America and its people, and Mark Twain, who analysed the influence of the frontier on the dynamics of the American life, criticising the side effects through irony and humour. The Western writers contributed to the emergence of the unique American fiction, as they brought to fulfilment native trends that were reflected in the portrayal of landscapes and social surfaces, as well as they improved the use of vernacular style, and contributed to the establishment of distinctly American protagonists.⁹²

⁹⁰ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 118.

⁹¹ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 118.

⁹² Baym et al., *Norton Anthology*, 5.

3.2 Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, known by his pen name Mark Twain, was born in Florida, Missouri in 1835 into a family of dreamers who were always expecting to miraculously become rich overnight. When Clemens was five years old, his family moved to Hannibal where the boy spent the following years enjoying the happy and carefree childhood. After his father's death in 1847, Clemens was taken from school and became an apprentice to a local printer. The education at the printer's office enabled him to learn more about the specifics of the industry and evoked his interest in publishing. Having finished the apprenticeship, he started the traditional vagabond life of printer, visiting New York, Philadelphia and other towns before he finally returned home.⁹³ His adventurous spirit later inspired him to follow his brother, Orion Clemens, to the Far West where Samuel spent seven years of life traveling, working and exploring the perplexities of the frontier life. As a writer for a newspaper in Nevada, Clemens started using a pen name Mark Twain which stood for "two fathoms deep" and referred to the days he spent on the river. In 1867, he visited Europe and Palestine — the journey that became a basis for his book *Innocents Abroad*. The book's successor, *Roughing It*, then focused on Clemens' previous western experiences. His later novels *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* allowed the author to return to the memories of his carefree childhood and establish himself as one of the most prominent humorists of the nation.

Having failed to gain wealth in the Far West, Clemens found his calling in delivering humorous lectures first in California and later in New York. In both his lectures and literary works, humour was accompanied by certain level of pessimism. Being a keen observer of life and a

⁹³ Russel Blankenship, *American Literature As an Expression of the National Mind* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 460.

recorder of the intellectual changes of his time, Clemens learned about the cruelty of human race and, till his death, held grimly to “the despairing feeling that man is an automaton moved about by combinations of incomprehensible forces.”⁹⁴ His observations and experiences developed into a capacity for social satire, allowing the writer to criticise unfavourable aspects of social and human nature in a way accessible to a large spectrum of audiences.

Twain’s ability to master language wittily and skilfully earned him a place among the greatest American writers. What made Twain unique was his love of words and command over their arrangement, “his mastery at distilling the rhythms and metaphors of oral speech into written prose, his vivid personality, his identification with the deepest centres of his fellow man’s emotional and moral condition.”⁹⁵ Owing his start in storytelling to the lectures by Artemus Ward and Bret Harte, Mark Twain crafted his own literary style which, though changing in attitude and themes throughout the career, never lacked linguistic proficiency and artistic value.

Mark Twain was a moralist, aiming to shed light on the drawbacks of the newly emerged, but rapidly growing, American nation. The Western frontier was a region of interest for Twain because it was considered a platform where the nation was coming into being, a place where human nature could be observed in its purest form, with all its flaws and sins. Twain also knew well that the reality of the American frontier coexisted with the notions of constant migration, loss of places, breaking up of social hierarchies and norms, displacements of authority, and sometimes violent attempts to reconstitute order.⁹⁶ For Twain, the frontier was the perfect environment through which the question of American national identity could be explored. Leonard Kriegel concluded that

⁹⁴ Blankenship, *American Literature*, 459.

⁹⁵ Baym, et al., *Norton Anthology*, 12.

⁹⁶ Barbara Ladd, “Mark Twain American Nationalism,” *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, And William Faulkner* (Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 86.

At its best, the frontier blended a mystical faith in democracy with a tart, often caustic ability to see things as they really were. It is this attempted reconciliation between the ideal of democracy and the reality of man that characterises Mark Twain's work.⁹⁷

3.3 *Roughing It*

Following his brother Orion Clemens who had been appointed the Secretary of the Nevada Territory, Mark Twain spent the years 1861-1867 exploring the life of the Far West. The account of his experiences on the frontier became a basis of a semi-autobiographical travelogue *Roughing It* (1872) which showcased the specifics of the free, unruled Western life.

“A record of several years of variegated vagabondizing”⁹⁸, as Mark Twain describes it in the prefatory, *Roughing It* illustrates an insider's look into the life of the American West in the nineteenth century. Charmed by the glorifying stories of freedom and easy wealth, Twain's persona sets on a seven year long journey to the American West, the real experiences of which redefine his expectations. The book traces the transformation of the desire for freedom into a sense of nostalgia and disillusionment disguised by the use of satirical language. Through the use of irony, humour and exaggeration, the book proves the ideals carried by the Frontier myth and the Manifest Destiny ideology — Romantic nature, easy wealth enlivening freedom and progress — as delusory, while the exclusively American characteristic features of exceptionalism and individualism appear to be tightly related to the predominance of violence and chaos in the newly acquired Far West territories.

Being “young and ignorant” (29), the narrator of *Roughing It* is captivated by the idea of his brother embarking on the journey westward:

He would be hundreds and hundreds miles away on the great plains and deserts, and among the mountains of the Far West, and would see buffaloes and Indians, and prairie dogs, and antelopes, and have all kinds of adventures, and maybe get hanged or scalped,

⁹⁷ Leonard Kriegel, “Foreword,” *Mark Twain: Roughing It* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1962), xx.

⁹⁸ Mark Twain, “Prefatory,” *Roughing It*, ed. Leonard Kriegel (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1962), 29. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated in the text by parentheses.

and have ever such a fine time, and write home and tell us all about it, and be a hero. And he would see the gold mines and the silver mines, and maybe go about of an afternoon when his work was done, and pick up two or three pailfuls of shining slugs, and nuggets of gold and silver on the hillside. And by and by he would become very rich [...]. (29)

The visions and prospects of traveling to the West described by the narrator in the opening paragraph of the book point to the beliefs and ideas that were inspiring people of the time to undertake the journey: the impulse for freedom, heroic achievements and easy wealth. Tom H. Towers points out that while the visions that drive the young narrator's desire to go to the West may seem contradictory in that they suggest matters of materialism and spirituality at the same time, they are versions of the same dream of freedom and independence from the dehumanising stultification of civilisation.⁹⁹

The exaggerations and irony used in the extract become the paramount linguistic devices used throughout the whole book. William Dean Howells remarked that these were the ideal devices used to delineate the West — the whole existence there had to be looked at as an extravagant joke “the humour of which was only deepened by its nether-side of tragedy.”¹⁰⁰ Another scholar, Joseph Yokelson, suggested that humour and irony emphasise the sense of irrationality, pessimism and the tragedy of the world in the Twain's memoir.¹⁰¹

The narrator's disillusionment with the West emerges as his encounter with the reality undermines his romanticised expectations. The disparity between the inflated romantic ideals and the shrunken reality is vividly illustrated in the episode that tells the story of the famous desperado Joseph Alfred Slade. The numerous stories of Slade's ferocious deeds the narrator recounts in chapter X reinforce his reputation of an archetypal Western villain. However, the brutal descriptions of the desperado stand in odds with the characteristics of the Slade the narrator meets on the

⁹⁹ Tom H. Towers, “‘Hateful Reality’: The Failure of the Territory in *Roughing It*,” *Western American Literature* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1974): 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43017710>.

¹⁰⁰ Forrest G. Robinson, “The Innocent at Large: Mark Twain's Travel Writing,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. by Forrest G. Robinson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 36.

¹⁰¹ Joseph Yokelson, “Mark Twain's *Roughing It*: A Humorist's Darker Side,” *Bridgewater Review* 4, no. 3: 10. http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol4/iss3/6.

journey. In real life, Slade happens to be extremely friendly and “the most gentlemanly-appearing, quiet, and affable officer” (75) whom the narrator immediately warms to.

Upon learning about Slade’s execution a few years after their encounter, the narrator refers to the portrayal of the desperado’s action by Thomas Josiah Dimsdale in the book *The Vigilantes of Montana*. Dimsdale remarked that in his natural state, Slade was “a kind husband, a most hospitable host and a courteous gentlemen” (77). Yet, when maddened with alcohol he turned into a fierce incarnate initiating various criminal and violent acts which eventually led to his arrest. According to Dimsdale, Slade, about to be executed, “so exhausted himself by tears, prayers and lamentations, that he had scarcely strength left to stand under the fatal beam” (81). Slade’s expressing his weakness before death points to the unaccountability of the desperado nature, in spite of the straightforward bravery the Frontier myth intends to make of it.

The fact that Slade’s acts were committed in the state of intoxication, and were rather a result of him not being able to take control of his deeds than of his courageous character, undermine the romanticised image of him forged by the settlers. The misleading appearance of Slade hints at the deceitful society of the West — Forrest G. Robinson concluded that the world the narrator steps in is replete with deceivers, but “the deceivers are also pitifully self-deceived.”¹⁰²

The maintenance of romanticised images of the American frontier and its people was enabled by the circulation of tall tales which celebrated the values of the Western social groups in a cheerful, exaggerated way.¹⁰³ In chapter XX, the narrator of *Roughing It* hears an anecdote about Horace Greely, a Republican reformer, taking a ride with a legendary Western stage-coach driver Hank Monk. The story is a classic example of a tall tale in which the line between historic reality and fiction is blurred by means of exaggeration and grotesque. The narrator is told the same story over and over again, until he finally refuses to hear it again from a weak, dying stranger. The man dies as

¹⁰² Robinson, “The Innocent At Large,” 34.

¹⁰³ Sacvan Bercovitch, “Deadpan Huck: Or, What’s Funny about Interpretation,” *The Kenyon Review* 24, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 2002): 91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4338379>.

he strained himself “trying to retain the anecdote in his system” (124). The anecdote is thus portrayed as a lethal disease in the human body. According to Martin Procházka, this organic metaphor illustrates the difference between “the narrative community of tall tales, and the organic form as a representation of an ideal structure of society.”¹⁰⁴

The death of the last narrator of the Monk story is an exaggeration which amplifies the bitterness of the stagnant social situation in a humorous manner. The use of tall tale, accompanied by hyperboles, humour and irony, enabled settlers to deal with the incongruities between mythic representations of the American frontier and the real life experiences. The anecdotes also functioned as an alternative to the failures of the settlement and to the optimistic accounts of progress suggested by the Manifest Destiny.¹⁰⁵

As was illustrated in chapter 2 of this paper, the ideology of the Manifest Destiny that urged the westward expansion in the nineteenth century was rooted in a noble aspiration to spread progress and civilisation across the continent. However, the account of the frontier life made by Mark Twain in *Roughing It* once again shows that the reality parted ways with the idealised goal. The individualism that emerged in the primitive conditions of the frontier caused the fear and refusal of civilised institutions — for the frontier, they were repressive, a threat to individual liberty.¹⁰⁶ The liberty of the frontier ultimately resulted in the absence of law, thus, the absence of standards of civilised behaviour and manners.

The Western value system, as described in chapter XLVIII, is radically different from the one in the East, dependent on law and justice.

To be a saloon-keeper and kill a man was to be illustrious. Hence the reader will not be surprised to learn that more than one man was killed in Nevada under hardly the pretext of provocation, so impatient was the slayer to achieve reputation and throw off the galling sense of being held in indifferent repute by his associates. (256)

¹⁰⁴ Procházka, *Ruins in the New World*, 129.

¹⁰⁵ Procházka, *Ruins in the New World*, 129.

¹⁰⁶ Kriegel, “Foreword,” xxiv.

Not only does murder on the frontier go unpunished, but it is also used as means of gaining reputation and the status of authority. Leonard Kriegel explains that such a situation became possible because democracy on the frontier was reduced to the idea of every man his own judge, since the dispassionate intelligence that the jury system required was either absent or unwanted there.¹⁰⁷ The distorted ideas of heroism thus allowed the trial to view a man who committed murder as a hero rather than a criminal. This anarchy produced by the frontier individualism forces the narrator to look at the eastern order as the lesser of two evils. This attitude manifests itself vividly in the episodes where the narrator expresses sympathy for the discriminated Chinese. According to Kriegel,

The threat to the Chinese was man unrestrained by law. The fact the Chinese were ‘quiet, peaceable, tractable, free from drunkenness, and...as industrious as the day is long,’ along with the converse fact that their oppressors were lazy, brutal, callous, and ignorant, merely reinforced Twain’s fear that American democracy might someday be victimised by the much-heralded ‘common man’ — who, Twain saw, was frequently much too common to be a man.¹⁰⁸

The sympathy toward the discrimination of the Chinese in California was also expressed in the works of Bret Harte, whose periodical *Overland Monthly* was constantly urging English-speaking Americans to learn as much about Chinese as Asians had to learn about Americans.¹⁰⁹ His poem “Plain Language from Truthful James” published in *Overland Monthly* used irony to shed light on the prejudiced attitudes and mob violence used against the Chinese people.

The narrator’s disillusionment reflected itself most vividly in the portrayal of natural phenomena in *Roughing It*. The ideas of Romantic nature as promising of the moral perfection of man are doomed by the reality early in the book: a spring the narrator so admires at the beginning of

¹⁰⁷ Kriegel, “Foreword,” xxiv.

¹⁰⁸ Kriegel, “Foreword,” xxv.

¹⁰⁹ Tara Penry, “The Chinese in Bret Harte’s *Overland*: A Contact for Truthful James,” *American Literary Realism* 43, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 81. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerlitreal.43.1.0074>.

the journey as it seems to stand for the a “ready-made Romantic symbol of the constant vitality of nature and of nature’s blessing upon America”¹¹⁰ is replaced by “long ranks of white skeletons of mules and oxen” as the coach takes the direction down to Salt Lake City — the tediousness of the observed scene implies the wasted Romanticism of western nature. The dusty deserts of Carson City evoke grim and dark images:

Visibly our new home was a desert, walled in by barren, snow-clad mountains. There was not a tree in sight. There was no vegetation but the endless sage-brush and greasewood. All nature was gray with it. We were plowing through great deeps of powdery alkali dust that rose in thick clouds and floated across the plain like smoke from a burning house. (126)

As the travelers move through the dusty plains “in the midst of solitude, silence and desolation”, the ideals of pure nature are destroyed. The dream of nature, as part of the Frontier myth, is but a fragment of imagination and idealisation. The climax of the disillusioned attitude towards the Western environment is reached in the final part of the book. The promised land of California appears to the narrator as monotonous. The earthquake he experiences in San Francisco, causing many to feel nausea and exposing the true nature of people, is a climatic moment as it not only illustrates the unpredictedness of nature, but also reflects the narrator’s interior landscape.¹¹¹

The American expansion in the nineteenth century, which was meant to plant civilisation, education and progress in the Western regions, rather led to the abandonment of social order and civilised institutions. The unruly democracy gave way to violence and lawless chaos, and the intended subordination of nature and Indians manifested itself through continuous struggles and fights. The account of the American frontier life made by Mark Twain in *Roughing It* illustrated the discrepancies between the promoted ideals of the West and the real life experiences that took place on the frontier. As a result, the travelogue disentangles both the mythic portrayal of the Western

¹¹⁰ Towers, “Hateful Reality,” 8.

¹¹¹ Yokelson, “Mark Twain’s *Roughing It*,” 13.

regions reinforced by the Frontier myth and the epitome of progress and civilisation advocated by the Manifest Destiny doctrine.

Conclusion

Myths constitute a substantial part of the world's cultural heritage. While some of them retain merely regional significance, others have gained a universal value overtime as they received recognition in different cultural environments, e.g. Greek, Jewish or Christian mythologies. The importance of myths lies in their ability to undermine the factual value of events, giving priority to metaphorical interpretations which appeal to human nature. Myths usually replace the problems which occur in history. But however harmonious and internally consistent they are, myths are never a proof against historical contingencies.¹¹²

As a relatively new country, the United States has formulated a number of myths the influences of which have been traced on both national and international levels. The myth of the American Dream, for instance, has made people from all over the world view the United States as a place of unlimited opportunity where through hard work and perseverance anyone may escape poverty and become a person of wealth. The visions of economic prosperity in the United States facilitated major waves of immigration in the nineteenth century: around 4.5 million Irish people escaping famine in their homeland migrated to the U.S. in 1820-1930; 5 million of Germans moved to Midwest and became farmers in the nineteenth century; around 25,000 Chinese immigrants followed the gold rush in California in the early 1850s; the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation attracted more than 20 million immigrants from Europe between 1880 and 1920.¹¹³

While it is true that there are numerous opportunities for professional growth in the United States, it is also valid to say that the advantage always goes to the individuals who have had the possibility to attend prestigious educational institutions, and do not belong to racially or ethnically discriminated social groups. Despite the persistence of the American Dream both in the United

¹¹² Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 22.

¹¹³ "U. S. Immigration Before 1965," *history.com*, accessed August 8, 2021 <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/u-s-immigration-before-1965>.

States and worldwide, the Urban Institute has projected a poverty rate of 13.7% in the United States in the year 2021, which means that about one in seven Americans may have annual income below the poverty threshold.¹¹⁴

As one of the oldest and most influential American myths, the myth of the West constitutes a significant part of the American national and cultural heritage. The particularity of the Frontier myth lies in its geographical and chronological relation to a real historic period of American expansion westward, the timeline of which corresponded with the one of the myth. This resulted in the coexistence of two Wests: historic and mythic, factual and imaginary. The historic nineteenth-century West contains an account of the conquest of Native Americans' territories through wars, indigenous genocide, environmental destruction. The mythic West builds on the account of westward expansion glorifying its means and romanticising its goals.

Besides accounting for the rapid economic growth, democratic polity, civilised progress and the distinctively American approach to the disruptive processes of modernisation,¹¹⁵ the mythic West, as formulated by Frederick Jackson Turner, presented the American frontier as a seedbed of the American identity. But even though it is possible to embrace the idea that the toughness of life on the frontier generated certain intellectual characteristics in the settlers, to accept Turner's suggestion of the frontier being the line of "most rapid and effective Americanisation" would mean to neglect a huge body of non-American population living there.

While the existence of the mythic West led to the increased ignorance and misinterpretations of the history of the American westward expansion in the nineteenth century, its influence on the formation of American cultural heritage is remarkable. Since the reality of the American frontier life was alien to anyone who had never experienced it, its representation in the works of art and fiction gave way to the formation of the American culture distinguished from the European ones in terms

¹¹⁴ Linda Giannarelli, "2021 Poverty Projections," *Urban Institute*, accessed August 8, 2021, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103656/2021-poverty-projections_1.pdf.

¹¹⁵ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 26.

of both genre and style. The appearance of a unique cultural heritage ultimately led to the strengthening of American national consciousness and unity.

The romanticised representation of the westward expansion in the American art of the nineteenth century facilitated the emergence of distinctly American themes, sceneries and characters. While paintings like Emanuel Leutze's *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, and John Gast's *American Progress* depicted the grandeur of American nation and its history, Asher B. Durand's *Progress* and George Caleb Bingham's *The Jolly Flatboatmen* represented the authentic peculiarities of the frontier life and nature, destined for the Americans by their Manifest Destiny. Nevertheless, the artworks which dealt with the Western subjects in the nineteenth century were produced primarily for the Eastern audience. So, while it is true that the American frontier life was characterised by unique regional specifics, it only gained significance under the Eastern approval.

Besides visual arts, the frontier experiences replenished American literature and folklore with the appearance of tall tales, dime novels and more refined regional writing, most of which promoted the Western heroic narratives. Mark Twain's travelogue *Roughing It* can be placed in between the mythic and historic West. While it includes examples of tall talk, and stories of the Western heroic figures like Jack Slade, the use of irony reveals a sympathetic and rather nostalgic narrator's attitude towards the American frontier. Twain's use of humour and anecdotes in the treatment of the Western subject is related to the settlers tendency of viewing anecdotes and jokes as the crucial means of survival and overcoming the insuperable hardships of the frontier life. *Roughing It* disentangles the mythology of the West and the objectives of the Manifest Destiny doctrine by implicitly criticising the lack of law and order in the Western settlements.

The expression of the myth of the West and the doctrine of Manifest Destiny in a large body of literature, art and folklore enabled a rapid and persistent rooting of the mythological objectives within the American society. Placing focus on the notion of victorious conquest, the American

Western mythology drew the historical facts of the frontier violence, Indian genocide and the devastation of natural environment out of the spotlight. It allowed the preservation of history written from the perspective of the winners as it was granted a noble, metaphorical, and even divine meaning. The influence on the defeated parties had to be neglected as a topic that allegedly lacked in grandeur. By foregrounding the ultimate conquering of the West coast territories and overlooking the genocide of the indigenous people, the nineteenth-century westward expansion of the United States and its mythology paved the way towards the country becoming the world's leading economic and political power.

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