

**A Perfect Place to Love or Die -
Wilderness and Culture in Nicholas Evans'
The Horse Whisperer and *The Loop***

Nora Mattsson
University of Tampere
Faculty of Communication Sciences
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Tämä englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden pro gradu -tutkielma analysoi brittikirjailija Nicholas Evansin romaaneja *The Horse Whisperer* (1995) ja *The Loop* (1999). Evansin romaaneja on tutkittu melko vähän, vaikka *The Horse Whispereristä* sovitettu elokuva onkin inspiroinut tutkimuksia.

Tavoitteeni on analysoida millaista ideologiaa romaanit välittävät. Lähdän liikkeelle oletuksesta, että molemmat romaanit voidaan lukea nykyaikaan sijoittuvina western-romansseina. Teorialuvun aluksi pohjustan analyysiä käymällä läpi genreteoriaa yleisesti. Tämän jälkeen käsittelen western-genren tunnuspiirteitä. Näitä ovat muun muassa erämaa miljöönä, lännen ja idän vastakkainasettelu ja lajityypilliset hahmot, kuten cowboy-hahmo sekä idästä saapuva sivistynyt nainen. Teorialuku päättyy erämaaideologian esittelyyn: selitän esimerkiksi kuinka tärkeää erämaaideologia on amerikkalaiselle mielenmaisemalle, miten erämaa on usein asetettu vastakkain sivilisaation tai kulttuurin kanssa ja millaisia assosiaatioita erämaahan on liitetty.

Tutkielman analyysi käsittää kolme lukua. Ensimmäinen käsittelee heteroseksuaalista romanssia, joka on tärkeä teema kummankin romaanin juonelle. Analysoin myös romaanien tarjoamia sukupuoliesityksiä. Toinen teema on idän ja lännen vastakkainasettelu. Luvussa analysoin, miten romaaneissa konstruoidaan Yhdysvaltojen lännen ja idän erilaisuutta, esimerkiksi maisemien sekä hahmojen ennakkoluulojen kautta. Kolmas teema on ihmisen eläinsuhde, sillä romaaneissa on paljon eläinkuvastoa: *The Horse Whispererissä* tärkeimpänä hevoset ja *The Loopissa* sudet. Kaiken aikaa kytken teemat siihen, miten kirjat ideologisesti kommentoivat erämaata ja kulttuuria.

Tutkielma tulee johtopäätökseen, että romaaneissa on hyvin samankaltainen kehys, ja ne sisältävät paljon samoja elementtejä. Mitä tulee heteroseksuaaliseen romanssiin, molemmat tukevat ajatusta konservatiivisesta avioliitosta tai vakaasta parisuhteesta. Yhtäläisyyksistä huolimatta romaaneissa on myös eroja. *The Horse Whispereristä* on tulkittavissa ajatus maskuliinisuudesta ja vapaudesta, ja *The Loop* puolestaan vihjailee tulevaisuudesta, jossa vastakkainasetteluja voisi jo purkaa, ja erämaa ja kulttuuri voisivat selvitä rinnakkain.

Asiasanat: Western, genre, erämaa, romanssi, Länsi-Yhdysvallat, Nicholas Evans

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1. Introduction

Cowboys on their horses and sunsets over mountains – the Western as a genre probably brings to mind some recollections or images to almost everyone who is familiar with popular culture. *The Horse Whisperer* (1995) and *The Loop* (1999) are bestseller novels by British author Nicholas Evans, and my starting point in this thesis is that I intend to argue that they can be read as representatives of the genre of modern Western romance. As such, I aim to identify which conventions of the Western can be recognized in the stories, and analyze what kind of meaning and ideology may be found beneath this formula. The research question I ultimately aim to answer is: how do the novels comment on the traditional ideology and symbolism of wilderness in America from their modern-day point of view, using conventions of the Western? Therefore, my aim is to identify what kind of ideology does Nicholas Evans promote through the use of the modern Western romance – whether he deviates from the Western tradition's views or maintains them.

In order to answer these questions, I will use genre studies to explain the characteristics of the formula that Evans utilizes. I am going to claim that through the use of the Western formula, the novels employ rather explicitly one of the most central ideas in American mythology, the idea of wilderness versus civilization. In fact, Perry Miller has argued that “the idea of *Nature* . . . in America means the wilderness” (204, original emphasis), and that “Nature versus civilization” is actually “*the American theme*” (205, original emphasis). In my thesis, the dialectic of wilderness and civilization is interpreted as consisting of various other dichotomies; for example, East and West, freedom and confinement, male and female, wild and tamed.

The Horse Whisperer and *The Loop* are congruent in several ways, especially regarding their themes, yet the novels are independent and not related to each other by their plots. In both novels the plot is essentially a romance, and many elements of the Western tradition can be found: they are set in the western landscape of Montana with its ranchlands and untouched nature, and the idea of American wilderness plays a fundamental part, reflected for instance in how people respond to it, and how it transforms people as well as animals. The novels are abundant with depictions of the western landscape with its vast space, beautiful mountain views and clear skies, under which the characters can feel transformed and liberated, but where they also experience conflicts that have to do with the collision of wilderness and civilization that comes up in various contexts.

Another crucial American idea that Evans employs and that connects the novels to each other is freedom, strongly connected to nature. For example, natural imagery of wild horses and wolves, flying eagles, and open skies work in establishing the idea of freedom. The dichotomy is visible in the way wild animals are opposed to domesticated animals and pets in both novels. In *The Horse Whisperer*, there are both wild mustangs and trained riding horses, whereas in *The Loop* there are, for instance, encounters between wolves and pet dogs. In these cases, it is usually the wild animal that is connected to nature, and the pet that falls under culture, as the act of domesticating is a kind of an act of cultivation.

In the Montana environment, many kinds of liberations occur for the characters: in *The Horse Whisperer*, Pilgrim the horse, who has been confined to a small, dark pen since he was in an accident, is let to run outside for the first time in months; Annie feels liberated from her overtly controlled emotional state and starts to feel positive emotions again; her daughter Grace is liberated from her anger towards her mother. In *The Loop*, Luke Calder is liberated from the expectations of his father, and Helen Ross from her inner frustrations.

According to Evans' official website (2016), *The Horse Whisperer*, published in the fall 1995, has sold about fifteen million copies and has been translated into 36 languages. It was also followed by a blockbuster movie of the same name. The plot of *The Horse Whisperer* tells the love story of Annie Graves and Tom Booker. Annie is a New York based but originally English magazine editor in her forties, who is married but fills the emptiness inside her by pursuing her career and working long days; Tom is a divorced and independent rancher and horseman from Montana. The story begins with an accident, as a truck hits Annie's teenage daughter, Grace, on her wintery horseback-riding trip. Grace and her horse, Pilgrim, are severely wounded both physically and emotionally. In an attempt to save her family and heal the horse, Annie takes her daughter and the horse to Montana to see a renowned "horse whisperer", Tom Booker. Annie is drawn into a romance with Tom, and it is constantly emphasized how they cannot control themselves because it is all so natural, contrary to Annie's marriage which is described as purely rational. In the end, Tom dies of a kick of the hoof in the head in a dual battle with a wild stallion, saving Grace and Pilgrim. Annie gives up her job, returns to the East and her marriage, and settles in their country home, now devoting herself to motherhood and living in the present moment. During their months on the Bookers' ranch, everyone is transformed. Pilgrim learns "how to be a horse again" (221) and is back to how he was before the accident. Grace becomes a woman, attains her self-esteem, learns to trust her mother and ride her horse again. Annie dives into the depths of her emotions, finds her identity, and becomes able to have another child. Tom faces many dilemmas and needs to solve them. The dichotomy between East and West becomes central through the characters' background in *The Horse Whisperer*; foremost it becomes evident through the descriptions of Annie's and Tom's emotional lives. *The Horse Whisperer* is set in the United States of the late 20th century, but at the same time the novel looks back in the past in many ways and Evans even makes explicit references to American history.

The Loop, published four years after *The Horse Whisperer*, begins when a pack of wolves migrates to Montana and sets in the forests of the imaginary town of Hope, whose citizens have a bloody history of hating and killing wolves. As one of the wolves kills a pet dog, 29-year-old doctoral student Helen Ross, an urban woman from the East coast, is called to monitor the wolves' moves and behavior and live in Hope for the winter. Helen falls in love with sensitive and shy Luke Calder, who is ten years younger than her and happens to be the son of the all-American rancher Buck Calder, a self-appointed town spokesperson who is famous for both his prospering ranch and his reputation as a womanizer. Luke, who is burdened by his father's expectations on him regarding the ranch's future, is initially Helen's only friend in town, and so their relationship soon deepens. Helen and Luke share an ambition to save the wolf pack, and finally Luke turns against his father. In the end, Buck and his followers kill all the adult wolves, but Helen and Luke manage to save almost an entire litter of cubs that are then relocated. Luke loses sight in his other eye as Buck mistakes him for the mother wolf in the darkness of the night and shoots at him. Finally, Helen and Luke continue life together and Luke plans to realize his dream to study wildlife biology. As to Buck Calder, his wife leaves him, and it is described how Buck is starting to age and lose his charm.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this thesis include genre studies and New Western Studies. The Western has a long history, but it still persists and interests critics, especially those in the field of New Western Studies. This field of criticism first emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction to several social questions of the time and especially to argue against Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" (Furniss 27), which I am going to explain in more detail in my theory chapter as I discuss the idea of wilderness in America. From the 1920s onwards Turner's thesis was beginning to be challenged and critiqued, and new approaches and perspectives emerging during the 1960s and 1970s (Furniss 26). However, it was not until the 1980s that this new line of criticism began to take form (ibid.).

Bradley J. Birzer (n.pag.) adds William Cronon to the initial list of New Western historians, and an article by Cronon will be used in this thesis when I discuss wilderness ideology in my theory section. Both Birzer (n.pag.) and Furniss (28) agree that the New Western critics are a diverse group and by no means coherent in terms of their agenda. Nevertheless, both Birzer and Furniss do raise some central ideas and themes that have been popular among the critics. Furniss states that these scholars have rejected using the term ‘frontier’ as an object of study, because they regard the term as “too ‘nationalistic’, ‘racist’, and ethnocentric . . .” (27). Birzer explains that concern for the environment is one of the main issues that most New Western Studies have an interest in, and continues that they “consider American culture (especially capitalism) exploitative and wasteful” (n.pag.). Also Furniss states that the new historians are interested in ecological factors and human/environment interaction, and how these have affected the history of the West (27). Furniss also discusses the importance of Richard Slotkin, whose goals of “looking anew at American history” are very similar to those of the New Western critics (28). Slotkin’s study *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* will be used in the analysis of Evans’ novels. The importance of the New Western Studies lies, in Furniss’ words, in how the field enables “multiple perspectives and possibilities for new critical intellectual inquiries into the study of the American West” (28). Nowadays, critics of the field are also studying literature on the West and of western writers. It should be noted that a general opinion of the New Western literary critics is that the birthplace of the author or the critic are not questions of importance: in fact, it has been said that it would be beneficial for the study of the American West to become more global (Campbell 54). Moreover, Harrison notes that critics agree that a “Montana writer” need not be born in Montana or even have lived there – it is enough that a writer sets some of his/her work there (xiii). Accordingly, in

my thesis, considering Evans writing novels located in Montana, USA, I do not treat his British nationality as an issue.

As to the novels of Nicholas Evans, his writing has not yet been analyzed in terms of the ideology they convey or from the Western point of view, aside from the film based on *The Horse Whisperer*. Instead, there has been, for example, a psychoanalytical analysis of Annie, one of the protagonists of *The Horse Whisperer* (Lestari 2014). Moreover, the representation and relationship of Pilgrim the horse and his owner, Grace, has been analyzed with a focus on anthropomorphism and zoomorphism that Pigney (2015) claims Evans uses as literary tools. Regarding *The Loop*, no previous literary research has come to my knowledge, besides S.K. Robisch's analysis of Evans' use of wolves in *The Loop* in the book *Wolves and the Wolf Myth in American Literature* (2009). Therefore, with this thesis I not only aim to broaden the literary scholarship on the work of Nicholas Evans, whose novels have not been much considered by literary critics so far, but also to participate in both the New Western Studies and the wilderness studies that are of current interest especially in the United States. It is relevant to analyze literature placed in the West, because as Susan Kollin notes, "the [American] West remains a contested terrain whose literature carries traces of the economies and ecologies of diverse groups of people who have made it their home" ("Environments in Western American Literature" 3).

The primary sources of this thesis are, as already stated, the two novels by Nicholas Evans. As briefly noted above, to connect Evans' novels in the Western tradition, I will use theoretical works on genre studies as my references, including for instance John Cawelti (1976) and John Frow (2006). According to Wallmann, Cawelti's book is "a basic source" for studying the Western (2), and for this reason it will be employed in the thesis, despite the fact that it was published in 1976. Additionally, critical works on the mythology and literature of the West will be used, such as those of Richard Slotkin (1996), Sara L.

Spurgeon (2005), and Susan Kollin (2015). I aim to investigate how the questions regarding wilderness and civilization have been approached with the help of relevant articles and books, such as Roderick Frazier Nash (2014). The thesis consists of the introduction, a chapter on the theoretical approach, three analysis chapters, and the conclusion.

2. The Western – a literary genre concerned with wilderness

In this chapter, the discussion is on the theoretical approach that I am going to use in analyzing *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*. The theory chapter consists of the following sections: first, focus is on the concepts of literary genre and formula writing, and I will specify how they have been defined, and summarize what purposes genres have been given by genre critics. Genre studies and interpretation of genre are central in studying literature because, as Pirjo Lyytikäinen claims, “no literary criticism is possible without a discussion about the concept(s) of genre or the methods and role of interpretation in literature” (7). Second, I will focus on the Western; I will offer a brief history of the development of the genre, discuss the conventional elements and archetypes of the western formula, and identify the connection between the concept of wilderness and the Western. I will elaborate on a variation of the Western, the western romance, which is central in my analysis of Evans’ novels. Finally, I will proceed to the concept of wilderness and discuss its symbolism, and especially how the concept is ideologically tied to the American civilization.

Genre

“A literary formula is a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works,” Cawelti states in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (5). In other words, writing literature according to a formula means that a text employs a variety of relatively typical themes, imagery, characters or settings, or writing the plot according to a structure that has been set again and again in the narratives of a certain genre. These conventions may refer to certain stereotypes or archetypes, usually specific to a certain culture and period, or more generally to common plot patterns, which are not limited to any certain culture or period, and may appeal to different kinds of readers in their near-universality (Cawelti 5-6). The familiarity of these conventions is both one of the defining criteria for genre literature, and one of the reasons for its appeal: Brian McHale confirms that “the experience of *re-cognition*” while reading, of coming across with something that one is familiar with from previous reading experiences, is a token of formula literature (13, original emphasis). Traditionally, formula writing has been connected with the function of fulfilling the reader’s need to seek enjoyment and escape the ordinary. Cawelti refers to this idea as the “escapist dimension”, where formula literature affects its regular and targeted readers by activating emotions in them that they are able to experience when immersed into the imaginative but identifiable world of the narrative (34).

Cawelti (9) notes that writing according to a formula that appeals to large audiences often tends to be highly prolific, and thus its potential profitability becomes an interest of the marketing industry. A high-volume formula can be called popular culture, as it is, by a very simple definition, well liked and enjoys popularity among masses of people (Storey 5). Cawelti wrote already in the 1970s that there must be something more substantial to formula literature besides the stereotypes and archetypes that the reader notices at first glance, and continues that it would be too easy to say that the production of formulas is only a

question of economics (9). A reason for this may lie in the aforementioned escapist dimension. Based on their previous experiences with a certain formula, readers “find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form” (Cawelti 9). When a reader, then, picks up a book that could be classified as belonging to a genre, he or she already has some expectations, some guidelines for his reaction and preoccupation with the book (Frow 104). Popular culture has sometimes been suggested to be a category under which it is easy to place narratives that do not meet the standards of what the majority considers as high culture (Storey 5). By this definition, popular culture can even be viewed as inferior culture (Storey 5-6), albeit most critics have, in the last decades, challenged such a hierarchy (e.g. Bar-Haim 1990, Storey 2013).

In his book *Genre*, Frow introduces genre as a means of conveying meaning and claims that generic structure is a necessity for any meaning to take place to begin with. Frow asserts that genre can be explained as “a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning” (10). In other words, “genre guides interpretation” (Frow 101) by creating ideology by “effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood . . .” (Frow 2). In this regard, it is plausible that a writer may use a certain formula to convey some meaning, possibly a specific ideological statement. Frow stresses, however, that genre is not simply located in the text itself, nor is it solely a projection of the reader. Genre exists as a relationship between the two, or, in Frow’s words, it is rather a “shared convention with a social force” (102). A reader who is familiar with a genre will read with a certain disposition, guided by expectations and guesses as to how to understand the text. However, the roots of these expectations are in culture and its institutions, and the ideologies of genres are thus also grounded there (102-103). Therefore, I will next discuss in more detail the way in which popular culture has been viewed to express ideology. This is relevant for the thesis, because

The Horse Whisperer and *The Loop* represent popular culture, and I will later analyze the ideology present in them.

Storey elaborates on the ways popular culture may promote ideology, and lists five possible ways of understanding ideology. First, ideology may refer to a system of ideas articulated by a particular group of people (2). Second, ideology may be used to produce “false consciousness” by masking, concealing or distorting images of reality, working in the interests of the powerful against the interests of the powerless (2-3). Third, “ideological forms” may draw attention to the way in which texts . . . always present a particular image of the world” and therefore take sides in conflicts of inequality, exploitation or oppression (3). The fourth definition that Storey lists is associated with Roland Barthes, who argues that ideology “operates mainly at the level of connotations, the secondary, often unconscious meanings that texts . . . carry, or can be made to carry” (4). Storey’s fifth definition of ideology is the definition developed by Louis Althusser. According to Storey, Althusser’s main argument was that ideology is seen in practices of everyday life (4). It may also be noted that since politics and unbalanced power relations are more often than not present when discussing ideology and culture, it is clear that popular culture products are not of less importance in terms of ideology than are any other forms of culture (Storey 5).

Gabriel Bar-Haim states that ideologies, much like religions, can be understood as systems that produce meanings and interpretations that either shape the prevailing social order or revert it in order to replace it (281). But what is the relationship between culture and ideology like? Bar-Haim stresses that ideology and culture, including popular culture, should first of all be separated from each other, and not be understood as two perspectives to the same phenomenon (280). “Ideology can then appear as the engine of social action while cultural representations appear as reactions to and commentaries on it,” Bar-Haim claims, and continues, “cultural representations . . . may be viewed as a way of coping with the effects of

actions and policies inspired by ideology” (ibid.). Works of popular culture can thus be read as reactions to dominant ideological forces, often aiming to point out problems that rise from them (281). These problems, in turn, usually stem from the tendency of an ideology to produce constructions that are favorable to their advocating groups but detrimental to those groups that are left in the margin (283). However, Slotkin stated already in 1973 that what audiences expect from popular culture is “a reflection of the images and symbols that are the outer emblems of its collective mythology, rather than a painful analysis or probing of the depths beneath the surface” (550). Ideologies are a constant source of inspiration and material for popular culture, and a plethora of popular culture representations are born at the expense of dominant meaning production systems (Bar-Haim 282). As Bar-Haim puts it, “popular culture thrives on disillusionment, frustrations, anxieties and changes effected by ideology . . .” (ibid.). All in all, while popular culture reflects ideology, it also produces and reproduces it.

Because formula literature relies heavily on how recognizable the elements in a particular story are and because of the high level of standardization, Cawelti suggests that a touch of uniqueness among all the conventionality of formula literature often turns out to be successful (12). Cawelti talks about “stereotype vitalization” and argues that in order to vitalize the narrative, a writer must renew the stereotypes by introducing some new and unexpected angles to the story (11). Two ways of vitalization are particularly effective, Cawelti explains: giving a stereotypical character also qualities that seem to contradict the qualities that the character embodies (11) and emphasizing humanity of the stereotypical figure by adding hints of vulnerability and complexity (12). In the case of the Western, Cawelti notes that in many points in the history of the genre new variations have emerged and thus renewed the formula (13). I will return to the different variations of the Western in a while.

The Western

I will now continue with a focus on the Western genre. This section will serve for recognizing the genre elements I claim Evans uses in his novels when I analyze the novels later in my thesis. To begin with, it should be mentioned that the history of the Western is certainly not a straightforward one; rather, the Western that we recognize today emerged in the nineteenth century, and has persisted and continuously evolved and changed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Worden 183). While it emerged in prose fiction, it has thrived in theatre, film, radio, comic books, music, and so on (ibid.). Thus, I will not try to cover every aspect or the whole evolution of this old genre with its several variations; I will, for instance, try to exclude discussion on western films, to the extent that it is possible. Rather, I will focus on the aspects that I find relevant for this thesis, such as typical setting, themes and character types, and the genre variation of the western romance, while at the same time I outline a history of the most important phases of the genre's development.

First of all, it can be stated that the western formula and the concept of the wilderness, in both ideological and spatial sense, are firmly connected to each other. The popular Western can be adjoined in the larger body of Western American writing, where West as a region is essential (*A History of Western American Literature* 18). The genre is named after the geographic location of the American West (Worden 183) which functions as its “symbolic landscape” (Cawelti 193). Generally, the genre reflects the region's “historical imaginary” with its themes, such as “the tensions between the rule of the law and individual freedom, the shift from the nomadic cowboy to the modern farmer and industrial worker” – themes that tend to make “political and social tensions central” (Worden 185). The prehistory of the genre is in the works of the American and European writers of American frontier narratives, who had noticed a need for an American hero tale; thus, the American wilderness and the western formula literature have been connected since the earliest stories of the West

(Slotkin 190). Slotkin notes that by 1830, the genre had already taken roots in popular literature, and several stereotypes had already been outlined (ibid.). According to Worden, the genre's father is James Fenimore Cooper: his series of *The Leatherstocking Tales* "would serve as a template for the western genre, especially in its juxtaposition of romance, adventure, and heroic individualism in the frontier wilderness" (185). Worden continues that the Western often has "historical wilderness or frontier" as the setting, "imagined as being just on the verge of being civilized" (186). Cawelti describes that historically the western has represented a time when the contrasting forces of civilization and wilderness are in balance, but the balance is somewhat unsteady, constantly in threat of being destabilized in one way or another in the confrontations of old and new ways of life and by individual actions (ibid.). Thus, the stories of the western formula often revolve around the problems that arise in the transition zone from one environment to another, and in the encounters of individual characters representing these different worlds. For Cooper, the West was a place of encounter between civilization and nature (214). Furthermore, Worden states that besides typical themes and setting, Cooper's novels introduced iconic character types, such as the western hero and the bandit (187).

According to Cawelti, the contrasting of East and West is illustrated by their relationship with nature, the difference being that "civilization and its artificial traditions have not yet taken a firm hold in the West," where the effects of nature prevail in "the pure and quiet light, such as the East never sees" (Wister quoted in Cawelti 221). The dichotomy between East and West will be very relevant in my analysis of Evans' novels later in this thesis, most evidently in the way the eastern and western characters encounter: the basic contrast between East and West has often been established in the encounters of the eastern traveler and the cowboy from the West (Cawelti 219). Moreover, the transforming power of the West on the protagonists is a major plot theme in both novels. As Wallmann claims, it can

be said that one of the defining elements of the Western is that it is ultimately about character of people, the testing and realization of who they really are and what they stand for (8).

Next I am going to elaborate on relevant character types. According to Cawelti, Owen Wister is also an important writer in the history of the Western because he initiated new character types in the genre: the eastern heroine who is “transformed by her western experience” (216), and foremost, the cowboy-hero as we know him today (219). Wallmann describes the cowboy-hero as “an image in legend and life who epitomizes our cultural dreams of solitude and self-sufficiency and intimacy with nature” (85) – moreover, important is the independence, the wanderlust freedom of the cowboy life that has “powerful emotional draw” (86). According to Cronon, Wister’s cowboy figure encapsulated “the nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life” (8) – more on this nostalgia will be said in the section about wilderness. Worden discusses that the way Wister treated the hero connects him with family, business and social order, “with a melancholic attachment to the nomadic life” (198-199). Worden notes that in the lines of Wister’s *The Virginian*, the western narrative often dramatizes implications and connotations related to nationalism, class, gender and race (198).

Regarding the cowboy hero’s representation, it is important to note that in the tradition of the Western, the ideal kind of masculinity equals independence (Bronner xiii). Bronner stresses that the cowboy character even has importance in affecting the national imagery of manliness and masculinity, and is recognized as an “American representation of a manly man” (xiv). Moreover, the connection between American independence and the frontier imagery, including the cowboy figure with his hard, rugged appearance and dominant character, are strongly linked together (ibid.). Also Cronon notes that the cowboy of the western wilderness carries great heroic masculinity (8). Aforementioned Owen Wister also introduced in *The Virginian* “the code of the West”, a force guiding the cowboy’s choices, which has its basis on both the hero’s personal honor but also on what is best for the

community (Cawelti 224). This code, then, is what guides the cowboy's decisions. However, problems arise when an eastern woman emerges and the cowboy falls in love. Women pose a threat to the code and the masculinity of the cowboy, often because they represent institutions of civilization and "these institutions make masculine courage and strength a much less important social factor" (222). This could be viewed as the domestication of the hero, which turns out to be problematic in *The Horse Whisperer*. Using violence is not unfamiliar for a cowboy. Often the hero acts as a vigilante who is not inclined to use violence, but chooses to do so for the good of his community (Untiedt 25). Furthermore, Worden points out that the nobility and moral code of the hero can sometimes blind the reader to "the realities of violence" (199).

Sara L. Spurgeon, in her book *Exploding the Western: Myths of Empire on the Postmodern Frontier*, confirms that wilderness is a theme that the cowboy figure is strongly connected with, as is the Western genre in general. Moreover, Spurgeon discusses another, newer kind of Western hero, a more sinister variation of the classic cowboy figure: the new "sacred hunter" introduced by Cormac McCarthy. This character typically leaves his community to enter the wilderness to hunt and kill animals, seeking renewal and regeneration (Spurgeon 27). Though the sacred hunter figure does not belong to the tradition of the western formula, nor are McCarthy's novels formula novels, it is worth mentioning because in my analysis of *The Loop*, I will point out a character in the story that comes close to the sacred hunter figure. Spurgeon also mentions the significance of horses to the cowboy heroes while she analyses the theme in the context of a Cormac McCarthy novel. The theme of wilderness is thus expressed through images of cowboys and horses, the horse carrying "symbolic significance that functions on a number of metaphysical, even mystical levels" (Spurgeon 52). As Spurgeon argues, Americans have been conditioned to respond to the images of cowboys with their horses by such operators as the media and advertisers (ibid.). In that familiar image

of the horse and rider, the cowboy signifies the will of the nation, the taming of the Wild West and conquering the wilderness: “Horses are inextricably linked to the mythic cowboy within the National Symbolic. More so even than the cow or the gun, the horse defines the cowboy’s status as sacred, special, uniquely American . . .” (Spurgeon 52). Moreover, images of herds of wild horses have become one of the most important mythic signifiers by which to refer to wild and untamed nature – the wilderness (ibid.). Another kind of image is the one where the cowboy breaks the wild horse, usually preceded with the depiction of an empty corral, the waiting saddle and the hero with a lasso in his hand (53). Spurgeon connects the scene of taming of the wild horse to domination and desire for power more generally, even to “colonialist nostalgia” (ibid.). These kinds of horse imageries are, perhaps not surprisingly, utterly important in *The Horse Whisperer*, so I am going to return to the subject later on in the thesis.

Coming to the twentieth century, the western genre, which had traditionally been targeted for the juvenile audience, was impacted by changing public interests and the challenge of new and different media. As an answer, the western formula, among other popular formulas, began to develop different types of westerns for different audiences (Cawelti 230). Cawelti explains:

. . . the big money comes from works that appeal to the general public, for these add to the basic western audience a number of other groups who are not ordinarily addicted to westerns. To attract this larger, more diverse public, western creators must . . . manipulate the western formula so that it responds to the interests, values, and assumptions of people who are not so enamored of cowboy hats, horses, guns, and the other western paraphernalia that they will accept what seems a false or irrelevant picture of the world. (231)

As a result, the romantic western was born and had its first peak years in the 1920s, and it is this particular variation’s contemporary version that I believe will be specifically applicable in my reading of *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*. Two important creators of the period of the romantic western of the 1920s were writer Zane Grey and filmmaker W.S. Hart (232).

Grey and Hart pictured the West through a “dialectic between the cultivated but enervated East and the vigorous, vital and democratic West”, and most often their plot lines had “mythical and melodramatic overtones” (235) and dealt with the developing love between a cowboy and a heroine (233). Both writers also depicted similar landscapes, featuring a quiet town with desert, mountains and cattle ranches in the background (234), much like Evans’ novels do, too. Audrey Goodman describes: “the popular novelist Zane Grey successfully managed the ideological contradictions of masculinity and modernity . . . Grey’s mythic southwestern spaces provided both escape and protection” (242). What ties Grey and Hart to Owen Wister is their emphasis on the code of the West, although Cawelti points out that in the novels and films of Grey and Hart there is more violence than in Wister’s (234). Violence in the plot patterns tend to increase gradually towards the end, where there usually is a confrontation between the hero and the villain (ibid.); I will return to this aspect in my analysis, as it is recognizable in *The Loop*.

Another significant theme that is representative in the western narratives of Grey and Hart was the idea of “the West as a testing ground of character and idea” (Cawelti 235). They would usually feature a female protagonist “whose personal qualities and attitudes, formed in the East, were challenged and tested in the western environment where situations of the most basic sort call upon the deepest resources of character and reveal what a person truly is” (ibid.). Typically, these heroines were in the first place unhappy with their present lives and confused in terms of their identity, but they would find regeneration and happiness through romance under the inspiring western skies, while erotic tension between the hero and the heroine was evident (235). Cawelti lists two types of typical female protagonists of this variation: the sophisticated eastern woman and the wild heroine / nature girl – what combines these two is that both will have to let down their guard and give way to the powerful love they feel for the hero (235). I believe that both of these figures will be

traceable as I move to the analysis of Evans' novels. Furthermore, Grey and Hart developed the elements of the Western by adding new features to their representation of the cowboy-hero. The cowboy they pictured was more of a solitary man, not necessarily an outlaw but having issues with settling down, "a mysterious and alienated figure" (234); albeit particularly Grey's hero had a longing to become part of his surrounding society, an essential theme which Cawelti refers to as "the domestication of the wild hero" (235). As I already mentioned, in *The Horse Whisperer*, domestication through romance will be a central paradox in the plot.

As was stated in the beginning of the passages dealing with the western formula, the Western as a genre is very strongly connected to wilderness as its basic landscape, and particularly so is the romantic western of the 1920s. Rather than being simply an environment for human culture, this landscape was now connected to religious and moral forces; western heroism was now connected to wilderness; unsettled heroes and unsettled nature were juxtaposed. Moreover, it served as a background for the fierce love between the male and female protagonists (Cawelti 239-240). What resulted out of these new meanings was the narrative's tendency to acknowledge such values as separation of masculine and feminine gender roles, monogamous love, the settled family, and the centrality of religion – in a way, the Western was becoming "a vehicle for reaffirming a traditional view of American life" (240).

From the 1960s onwards the western formula has continued to divide into several directions (Cawelti 253). Cawelti notes that contemporary versions of the genre reflect the conflict between differing views of the past and the present (259). New subgenres that Kollin mentions are the nostalgic "'end of the West'" Western," a form which depicts the fading of an old way of life ("Genre and the Geographies" 570), and the ecological Western, which restores an ecological vision to the Western with plenty of wildlife symbolism ("Genre and

the Geographies” 577). To give an example of a modern thematic approach, Crimmel claims that the literary tradition of the American West, which involves the genre of the Western, takes nowadays actively part in raising consciousness about protecting the wilderness and improving people’s relationship with it (377). Thus, ecocriticism is in many respects inseparable from western literature (ibid.). Moreover, the western romance brought into the modern day may work as an updated branch of the traditional western formula. In the following paragraph, I will discuss the contemporary romance in general, and more specifically the modern Western romance.

As a genre, romance literature has been described as “the modern, consumerist equivalent of a fairytale” (Percec 6) and as “the feminine equivalent of an adventure story”, whereas adventure story is a fantasy archetype, appealing to all levels of culture and classes and types of people (Cawelti 41). According to Percec, romance literature nowadays holds a leading position in the international publishing market (ix). As to what makes up a romance, Percec states that although the pattern of romantic fiction is somewhat loose, there is a set of criteria that writers, publishers and readers follow: the story must have a romantic relationship between a man and a woman in its center, it should have a happy ending with a resolution such as marriage, reunion or enduring partnership, and the plot should be substantial enough for the reader to stay interested all through the narrative (6). Although Percec does not at this point clarify what enough substance might mean, I take it that Percec, in accordance with Frow and Cawelti, insists that as profitable as genre literature may be, there generally needs to be some depth to the characters or some sort of production of meaning beneath the superficially seen romantic plot for readers to remain interested. Radway writes about romances that are ideal from the reader perspective, and states that ideally the protagonists recognize their connection relatively early in the story, but have some emotional barriers that are then gradually removed from hindering their relationship (123). Moreover, according to

Radway, in an ideal romance the heroine is unusually intelligent or has “an extraordinarily fiery disposition” (ibid.). According to Faktorovich, it is characteristic of romance narratives that the male is the more active one in the story, while the female is more passive (238); and in my analysis, I will show how this is visible in Evans’ novels. Adding to the typical elements of the romance, Gosa claims that the readers’ interest is ultimately based on sex (14). Gosa defines a sex scene as:

. . . a stretch of text longer than one paragraph which explicitly describes sexual encounters, whether they are describing a completed sexual act or just referring to prelude (kissing and fondling), intercourse (doing the deed) or postlude (seen as post-sex talk or action with specific sexual reference). (21)

Typical for the scenes are: detailed and explicit language where euphemisms replace vocabulary related to sex organs or actions, overemphasis in the way sentences are constructed, overactivity where characters are described doing more than one thing at the same time, women being passive and men being active, and the characters asking themselves questions, recapitulating and/or moralizing after the acts (Gosa 27). Moreover, in a typical romance narrative, love and marriage will follow the sexual acts (ibid.). Gosa claims that all in all, sexual acts in romances work for gratifying the reader who likes things explained to him/her and who does not prefer questions left unanswered or figuring the answers him/herself (ibid.).

As to the modern Western romance, there seems to be no congruent definition as to how to define and classify this type of narrative. Very few studies or articles discussing modern Western romances came to my knowledge after researching. Daniela Rogobete mentions Western romances in a list of “mix-and-match” categories of genres (in Percec 115); Percec views the Western romance as a subcategory of romance, a result of the hybridization of the romance genre in the early 21st century (9). Reviewer and writer Shelley Mosley describes contemporary Western romances as follows:

These may feature heroes who are ranchers, rodeo riders, horse trainers, veterinarians . . . the list is as long as the author's imagination. They are as likely to be driving a truck as riding a horse. Heroines may be reassigned because of work, be running away from the big city, or find themselves the owners of a ranch left to them by relatives. Settings vary, too. . . Many times, there's a small town nearby. (n.pag.)

Nancy Cook remarks that the West has been specifically popular as a milieu for romances (55). Cook notes that in romances set in the West, western mythology is always strongly present as the "harsh but beautiful; spacious but lonely" background (56): "These novels offer realistic settings, but their cowboy/rancher heroes come with many of the trappings of Western mythology: they are independent, honorable, competent, protective, strong, quiet men who stand up for their land . . ." (ibid.). Moreover, Cook states that the West, and specifically Montana as the setting for a romance, often speaks to "the essential character": it reveals what truly matters for the characters, and this is often liberating (55-56). Cook continues that what is typical for Montana romances is the way they value "home making" as a resolution (57), and therefore conservatively support the idea of "the heterosexual nuclear family" (60), and consequently, they can relatively rarely be seen as empowering for women (ibid.). If some sort of psychological empowerment happens for the female protagonist, it is mostly "through romantic assimilation", which helps the character see meaning in her life, feel belonging to a place, feel true love, and recuperate "from the negative effects of modernity" (69).

For the purposes of my analysis, I will treat the Western romance, which Percec also considers as a subgenre of romance, as a branch of Western literature, containing elements of the Western but with a romantic focus. The main reason for this is that I think the theme of wilderness is so crucial in Evans' novels. Next, I will discuss the idea of wilderness in more detail.

Wilderness

I have now provided a framework for how literary genres work, and outlined the basics of the western formula, including typical setting, themes and character types. Lastly, in this section, I will discuss the idea of wilderness, especially in the American context, and even more specifically, referring to the geographic area of West America. While I consider the concept of wilderness, civilization comes up as well – this is necessary, unavoidable and natural, since the two can be considered as each other’s opposites. Roderick Frazier Nash suggests that wilderness and civilization can be viewed as “antipodal influences which combine in varying proportions to determine the character of an area” (6). On the other hand, some scholars claim that wilderness can actually be considered a creation of civilization: for instance, William Cronon argues in his essay that wilderness cannot be placed apart from humanity, as ideologically it is a human creation, a product of civilization (1). However, the discussion that follows next will mostly revolve around the idea of wilderness, as I will introduce definitions it has been given and associations related to it, while civilization will gain its meanings mainly through the opposition.

First I will briefly introduce the idea of the frontier, which has partly been influenced by thoughts on wilderness, but on the other hand, which itself has affected the transformation of the attitudes on wilderness (Cronon 3). Elizabeth Furniss, whom I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, argues that Frederick Jackson Turner, who wrote his paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in 1893, was the leading scholar in the academic studies of the frontier for several decades (24) and was still enjoying popularity in the early 20th century (26). Furniss explains that one of Turner’s main arguments in his writings was that “American history, culture, and political institutions were shaped not by America’s British heritage, but instead by the unique environment of North America” and by this environment Turner means foremost the wilderness (24). Furniss continues to explain

Turner's central ideas: "it was from the frontier experience that uniquely American culture and political institutions were forged" (ibid.). Furniss adds that for Turner, the term 'frontier' meant a geographical zone on the periphery, largely uninhabited by the settlers (ibid.), but it also meant a process of encounters between savagery and civilization, settler and Indian, or man and nature (25). Turner's main arguments were, according to Furniss, that as settlers moved westward to the frontier, they "gradually shed the trappings of civilization" there. First, the settlers were overwhelmed by nature and forged to regress to what Turner saw as more primitive ways of living; but soon the settlers would master the wilderness, and what emerged from the frontier was "the new American" (24). Furniss argues that Turner's work was so influential that it has even participated in defining American national identity (25).

However, according to Slotkin, it is important to note that in order to understand how wilderness is depicted in culture, one must understand where these depictions have their basis: in the American mythology (18). The mythology, in turn, has its roots in the constantly evolving relationship of the first Puritans that sailed to America and their new, strange environment (ibid.). The substantial factors in the physical and psychological environment of the colonists were, according to Slotkin, "the wildness of the land" with its blend of harshness and potential fertility, the near presence of the native people, and European culture as the frame (ibid.).

Wilderness is nowadays often romanticized in the mental landscapes imagined by a modern-day reader, and given before all positive connotations, as in for instance imagining a sunset over a lake or a line of mountains. This is partly because the modern-day concept of wilderness is highly charged with ideas of sacredness, because in the theories of 18th Century Romantics, "God would most often be found in those vast, powerful landscapes . . . God was on the mountaintop, in the chasm, in the waterfall, in the rainbow . . ." (Cronon 4). However, Cronon explains that it was actually until the late 18th century that wilderness, in

America, had foremost negative meanings attached to it (2). Wasteland was the closest synonym for wilderness, the most suitable adjectives were such as ‘savage’ or ‘desolate,’ and as for emotions, the presence of wilderness was most likely to evoke fear and terror (2). The first settlers of the New World had learned these dark connotations from the Christian tradition in Europe, and brought this “intellectual legacy of the Old World” with them to America (Nash 8). As Cronon states, many of the word’s most deep-rooted associations stemmed from the Bible: wilderness was where Christ had struggled with wild beasts and the devil, and the term was used to refer “to places on the margins of civilization where it is . . . easy to lose oneself in moral confusion” (2). Furthermore, according to Slotkin, in America the anxious attitudes towards wilderness had their roots “in the dark side of the Puritan attitude toward the natural world and toward the American wilderness in particular” (146). Slotkin argues that these attitudes expressed the Puritans’ own emotions, such as the feeling of not belonging, their fears of adapting in their new, different environment and their guilt for having left England, (ibid.). However, as they did adjust to their new environment and gained experience and knowledge, the colonists gradually began to portray the American wilderness “in more realistic, less nightmarish terms” (Slotkin 147). The wilderness now took on more positive qualities and gained a restorative role in relation to the human soul (ibid.).

To sum up, the term’s connotations actually went through a major transformation by the end of the nineteenth century; what was once regarded as wasteland was now often referred to as Eden (Cronon 3). According to Cronon, two reasons were behind this shift of thinking: the idea of the sublime, and the frontier myth as the American nation’s most sacred myth (ibid.). The idea of the sublime refers to how such 18th century thinkers as Burke and Kant deduced that if Satan is present in wilderness, then is also Christ: “One might meet devils and run the risk of losing one’s soul in such a place [as the wilderness], but one might also meet God” (ibid.). If God was to show up, he would most certainly show up in a

landscape “where one could not help feeling insignificant,” reminded of their own mortality (ibid.). Thus, the idea of wilderness gained associations with the sublime. Cronon, however, stresses that coming to the 19th century, the romantic sublime was not the only ideology that helped shape wilderness into a “sacred American icon” (7). Wilderness was also needed to preserve the idea of what it means to be American. Cronon describes that Turner’s frontier thesis entails that that the first immigrants tamed the wild, laid the foundations of civilization and “reinfused themselves with a vigor, an independence and a creativity” that was to become the basis of American national identity (7). However, the frontier myth also entailed the idea that this essential American identity was based on temporariness (ibid.) – therefore, the national character was in constant danger of passing. Cronon argues that when Turner declared that the frontier is disappearing, those that celebrated the frontier would look back in mourning, because their whole view of the world was founded on free land, on wilderness (ibid.). Therefore, wilderness must be preserved, in order to keep those essentially American values alive.

According to Cronon, a strong defining element of the frontier myth was the powerful thought among some Americans of wilderness as “the last bastion of rugged individualism” (7). A representation for this individualism was embodied in the birth of the cowboy character (ibid.). As was discussed earlier in the context of the western formula, the cowboy was the individual in the Western narratives who would “escape the confining strictures of civilized life” (Cronon 8). Cronon continues that masculinity was especially important to the mythic frontier individualist (ibid.). Therefore, on one hand wilderness seems to be a fountain of a certain type of masculinity that is often contrasted with feminine civilization, but on the other, wilderness itself is at times connected with the feminine. Moreover, otherness is an aspect that is often connected to wilderness. Cronon points out that

the frontier idealists saw the wilderness as the one place where “a man could be a real man” whereas civilization was regarded a threat to masculinity (8).

Imagined as “a space of freedom”, wilderness can also be viewed as “the metaphoric domain of the Other” (Gersdorf, 159). Henderson notes: “Wilderness is often understood as land untouched by people . . . [It] is not simply an absence of human influence, but the presence of something else” (413). Spurgeon states that when nature is the Other, it is “strange and untrustworthy. . . the place of power and danger from which one is normally isolated and protected” (66). Spurgeon argues that in the context of the Western, American national identity is based on the violent conquest of “the racialized Other and feminized nature” (19). Both of these themes include the idea that wilderness should be conquered (20). Spurgeon refers to Annette Kolodny’s idea that in the Western, there is usually a lone male hero who is “struggling to define a relationship with the female landscape and untouched virgin, one image offering nurturing fertility while the other demands penetration and conquest (20). Spurgeon mentions, in accordance with Slotkin, that within the National Symbolic thinking and in the tradition of the early Puritan writing concerning the wilderness, common to the Western is the idea that “wilderness must be conquered by man lest it conquer him” (25). Furthermore, Kollin argues that typical for literature of the West is that the land is envisioned as once harmonious or balanced wilderness, now destroyed by man; “a virgin land ruined forever by industry, modernization, or simply the arrival of other populations” (“Environment in the Western” 5).

All in all, wilderness thinking has gone through tremendous changes and many different phases over the centuries. Nash explains that different points of views from different eras have over time shaped into a specific “philosophy of wilderness” (238), which admits that wilderness has the right to exist (270), it is essential for man’s well-being (266), and therefore it should be preserved (271). Regarding the opposition of wilderness and

civilization, Nash concludes: “the essential premise is that wilderness and civilization are no longer in an adversary relationship. Modern civilization . . . needs wilderness, and if wilderness is to exist it surely needs the protection of a self-restraining civilization” (ibid.).

The following three chapters will focus on my analysis of *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*. I will analyze the novels from three different perspectives; however, it needs to be noted that the themes somewhat overlap. In order to analyze wilderness and culture in *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*, I will divide my discussion of the two aspects into the following subthemes: male-female romances, the opposition of East and West, and human-animal relationships. All three subthemes can be traced back to the bottom-line opposition of wilderness or culture, and what kind of connotations and values the two are given. Each subtheme will also reveal typical elements of the Western, which in turn reflect the wilderness/culture thematic.

In my analysis, I refer to several different uses of the word ‘culture’. The meanings I will refer to are: ‘culture’ as consisting of activities such as the arts, which are considered to be important for a civilization’s development (*Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*); and ‘culture’ as a particular civilization, considering especially its way of life and arts (ibid.). Referring to the same dictionary, I will also use the word ‘cultural’ as in involving or concerning the arts, and ‘cultured’ as in being well educated and knowing a lot about the arts. The word’s etymology is also made use of in my analysis: “The word ‘culture’ comes from the Latin *cultus*, which means ‘care’, and from the French *colere* which means ‘to till’ as in ‘till the ground’” (Berger, n.pag.). In this sense, I will at times use the word ‘cultural’ in another sense, mostly used in American English, given by *Collins* online: “obtained by breeding or cultivation.”

First, I will focus on the central plot theme in both novels: the heterosexual romances between the male and female characters in the narratives. I will also explain the

ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed and deconstructed in *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*. Analysis of the romances, and of the gender representations present in them, is relevant because discourses of femininity or masculinity are maintained and enforced by representations, and literature participates in these representations by reinforcing some qualities or constructing new ones.

Second, I will point out how a dichotomy between East and West is built in the two novels. There are several reasons to analyze this dichotomy in Evans' novels. For instance, as was already stated, narratives of the West typically reveal something about the historical and social issues of the region. Moreover, Kollin notes that literature of the West carry traces of the issues faced by the "diverse groups of people who have made it their home" ("Environment in the Western" 2). By analyzing the way the land is depicted, one may also receive information about the characters, and vice versa. However, the analysis of the depiction of the East is also important, since, as Kollin points out, landscapes are not restricted spaces: instead, events unfurling elsewhere shape and define them as well ("Environment in the Western" 2). Moreover, it has been suggested that the use of familiar landscape elements can work as a device for inviting the reader to recognize the mental and physical space – the atmosphere – that the writer intends (Proulx 13). Thus, relevant in the chapter East/West are the interaction and the juxtaposition of the two geographical areas, and the detailed analysis of the portrayed surroundings in both.

Lastly, I will discuss the way that animals are connected to the narratives, especially how the characters of the novels relate to animals. This is a relevant theme because animals are central in both novels' plots. My main focus will not be on what the animals themselves symbolize in the narrative, although I will occasionally address this point of view, as well. Surely there are various possible symbolic meanings to be associated with, for instance, Pilgrim the horse in *The Horse Whisperer*, but it is not my intention to identify all of

them. Instead, I will concentrate on the *relationship* between man and animal. Differences in attitudes in this regard reflect also the larger portrayal of wilderness and culture. For instance, the desire to gain control over animals reflects control over nature in a larger sense. Another example: seeing the wolf as an animal whose life is as important as the family dog's, rather than seeing it as a beast, gives wilderness absolute value because the animal is valuable as it is, not only when it is useful or valuable to the human.

3. Male / female romance

In both *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*, the most central plotlines revolve around the heterosexual romances between the protagonists: in *The Horse Whisperer*, between Annie Graves and Tom Booker, and in *The Loop*, between Helen Ross and Luke Calder. In this chapter, I will discuss these romances and focus, for instance, on what kind of masculinity or femininity are portrayed through these romances, and what these have to do with wilderness and culture. In order to better analyze these romances, I will give an in-depth introduction of each central character.

In *The Horse Whisperer*, the female protagonist, Annie Graves, is 43 years old, a mother of a teenage daughter, Grace, and wife of lawyer Robert Maclean. Annie was born in England, “sailed triumphantly through Oxford” (48) for a degree, and now lives with her family in New York City where she works as editor-in-chief for a magazine. Annie's personality is described as energetic and impatient by nature, and her lifestyle as “upstart” (25), “the tyrant liberal” (21) and “English to boot” (25). In the eyes of her husband Robert, Annie is described as a woman who has a sparkling personality. The marriage is, however, described as somewhat complicated: “Robert had always felt that he loved his wife more than she would ever love him . . . Their marriage, compared with many he had observed, was good

. . . Why someone so vibrant should want to be with a man like him, he never ceased to wonder” (71). From Grace’s point of view, “her parents’ relationship had long been a mystery to her, a complicated world where dominance and compliance were never quite what they seemed” (14).

The birth of Annie and Robert’s only child was an emergency section. The birth is described as being a harsh one: after Annie had epidural,

half an hour later all hell had broken loose . . . Like some hero from a forties war movie, the obstetrician had swept in and declared his troops he was ‘going in’ . . . Robert had always imagined caesareans were peaceful affairs. No panting, shoving and screaming . . . Nothing then had prepared him for the wrestling match that followed . . . Annie was under general anesthetic and he watched these men, these total strangers, delving inside her, up to their elbows in gore, hauling it out and sloshing the hole with metal clamps and grunting and heaving and twisting until one of them, the war hero, had it in his hands . . . (69)

I think the birth is described this way to stress that it was not *natural*: it was more like a medical incident. The kind of natural birth that is implicitly constructed in the extract would not include medication, clamor or third parties; therefore, Annie’s childbirth does not fall under this category. On the contrary, the situation is hellish: parallels are made to a wrestling match and war, Annie takes in all possible medication, and several strangers are involved. All in all, the birth of Annie’s first child is portrayed almost as the antitype of a more peaceful birth that is implied in this extract to be more natural and therefore also more ideal.

The reader is told that after having Grace, Annie is resolute in showing that it is possible to combine motherhood with the dynamic career in the field of media, “like many ambitious women of her generation” (51). As a mother, she is described as having been very close to Grace for the first ten years of her daughter’s life, “closer than almost any mother and daughter she could think of” (52). The combination of motherhood and career has not, however, gone without sacrifices from the other end, and by now Annie suffers from a strong sense of guilt that has accompanied her consciousness ever since she accepted her job as

executive editor, for now she only sees her daughter a couple of hours a day. Even this short time causes stress in the family: “Annie had at first refused to acknowledge the toll it was taking at home. She and Grace now had what she proudly referred to as ‘quality time’. From her present perspective, its main quality seemed to Annie to be oppression” (52). However, it is not only the emotional distance between Annie and her daughter that causes her pain. Much of Annie’s pain resonates from the fact that she has had several miscarriages, and this is a cause of sorrow that Robert and Annie have never discussed. I think the narrative implies that Annie has failed as a mother: considering the miscarriages, Grace’s birth, and the emotional distance with Grace, Annie’s mothering is not given positive connotations. Annie seems to be aware of this only on a subconscious level because she does not share these issues with anyone. As a result, Annie wants to punish herself, and she does so mostly by channeling her frustration, disappointment and anger into work.

It should be noted at this point that the analysis of Annie discusses, to a great extent, her motherhood. Much of this discussion is based on her position as a 1990s working mother that is contrasted with the more traditional, self-sacrificing “angel” mother position, a classical and dominant paradigm in representations of motherhood (Kaplan i). Kaplan states that by the end of the 1980s, discourses and representations of “two-career marriages” emerged, where both parents worked, but the stress was still foremost on the mother (189). Kaplan claims that cultural codes of the era promoted that good mothering is difficult to combine with good working (ibid.), and before this, “the fact that women should only bear and nurture children was simply a *given* [sic]” (182). Moreover, Greenfield notes that ever since the entrenchment of the nuclear family from the 18th century onwards, women were foremost defined in terms of their motherhood (14) and childbirth was seen as “the ultimate source of adult female identity” (Gillis quoted in Greenfield 15).

In her job, Annie has a reputation of being ruthless: the word is that if one ends up being interviewed by her, he or she will “be ‘done’ or ‘buried’” by Annie (48), and apologizing to people “doesn’t occur to her” (24). On the surface, Annie is competitive and presumptuous: she even turns a run in Central Park into a competition in her head, considering herself a true runner whereas other people are mere joggers. She is also compulsively controlling in many regards. For instance, when Annie and her husband are driving out of town for the weekend, the Friday night traffic makes her cranky and she reacts by giving her husband orders on how he should drive. She also tends to, for instance, make pedant remarks on her daughter’s American English speech: “Annie always picked her up on the way she spoke, adopting her loftiest English accent to do so. It always prompted Grace back in flawless Valley Girl” (76). Moreover, Grace observes that whenever Annie feels impatient, she compensates by taking charge and turning bossy towards other people. Annie commands her husband to stop brooding over their daughter’s accident, saying: “You’ve got to stop feeling sorry for her. Pity won’t help at all” (102). Annie is depicted as bossy and domineering, tending to control not only her own, but also other people’s actions and emotions. However, there is more to her: it is said that her husband senses in her “a depth of unresolved pain beneath” (47).

Annie’s success in her job is connected with her competence in learning about different cultures: “She had a way of tapping into things. She could seamlessly adapt, insinuate into any group, any culture or situation. She knew instinctively what was required . . . And in her work, which had so long obsessed her, this gift had helped her win all that was worth winning” (195). This extract suggests that Annie’s life is a theatre in which she performs histrionically, accommodating with no difficulty into any given role. After Grace and Pilgrim’s accident, however, this play of hers has begun to come to pieces. Due to the above-mentioned aspects of Annie Graves I claim that she is a woman from the East who is

connected with culture – with her triumphant education in Oxford, her work as a magazine editor-in-chief in the field of culture, her way of trying to cultivate her daughter, and with her determination to control all aspects of life and people, I believe she certainly represents the cultural in more ways than one. At the same time, it seems that Annie’s personality is given many negative qualities: she is described as controlling and bossy, work-obsessed, and as was argued above, it is implied that she has failed as a mother. It is interesting that despite all Annie’s independence, it is stated that “it was, she believed, a simple and unassailable fact of life that if a woman went to epic lengths to throw herself on the mercy of a man, the man would not, could not, refuse” (178). I think this extract suggests that Annie is, behind all her rationality and hard surface, seeking for a change, looking for acting the more unfamiliar role of damsel in distress. Annie’s westward quest is furthermore triggered by her noticing how Pilgrim turns worse – after the accident, the previously beautiful and classy horse is described as turning devilish with his “grotesquely scarred muzzle” and “his eyes with their blood-crazed whites” (109). Accordingly, Annie notices that regarding her daughter, “something inside the girl was dying” (122).

Tom Booker, who is “the horse whisperer” and the male protagonist of *The Horse Whisperer*, is the epitome of the modern-day cowboy hero. It is him that Annie finds and turns to with high hopes of him healing their traumatized horse, Pilgrim, from his emotional upsets caused by the car accident. Booker is forty-five years old, and the reader is told he was born and raised in Montana where his great-grandparents once moved. He is divorced from a short marriage and has an adult son who lives in New York. His appearance is described as signaling some kind of “focused stillness”, expressed for instance in the way that he speaks only if he has something to say (139). The reader is first introduced to Tom as having a sunburnt face, wearing boots and a hat. According to Tom’s mother’s description, he is “lean and tall and of all her three children by far the best looking . . . his sunbleached hair

longer than before . . . Even in winter his face was tanned and it made the clear, pale blue eyes of his all the more vivid” (139). By the description of Tom’s looks and appearance, he seems to carry characteristics of the “rugged manliness” referred to in the theory chapter. Annie notes that Tom’s body has “angularity . . . born of his work” (413). Furthermore, based on how other characters talk about him as a “cowboy” (145) or address him as cowboy, it is fair to assume that he looks and sounds like one. Even when visiting New York City, he wears his cowboy hat. Booker does not have a house of his own or a permanent home. For all his adult life, he has been traveling for work, training horses and teaching his horsemanship clinics “month after month around the country” (149). Thus, he stands for some “wanderlust freedom” mentioned earlier, referring to the cowboy figure’s unattached male independence, which in turn reflects the feelings of freedom and independence that are so important to American national identity. It is emphasized that on his brother’s ranch, where Tom stays and helps in-between his clinics, they still do a lot of work with horses, whereas other ranchers have mostly replaced the horses with vehicles: “Rounding up cattle on motorcycles wasn’t the same somehow” (215).

Considering above aspects, my reading is that despite living in the 1990s, Booker is a rather traditional cowboy. It seems that he is confident by nature, satisfied with what he has, and his psychological mindset is very stable. As was explained in the theory chapter, the cowboy hero has been connected with such ideals as self-sufficiency, independence, freedom and intimacy with nature, and in the way that Evans portrays Tom Booker these themes are evident. Independence and freedom are visible in the way he views relationships with women: “He’d always liked the company of women and found that sex came his way without looking for it” (149). It seems that Booker is an independent man, and does not need a woman in his life, although he attracts many. In the following extract, in which Booker contemplates over his ex-wife, his freedom and intimacy with nature are

pronounced: “He could never feel such a need, not for Rachel or anyone else . . . he already knew he had in his life a kind of innate balance . . . a cohesion of things animate and inanimate, to which he was connected with both by spirit and by blood” (ibid.). His self-sufficiency is also reflected in his freedom from owning things, as is explained through a depiction of his room: there are so few belongings in the room that “a stranger might have wondered how a man could live so long yet own so little” (273).

Horses are typically inseparable from the cowboy figure, as was stated in the theory chapter. Tom Booker’s relationship with horses is discussed in more depth in the chapter on human/animal relationships. However, in order to prove that he actually is a cowboy figure, I will here point out that the way he is depicted as riding the horses and working on the farm does support my reading. For instance, there is an image of Booker riding his horse, describing how “. . . Tom eased Rimrock back onto the bank, then loped him up into the sun at the top of the ridge and stopped” (224), or a scene in the novel where he works with colts on horseback:

The colts bolted and swerved from one end of the arena to the other, making long shadows on the sand and kicking up amber clouds of it that trapped the slanting sun. Tom moved Rimrock effortlessly after them, sometimes stepping sideways or backward to block them or open up a gap. Annie hadn’t seen him ride before. The horse’s white-socked feet made intricate steps without any visible guidance, steered, so it seemed to Annie, by Tom’s thoughts alone. It was as if he and the horse were one. She couldn’t take her eyes off him. As he came past, he tipped his hat and smiled. (220)

These scenes seem to underline how the cowboy works with his horse in a naturalness that makes the man and his horse seem like merged into one mind and body, and how easily they together move in nature.

As Tom Booker begins to develop romantic feelings towards Annie, it is not her drive or ambitiousness in life that intrigues him. First of all, Annie is beautiful in Tom’s eyes. When they first encounter, “all he really registered was the auburn hair and the troubled green

eyes” (163-164). The red hair could be read as highlighting her intelligence and fiery personality, stereotypes generally attached to red hair (Anderson 6) and also common in literature (Anderson iv). As noted in the theory chapter, the female protagonists of romance narratives are usually highly intelligent. Accordingly, in Annie’s eyes, Tom is handsome: “Maybe it was just the light, but his eyes seemed as clear and blue as the sky behind him” (252). It seems like even Tom’s looks connect him to nature; at least this is Annie’s association. It could be said that for Annie, Tom emerges out of the landscape of the West. It seems that what attracts Tom is the sensitivity he seems to sense in Annie, even before the two of them know with each other better. When they talk on the phone for the first time and Annie tells him about their situation with the horse, Tom observes sentimentality in Annie’s voice, although “it was buried deep and firmly under control” (153). I interpret a reference to culture here, since the idea of culture also includes the idea of control: to cultivate something, such as crop, entails control of that specific plant in terms of, for instance, ownership and regulation of where it grows and what else may not grow on the same area. In this case, Tom makes the observation that “the Englishwoman in New York” (151) he converses with is controlling her emotions. Later on, when the reader is given the first indications about him actually falling in love with Annie, he feels an urge to protect her: “She had looked so lost and beautiful that he’d wanted to take her in his arms” (224). I think this states something about what ideal femininity is like in the West: a woman is viewed as attractive if she is the damsel in distress, is an object of protection for the man, whereas career-directedness is unattractive, possibly even considered manly. Therefore, passivity is feminine, and activity is unfeminine.

When Annie begins to settle in Montana, first in their accommodation in Choteau and then in the guest house of the Double Divide ranch, the first thing she takes care of is arranging herself a study to work in. Grace describes that Annie transforms the dining room

into her office “as a first priority of course” (206). For Tom, this is difficult to understand: “It had struck him as odd that the first thing Annie should want to do in this new place, before unpacking, before even seeing where she was to sleep, was to set up somewhere to work” (233). I think this extract shows that Tom’s attitude toward women’s working is not neutral, even though he himself travels for work. It could also prove that Tom has a problem with the type of work Annie does, as if working with knowledge and culture is not as meaningful as manual work such as his. The situation invokes judgmental statements in other characters, as well. Tom’s brother’s wife Diane comments to Annie: “So you do sometimes give yourself a break from the telephone after all” (248), and Annie senses accusation in this, “almost as though she were saying that Annie was much too busy to bother herself with being a mother” (249). These assessments from the western characters seem to highlight the difference between what is implied about women’s positions in the East and the West. Perhaps there is even a connection to be made to wilderness and culture, the result being that it is seen as more “natural” for women to nurture than to work. I will give more evidence for this reading later in this chapter. The difference between the Eastern and Western characters’ stances towards working women is further enhanced by the view of Grace, Annie’s daughter. The New York born teenager ponders: “She was proud of her mother . . . Although she’d never dream of letting her know, Annie was how she herself wanted to be when she grew up . . . it seemed natural and right that women should have such careers . . . It was just that Annie was, well, so sure about everything” (261-262).

It is noteworthy that in *The Horse Whisperer*, Tom Booker’s stance on horses is more than once juxtaposed with his attitude towards Annie. First of all, it seems that this attitude of his, the apposition of women and horses, has passed down from the preceding generations, as Tom reminisces that even his grandfather used to say: “dancing and riding, it’s the same damn thing,” and continue: “It’s about trust and consent. You’ve gotten hold of one

another. The man's leading but he's not dragging her, he's offering a feel and she feels it and goes with him. You're in harmony and moving to each other's rhythm, just following the feel" (136). Whereas the 'horse riding as dancing' figure of speech is probably a more or less familiar one to riding school students globally, taking the figure into a heterosexual direction where male is the human and female is the horse is essential for the romance of *The Horse Whisperer*. The juxtaposition is at times reinforced by Evans in transitions from one scene to another which parallels the preceding one. For instance, there is a scene where Annie is running, and the paragraph ends with Booker watching her "break into a run, still not looking at what lay around her or ahead of her, but only where she placed her feet" (237), and the next paragraph begins: "Pilgrim burst into the arena as though fired from a cannon. He ran straight to the far end and stopped there, sending up a splash of red sand" (ibid.). Later, when Tom recognizes he has romantic feelings towards Annie, he once again uses the horse riding simile, positioning Annie as the horse, to make sense of his emotions: "Never, since he first laid eyes on Rachel so many years ago, had he met a woman he wanted more . . . All things were one, and like a rider in harmony the best a man could do was recognize the feel and go with it and be as true to it as his soul let him" (311-312).

As was stated in the theory chapter, in narratives of the West people are often transformed by their surroundings, and Annie's transformation is to a great extent about shifting away from the domain of work and therefore becoming more passive. After Annie's first "date" with Tom, where he takes her horseback trekking in the wild nature, Annie begins to shift away from work life. The shift begins by subtle remarks about how the surrounding nature makes her feel versus how her work makes her react while she is driving a car: "She traveled north and looked out over the plains to her right . . . Ahead on the blacktop, the sun was already making pools of mirage and she lowered the window and let the wind blow her hair back . . . Then she remembered all the faxes and phone messages that would be waiting

for her when she got back to the ranch that the thought had eased her foot on the gas pedal” (249-250). Later, in several places, Annie is described as experiencing difficulties finding her usual work mode, identifying with her work self, and generally having a hard time working long-distance: “. . . she wrote an immediate and robust reply, full of facts and figures . . . But God, it took such a lot of effort” (250); “She started to read Lucy’s fax again but for some reason found it hard to concentrate . . .” (251); “She was trying to write an editorial . . . but she was having trouble finding the old mix of wit and vitriol that used to characterize Annie Graves at her best” (262). Moreover, in the last one of the aforementioned scenes, Annie has just arrived from the horseback trek that Tom invited her to join, and she ponders over the feelings the trip evoked: “It was years since she’d felt the exhilaration that had been there this morning. It was like someone had let her out of a cage” (263). During their ride, Annie and Tom had seen two eagles fly over them: “A shadow passed over the heads of the horses and he looked up at the sky and so did she. It was a pair of golden eagles . . . And together, in silence, they watched them soar slowly up the valley until they were lost beneath a massive gray wall of mountain beyond” (260). It should be noted here what was discussed in the theory about the Western’s way of constructing a difference between the urban and wilderness; it was mentioned that in the Western, civilization is often described as confining. Accordingly, in this extract of the novel, Annie experiences nature as a liberating force. Clearly, the experience was triggered and reinforced by her seeing the eagles flying free earlier; it is noteworthy that the eagle is a known symbol for American values of independence and freedom (Nix, n.pag), and in American Indian beliefs, the eagle is believed to have a special connection to God (Our National Symbol, n.pag.). Annie not only transforms by feeling freer, closer to nature, and less determined by her work, but she also begins to go through a moral self-reevaluation about what kind of a person she has been in her job. Thus, the Western theme of the west as a testing ground of moral, discussed in the theory

chapter, also comes into picture. The following extract pictures Annie thinking about the people she has fired, understanding herself now better with the help of nature, relating her new identity with the emerging spring around her, and realizing that Tom is the mediator of her whole wilderness experience:

Now, from the fatuous vantage of her office in exile, Annie reflected on such deeds and on the losses within her that had prompted them . . . Here, in this place of sky, she now came to see them more clearly, as if their secrets were unfurling with the season itself. And with a bereaved stillness born of this knowledge, as May slipped by, she watched the separate world outside grow warm and green. Only when she was with him did she feel part of it. Three times more he had come to her door with the horses and they had ridden out together to other places he wanted to show her. (280-281)

There is another horseback trekking scene where Annie and Tom are having a conversation, and Annie compares what she does for a living to what Tom does. Annie claims that her job as a magazine editor is “dumb and patronizing and phony” – once again a reference to culture being artificial – whereas she says to Tom, “what you do is real” (284). This self-examination ultimately results in Annie giving up her job. After this, Annie also begins to change in her routines and even in her physical appearance. She gradually gives up her habit of morning runs, “whose tyrannical routine she seemed, with no apparent ill effect, to have all but escaped. Since the cattle drive, she had only run once and even then was shocked to hear herself tell Grace she’d been out jogging. If she was now a jogger, she might as well quit” (395). I read this is as another proof for Annie’s time in the West transforming her more *passive*: she even gives up the physical exercise she has earlier done on a regular basis. When Annie’s husband Robert visits Montana, he observes she has “new, healthy radiance” about her (394). Besides becoming closer to nature and experiencing the emotions it raises in Annie, she is even transformed through her changing relationship with the church, a shift that is also triggered by Tom. On an impulse, one Sunday she feels powerfully eager to go to church with her daughter, but it is stated that the urge has actually more to do with Tom

than religion. I will discuss this topic more closely in the chapter East/West. Even later in the narrative, it is stated that now that Annie's situation has completely changed, she realizes that her life back in East seems to her very unreal. On the contrary, "nothing, in a sense, could be more real than the life they'd found here . . . One, it seemed to Annie, was comprised of obligations and the other of possibilities" (343). Soon after this realization, Annie throws herself head over heels into the romance with Tom. Although Annie has just considered the life in the West as a world of possibilities, her feelings towards Tom are described in a way that makes the romance seem irrevocable. When they have their first kiss by a riverbank in the wilderness, "it seemed to Annie . . . that in what followed there was no element of choice" (357). As was stated in the theory, it is typical for Western romances that the surrounding wilderness seems to guide the characters. However, this extract also entails passivity, as if Annie has no agency of her actions anymore.

It seems that as Annie and Tom fall in love, Annie's transformation in the West is about her moving closer to nature and God, both in a physical sense by the change in her physical environment, but also psychologically, and ultimately even through her actions. On the other hand, it seems that Tom's transformation draws him further from his true nature, which is suggested to involve male freedom and independence, as he begins to feel ominous about their deepening relationship. Tom's change is, however, not as explicit as Annie's. It should be remembered that, as was discussed in the theory section, whereas the cowboy in the Western signifies masculine independence, femininity is viewed as a threat to it. Kelley explains: "Whereas masculinity is connected with outdoor living, mobility, and emotional restraint, femininity is linked with romance and domestic containment. All traits feminine are seen as a threat to male independence . . ." (234). The moment when Tom realizes his independency is threatened is when he reflects over their first kiss. Tom remarks that he has never felt a need for a woman before, but now that he does, he figures "he had been whole

and now he was not. It was as if the touch of Annie's lips that night had stolen away some vital part of him that only now he saw was missing" (406). The cowboy, therefore, is now losing his identity, but still he cannot resist going further. When Tom and Annie have sex for the first time, Tom realizes that Annie is the first woman he makes love to in his bedroom, it is the first time he lets a woman "in a place that he could call his home" (410). It is very explicitly stated how Tom has previously valued his freedom but now he is about to lose it. Until this point, "He had gone to women's beds but never let them come to his. He had casualized sex, kept it distant that he might keep himself free and protect himself from the kind of need . . . which now he felt for Annie. Her presence, in the sanctum of this room, thus took on a significance that was both daunting and wondrous" (ibid.). Right before they have their first intercourse, Tom feels Annie has "possession of the very root of his being" (412). In many places, Tom keeps justifying their sex to himself by thinking that it is nothing to be ashamed of because it is not in the power of their decision, but instead "a deeper force" that guides them, stirring "not just their bodies but their souls and knew naught of shame nor of any such construct" (411). I interpret this deeper force as referring to wilderness, containing power of renewal, which can also be channeled into sexuality. It can definitely be argued that Tom begins to lose his western independence, and therefore masculinity, the moment he lets the woman from the East into his home and bed. For a short moment, however, wilderness seems to take over the couple. They realize this themselves, too, during their first sexual intercourse, as Tom suddenly remembers the pair of golden eagles they saw the other day, and says to Annie: "That's what we are. Now. That's what we are" (414).

It is notable how on one hand, the physical consummation of Annie and Tom's romance is continuously associated with wilderness; on the other, wilderness itself is described as reinforcing the physical intimacy of the lovers to a great extent. Both Annie and Tom constantly justify their relationship to themselves with naturalness, thinking to

themselves and to each other that if something is so purely natural, then it must also be right, be the other person married or not. As other people at the Bookers' ranch are conveniently out of town, leaving Tom and Annie by themselves, they set out for a romantic, private, four-day horseback trek into the wild, where they pretend that the rest of the world does not exist. When the two of them ride out into wilderness, they hear or see a variety of wild animals there: coyotes, elk, bears, and a wolf. Contrasted with the reins and fences of the horses of the Double Divide Ranch, these animals have no chains or borders whatsoever – they are not cultivated in any sense. The nature they experience is portrayed as blossoming vividly: “They came across hidden valleys filled with beargrass and glacier lily and waded up to their knees through meadows turned to lakes of brilliant blue with lupine” (425). And it is this surrounding wilderness, where “the sky had clouded over them” (423) that Annie identifies their romance with: “There was a gravity to their union which seemed to Annie somehow to benefit the place” (ibid.). The four nights Tom and Annie spend in the wilderness are described like a marathon of climaxed sex under the stars or under aurora borealis, where “they fed upon each other like creatures foretold of some dreadful, limitless winter” (426), interrupted at times by nude swimming in natural pools under waterfalls. This portrayal of the romance's pinnacle seems clearly to juxtapose Annie and Tom with the wild animals they spend their nights among: the couple is also chainless and free.

Considering this passage in the novel, where Tom and Annie act on the basis of their instincts, it is worth pointing out that the early Puritans' attitudes towards sexual desire and sexual expression were in great contradiction with the Indian attitudes at the frontier (Slotkin 47). Slotkin elaborates: “The suppression and reorganization of sexual impulses . . . were a central feature of Christianity and of European culture in particular . . . Sexual expression was synonymous with the sin of lust, save where such expression was placed under patriarchal authority in marriage . . .” (ibid.). The Indians' attitude, on the contrary,

was that sexual freedom was natural and right, and their sexual practices “horrified the Puritans” because they were connected with an overflow of “free animal spirits” which represented the Indian’s closeness to the wilderness (ibid.). Therefore, I interpret that the way Annie identifies her romance with Tom with nature also reflects how she deviates from the society’s codes, which have been more present in her marriage, as is traditional. However, as Annie and Tom’s trip approaches its end and they have to return to the ranch, the time for culture to be restored also comes nearer.

The romance of *The Horse Whisperer* ends in Tom’s death. The death is not a suicide per se, but Tom acts in a self-destructive way, which contributes to his death. What happens before this is that Tom acts in an oppressive manner towards Pilgrim. In the scene, he uses force to tame him in a way that has earlier been said to be against his moral code as a horse trainer – this scene will be discussed more closely later. Tom tries to explain his acts on Pilgrim to Annie: “Sometimes what seems like surrender isn’t surrender at all. It’s about what’s going on in our hearts. About seeing clearly the way life is and accepting it and being true to it, whatever the pain, because the pain of not being true to it is far, far greater” (443). Although Tom superficially seems to talk about Pilgrim’s surrender, at the same time he explains to Annie why he is about to choose eternal freedom in death, instead of life and love with Annie. For Tom, attachment to another person equals confinement, which is unbearable for a cowboy whose masculinity is tied to his independence.

Following this scene, Tom and Annie have conversations trying to decide whether or not they have any kind of future together. Since these conversations tend to come to a dead end, no resolution seems sensible or plausible. Annie tries to convince Tom that she can move to Montana, but Tom resists. Tom acts altogether strangely, even in a desperate manner, as Annie observes: “There was just something about him, some sad foreshadowing that was almost fatalistic. She had seen it today, in his desperate intent that she should understand what

he had done to Pilgrim” (452). The events of the narrative escalate when Grace finds out about her mother’s unfaithfulness to her father, and decides to saddle Pilgrim and ride out in an upset state of mind, eager to “show them” and make Annie and Tom “feel sorry” (461). Tom follows, and finds Grace and Pilgrim in a cauldron down a mountain where they are dangerously stuck, surrounded by the same herd of wild mustangs that Tom and Annie saw before: Grace was “. . . trapped by a turmoil of shrieking mares . . . At the center, rearing and screaming and striking at each other with their hooves, were Pilgrim and the white stallion Tom had seen that day with Annie” (465). Tom knows what to do, and Grace “saw Tom now take off his hat and step out . . .” (466) – I think this is the point where Tom, who has already lost freedom and acted against his moral code, also parts with the probably most signifying object of his, the cowboy hat. “Then, without any sign of fear, he walked toward the fight” (467). Tom reaches Pilgrim and manages to send him away and then faces the leading stallion. This is the point where Tom acts self-destructively, as is explicated to the reader:

What was certain was that Tom could have walked away. Two or three paces would have taken him out of the stallion’s reach and clear of all danger . . . Instead, Tom stepped toward him. The moment he moved, as he must have foreseen, the stallion reared up before him and screamed. And even now, Tom could have stepped aside. (468)

With Tom’s lifelong knowledge and understanding of horses, he obviously could have read the horse’s body language well enough to dodge or move himself out of reach of the mustang’s hooves. However, he does not, and instead he walks closer with palms open – this seems to Grace as if Tom is “offering himself” to the horse (*ibid.*). The horse rears again, and “the hooves came down upon his head and struck him like a crumbled icon to the ground” (*ibid.*). In this scene, Tom actually is the crumbled icon: an American cowboy who has been domesticated by letting a woman into his room and heart, lost his independence and given up the moral code he lived by before, and now, to escape the dilemma, he does nothing to

prevent his death. Handley states that according to contemporary western critics, it is typical that the independent cowboy character's destiny is to be "loved from a distance" and denied the highly valued American family (12). My interpretation this scene, and of the depiction of Tom offering himself to what seems like certain danger, is that he is looking for atonement from the wilderness and shelter from death; he suffers from the fact that he has so deeply fallen in love with her and lost his freedom, which gave him his feeling of potency and masculinity. Through Grace's pain, even though he has not shown any signs of regret over his relationship with a married woman earlier, he also feels he has violated the highly valued nuclear family. Moreover, he suffers for using force on Pilgrim, for taming him, which he did in order to feel like a man again. Considering these aspects together, Tom's situation seems so unbearable for him that the only way out seems to be death. The solution makes Tom the more active person in solving the situation, and Annie the passive one who does not make any moves.

After Tom's death, Annie returns east, and soon notices she is pregnant, which is described to cause "marveling" among doctors (478). Annie leaves NYC to move permanently to her and Robert's second house in Chatham. Therefore, she now lives closer to nature than at the beginning of the novel, and devotes herself to motherhood instead of trying to combine working life with it, as she had done before. In their yard they have cherry trees, a pond, and they have built a stable where they have moved Pilgrim and brought another horse for his company from Montana. It is told that the pregnancy saves Annie's family from further drama, because "after the shock of its discovery, her pregnancy had, by slow degree, brought healing and kind of clarifying calm" (474). After the baby is born, Annie works only now and then, as freelance writer. The baby's father is not pronounced, but the reader is told that he has very blue eyes, much like Tom had. It seems that the urban woman from the East did transform on her westward journey and adopted some western values. She also adopted

some tendencies regarded feminine and ideal for women in the West: she is closer to nature, she does not work nearly as much, she regards her motherhood more natural, and she feels more balanced emotion-wise. Nevertheless, she does return to the East and her husband, and therefore I think that even though she absorbed some western ideals and the West changed her to some extent, her time spent in the West was mostly about the journey. It can even be viewed as a selfish quest dressed in the form of saving her family. Annie stays in her marriage, and I think this reflects the customary resolution of the romance genre: a marriage or an established relationship, as was stated earlier. Since Annie does not even consider other options that the reader could imagine for her, such as continuing life on her own, I think this shows that the novel ideologically supports the conservative marriage.

Now I will move on to discuss the male-female romance in *The Loop*. The protagonists involved in the romance are, as already mentioned, Luke Calder and Helen Ross. Helen is a Chicago-born, 29-year old biology student at University of Minnesota, who is writing her dissertation on a nature versus nurture –related topic of “why some wolves kill livestock and others don’t” (58). At the beginning of *The Loop*, it is stated that she feels terrified for turning 29, and she considers herself too old to be “unemployed, unmarried and unhappy” (51). This extract reveals that marriage is, in the novel’s ideology, tied to happiness – albeit employment is listed, as well. To reinforce this, it is told that Helen’s parents divorced when she was nineteen, and this was a shock to Helen and upset severely the foundations of her life: “It was devastating to discover that a household . . . should all along have secretly sheltered such misery” (51-52). The reader is prompted to believe that this is why Helen is having difficulties forming stable relationships with men. For Helen, having her dog Buzz is, “except for her father . . . the longest relationship with a male she had ever had” (64). It seems that Helen is feeling generally angry at the world and experiencing trouble trusting people. For a long time, Helen has identified more with animals than people, and her

parents' "divorce confirmed her long-held suspicion that animals were infinitely more reliable than people" (52). She also has a tendency to act somewhat impertinently towards other people, or at least talk in a sarcastic manner. This is where Evans' female protagonists are very much alike: in *The Horse Whisperer*, Annie is also described as deeply frustrated at everything and everyone in general, and easily irritated in her responses. However, Helen seems to have a low self esteem which makes her feel pity for herself, and at times make fun of herself in front of other people. For example, this is evident in a scene where Helen meets her father and his 25-year old bride for lunch in New York City. In the scene, her father's new partner turns up in high heels and expensive looking attire, whereas "Helen was wearing a dress too, her best in fact: a mud-colored cotton print dress, bought two summers ago at The Gap. She briefly considered crawling under the table" (54). This is also a scene where a certain type of femininity is constructed, and then it is expressed that Helen does not fit under the category. Regarding Helen's looks, it is mentioned that her hair is cut short, "like a boy's" (88), much like is Annie's hair in *The Horse Whisperer*, and later it is stated that she mostly wears practical outdoor clothes. These remarks further construct the femininity that cannot be applied to Helen. Therefore, the novel builds an unfeminine image of Helen. Furthermore, Helen is not described as obviously beautiful. In Luke's eyes, however, Helen's looks are described as appealing: Luke was ". . . surprised by how pretty she looked up close. That smile of hers and the way she looked so directly at you with those brown eyes" (210). To sum up, Helen is portrayed as an unhappy, educated woman, who is somewhat lost and without direction in her life, feels lonely, and carries years of accumulated frustration within her. Beneath the surface, however, Helen senses "a whiff of her true feelings, of her loneliness, of the aching hollow . . ." inside her (206).

In *The Loop*, there are two important male characters, a father and his son, through which masculinity is represented in different ways. The two characters can also be

read as two different portrayals of the cowboy hero typical of the Western genre, and this is why it is important to also analyze the father in this chapter, although he is not involved in the romance of the novel. I will discuss the father first. Buck Calder, officially known as Henry Calder II, is the eldest of the Calder family. He is a third-generation rancher, who is foremost described in terms of his reputation as a womanizer and as being an influential person in his home town, one whose opinions others tend to follow: for example, Buck is named “one of the most respected members of our community” by another Hope rancher (489). He is a father of three: a daughter, who has made Buck a grandfather, a first son who died in an accident, and Luke, the male protagonist of *The Loop*. It is described that Buck is highly acknowledged through his work: “Calder-bred bulls and the richness of their seed were renowned throughout the West and beyond” (35). Therefore, it can be claimed that the masculinity that is constructed through Buck in *The Loop* entails power.

Buck’s pursuit of women is highlighted in his nickname, which according to *Collins* online dictionary refers to a male animal, and it is stated how “a winning way with women, it seemed, swam strongly in the male Calder gene pool” (33). Even his family knows of this tendency: for instance, his son Luke is aware of “his father’s famed womanizing, which Luke . . . discovered at school was common knowledge” (116). In a scene where Dan Prior sees Calder for the first time, Dan expects to see what he regards as a typical grandfather. Instead, Dan sees something quite different, and Buck’s looks are described in a relatively classic cowboy manner:

He wore a light-colored Stetson and a white snap-button shirt that set off his tan. His eyes gleamed a pale gray-blue . . . and Dan realized it was the eyes even more than his physique that gave the impression of power. Dan had expected to see the grandfather he knew Calder to be. But here instead was a man in his prime, who clearly knew the effect his confidence had on others. (24)

When Helen meets Buck for the first time, her first impression is similar, with the addition of Helen feeling his masculine charm: “Dan had told her a lot about Buck Calder, but nothing

he'd said had quite prepared Helen for the shock of the real thing. The sheer physicality of the man was overwhelming. He made those around him seem like suckerfish to a shark" (144-145). Afterwards, Helen jokes to Dan about Buck's gaze, saying, "my mom calls eyes like that *bedroom* [sic] eyes" (145). Clearly, Buck has the same external features of a rugged, independent, self-confident outdoor man, with a tan and a cowboy hat, that are also present in Tom in *The Horse Whisperer* and that are typical of the cowboy character in the Western. As has been stated, horses are important for the cowboy character, and there are also instances in *The Loop* where Buck is portrayed in a classic cowboy manner, sitting on horseback in sunlight:

Buck Calder sat resting his horse on a bare bluff that leaned out from the forest above his allotment. The horse was a Missouri Fox Trotter, a handsome, deep-chested gray, who held himself every bit as proudly as his owner. In the early morning sun, squinting out at the plains under the brim of his hat, it occurred to Buck, as it often did, that the two of them cut quite a picture. (231)

In this image, there is something even satiric in the way that Buck is conscious about his handsomeness on his handsome horse; he actually seems to regard himself a true icon. Moreover, whereas Tom works with horses in *The Horse Whisperer*, Buck's field of work is raising cattle. Whereas Tom is described as self-learned, a natural with horses, Buck has been educated and is, in that sense, more cultured. In his work, it actually seems that Buck has very strongly adopted a cultural way in controlling, selecting and refining his cattle:

Buck went to college in Bozeman and learned all about genetics. And when he came back, he helped take everything a step further. He started keeping an individual file on every animal they reared, charting its performance in minute detail. Birthing ease, mothering skills, weight gain, disposition and much more were scrutinized and ruthlessly acted upon. The progeny of those who made the grade flourished; those who found wanting went swiftly to the wall. (34)

The reference to ruthlessness reveals that despite references to Buck's looks, he is not a true cowboy character because his intentions are for his own best, and such a feature is not acceptable for a hero.

Eighteen years old Luke, who is the youngest of Buck's children, is an introvert who escapes into the world of books, has a stutter that makes him feel insecure and awkward, and has no experience with the opposite sex. Luke identifies more with animals than people, and his reactions are, at times, compared with those of an animal. For instance, when he meets new people, he is "fighting an urge to turn and run" (29), suggesting the reaction of a prey animal, whereas the father is often depicted like a predator. Luke's disposition is described in the thoughts of his big sister: "He was getting to be more of a loner than ever . . . always off on his own in the wilderness with only that funny-looking horse of his for company" (10). Regarding his future, Luke dreams about studying wildlife biology at the University of Montana, "a place his father thought infested with liberals and 'bunny-huggers'" (116). This can be read as a reference to the kind of masculinity that Buck considers proper: Luke's plans are not manly enough for his father. Therefore, the father and son's interests contradict, and the father-son relationship of Buck and Luke is described as being problematic in other aspects as well. Buck thinks that a rancher's son should principally work and help at the ranch, "like ranchers' sons were supposed to" (29), and that a rancher's son's destiny is to run the ranch in the next generation. However, Buck does not regard Luke capable of running the farm in the future. Moreover, Luke knows his father is ashamed of people knowing he has a son who stutters, and it is implied that Luke's mother is the only one who knows how to deal with the stutter and accepts it. Luke's elder brother, who was Buck's favorite son, was killed in a car accident when he was fifteen, and both Buck and Luke feel that Luke never manages to fill the place and destiny his brother had in his father's mind. It is described how during the family's mourning, Buck "like a brave pioneer, strode forward in manly denial. Unconsciously impelled, perhaps, to spread some compensating genes, Buck sought sexual solace wherever he could" (39). In many extracts about Buck it is hinted that masculinity, for him at least, means having power in the sense of authority over people, not showing or

processing one's emotions, and overt, unattached sexuality. Furthermore, in Buck's opinion, "a real man had three unalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of women" (35). Luke, on the contrary, seems to lack most of the qualities considered masculine by his father: his stutter always gives away his nervousness and insecurity, and whereas his father was already famous among girls in the same age, Luke still regards romance and sex confusing. Externally, Luke is described as "the image of his mother; the pale Irish skin, the dark hair, the same watchful green eyes" (38) – in fact, it is stated that Buck secretly feels "his genes had somehow been denied access to the boy" (ibid.). My interpretation of this is that Buck regards Luke as feminine. Thus, femininity entails vulnerability and insecurity, while masculinity entails authority. Since Luke identifies strongly with wilderness, as will be shown, it can be deduced that my reading of *The Loop* in this aspect supports the idea of wilderness of the West as feminized virgin land conquered by masculine pioneers.

Compared to his father and Tom in *The Horse Whisperer*, Luke seems to lack some traditional cowboy features, for instance a muscular body, suntanned skin and sunbleached hair. Regardless, Helen sees Luke as handsome: ". . . he's tall. And dark. And slim. And he has the most beautiful green eyes you ever saw. He's the son of a big rancher and he's sweet and kind and caring" (406). Although missing some traditional cowboy features, Luke is at the same time portrayed as a cowboy figure. For instance, on the latter side of the novel, when Luke and Helen are already in a relationship, there is a scene where Luke meets Helen at the airport and it is described: "He was wearing his hat and jeans and boots, with the collar of his old wool jacket turned up, and it made Helen smile to herself that he looked every inch the young cowboy her sister had imagined" (421). This kind of ambiguity regarding Luke's character could be part of the stereotype vitalization that Cawelti mentions, discussed in the theory chapter. Part of this type of vitalization is to give the

character new, unexpected features, and describing the cowboy as insecure and sensitive is certainly a fresh approach.

Initially, Luke develops a vague crush on Helen, as he has secretly been watching her for some time from the shadows of the forest. Luke sees Helen on her weakest moments: “She seemed so sad. The way she came down and sat by the lake, crying and smoking all those cigarettes, like she was trying to kill herself. He’d wanted to go down there and put his arms around her and tell her to stop and that everything was okay” (208). In a similar way as Tom in *The Horse Whisperer*, Luke feels the need to heal the woman who is tough on the surface, broken on the inside. Thus, both novels portray the active man who saves the damsel in distress. The two begin to develop feelings towards each other as Helen asks Luke to help with her work. Naturalness is, in accordance with *The Horse Whisperer*, emphasized as the two spend their days together in nature: “Several times, she had caught him staring at her . . . But she didn’t seem to mind, just smiled back at him as though it were the most natural thing in the world” (254). Later, Luke finds Helen lying unconscious on the floor of her cabin. Helen has just read a letter from a former boyfriend, writing to her that he is about to marry his new love. It is hinted that Luke possibly prevents Helen from committing suicide, because Luke sees Helen on the floor and beside her “a mug . . . on its side in a pool of spilled liquid. There was an open bottle of pills there too” (303). This is when Luke and Helen come into closer physical contact for the first time. Luke holds Helen, consoles her, takes care of her, and “All he knew at that moment, or cared to know, was that he loved her” (305). This scene reinforces Helen’s portrayal as a damsel in distress, and Luke as the active male who arrives to save her. In another scene, the couple is juxtaposed to a pair of wolves in a scene where they drive a snowmobile deep into the forest. There, in the darkness and in the snowfall, they both try howling like wolves, and after Helen has encouraged Luke to try, the voice comes out of Luke’s throat flawlessly, not blocking in his

throat as Luke had feared – the impression is almost as if nature helps him over his obstacle: “And before the note had time to die, from across the snow-tipped trees of the canyon, the wolves replied” (344). Wilderness is, in this scene, implied to be a healing force.

In a scene where Luke and Helen end up kissing for the first time, the kiss causes a lot of questioning and self-reflecting in Helen. This is, as stated, typical for the romance genre: “They had only kissed . . . That was all. Where was the wrong in that? It was the question Helen had harassed herself with ever since Luke had gone home the previous evening and left her alone in the cabin with the nascent spectre of her own guilt” (390). The lovers’ first sex scene is displayed in a juxtaposition after a scene where two wolves mate. This reinforces the way their relationship is associated with naturalness. The preceding scene ends: “And in the first week of February, with the windless world again freezing hard and the snow falling in feathered flakes upon them, the white queen coupled with her maimed king . . .” (435). The next scene depicts the couple’s first time having sex in Helen’s candlelit cabin. This scene also marks a great transformation for Luke, because Helen’s patience and gentleness with his inexperience helps him feel self-reliant and capable: “. . . not just because of the vivid, flesh-quaking feel of it, but because it made him see he wasn’t just a useless, stuttering boy anymore and that maybe he was ready, at last, to step into life” (436). Afterwards, Luke associates in his mind a wolf nest in the wilderness to Helen’s embrace in the dark cottage. He thinks about how he earlier had been lying in the darkness of an abandoned wolf den imagining it “. . . a perfect place to die. And now he knew he was wrong. This, here, now, in darkness just as black, but with this other living creature in his arms. This was the perfect place” (ibid.).

As it is portrayed how Luke transforms and becomes manlier by gaining confidence in the narrative, his father, by contrast, seems to gradually lose some of his power and attraction. First, Buck is rejected by one of his regular female lovers. Later, Buck tries to

flirt with Helen, but Helen rejects him as well. Whereas at the beginning of the novel he is an influential person among his own community, he is soon hated on a larger scale; after he has gathered a media event advocating wolf killing, he begins to receive contemptuous messages and even death threats. Even Luke has the willpower to finally step against his father and walk away from his childhood home. The events culminate in a great tumult where Helen and Luke, with other people on their side, confront Buck and his followers. Buck is fuming in a misogynistic manner; referring to Helen, it is described how “his blood was still simmering at the sight of that little whore-bitch . . . He’d felt like smashing her cute little bunny-hugger face in” (526). The events culminate in Buck first shooting a wolf, and then accidentally shooting Luke instead of one – but Luke survives. The last chapter lets the reader know that Buck’s wife, Eleanor, has taken a divorce, and she meets her ex-husband in a café after a long time. Eleanor describes Buck:

He had his head slightly bowed, his face half hidden by the brim of his hat. His walk was uncertain, awkward almost, as though he didn’t belong in such a place. He was wearing a pale blue snapbutton shirt and black jeans that seemed baggy on him. As he got nearer she saw how thin he’d become. (534)

In the same scene, Buck collides with a young girl and it is described how the girl laughs at him. Up close, “he looked almost haggard. There was a patch of gray bristles on his chin that he’d missed with his razor. His shirt looked as if it hadn’t been pressed” (535). Clearly, the previously dominant and vital image of the cowboy has faded like an old photograph. I think this symbolizes how the values he believed to be true in his life are changing. If Buck has stood for the old values of dominance and opposition of different species or different people, times are now changing. Considering this, *The Loop* seems to have elements of the new versions of the Western: “the end of the West” Western and the ecological Western, introduced in the theory section. Moreover, since marriage is so highly valued in literary West, it is reasonable that the womanizer does not have a happy ending – as such, Buck is the

villain of the narrative. Buck apologizes to Eleanor, and this is where the cowboy asks, once again, for atonement. Even the previously constructed ideals of masculinity are fading out. Considering both novels, what happens is that Buck loses his power and appeal after being violent towards the wolves, and Tom dies after using force on Pilgrim. However, Luke, as the most evident protector of nature, is the one who continues to grow and finds happiness. In this regard, it can be said that Evans' novels to some extent challenge the frontier idea of masculinity as authority.

As to Helen and Luke, they are once more juxtaposed with a wolf couple. There is a scene where Helen and Dan release a pair of wolves; they drive two hours from Hope, "high into the mountains", "as far as the last road would take them" (538). Here, they have taken with them "an alpha pair, untagged, uncollared and untraceable" (540). Dan and Helen release them from their cage, and they run out of sight, into wilderness and into freedom. Straight after this, Helen and Luke are portrayed as a happy couple. As they have constantly been portrayed next to wolves, it has been highlighted that naturalness is an aspect of their relationship – much like in *The Horse Whisperer*, where the couple felt a force guiding them that was out of their power. Therefore, it can be interpreted that *The Loop* implies that now that Helen and Luke are in a steady relationship in the end, this is a *natural* state. In this sense, the novel ideologically supports heterosexual commitment as a natural state, in accordance with *The Horse Whisperer*.

At the end of *The Loop*, Luke is the university student he dreamed to be, and Helen has overcome her general pessimism towards life: "Curiously, for the first time in Helen's adult life, the future didn't seem to matter. It was as though all that had happened here had purged the part of her that had always yearned and nagged and worried . . . All that mattered was *now* [sic] and that she was with the person she loved best in the world" (543). As mentioned in the theory chapter, psychologists have found that among the benefits that

wilderness can have on an individual's mental health, is an increased feeling of self-capability – more on this topic will follow later. On one hand, it seems that Helen has gone through a transformation from thinking pessimistically about her future and low about herself, to having a more hopeful disposition in life. On the other hand, I think that Helen becomes more passive in the end. Instead of trying to clear her plans for the future and actively decide something on it, she gives up making any moves regarding her future, and simply settles for the relationship with Luke – as if the relationship is the key to happiness. As was stated in the theory chapter, this is characteristic of the Western romance. There is something similar to Annie in *The Horse Whisperer*, too, in the way that the women seem to part with their ambitions and lose some of their agency. To conclude, all of the central characters of *The Loop* were transformed, and their beliefs about themselves challenged. Wilderness and culture seem to have restored a balanced harmony in the end of *The Loop*.

Generically, both *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop* follow the usual pattern of romance narratives. The most central plotlines are the male/female romances, and they end happily enough. In *The Loop*, the couple's relationship endures, and in *The Horse Whisperer*, there is the birth of a baby and a marriage is salvaged. Considering Radway's statements about the romance as reader-inviting, as was mentioned in the theory chapter, in both novels the characters recognize their connection quite early, but there are many emotional barriers to be overcome before they fully indulge themselves in the romance. In *The Horse Whisperer*, the first connection happens when Annie and Tom talk on the phone, and Tom senses Annie's emotions. In *The Loop*, the first connection is when the main characters lock eyes with each other in the forest. Moreover, both novels follow the general sequence of sex scenes, as explained by Gosa, also discussed in the theory. Both novels have several scenes that follow a certain sequence that was discussed in the theory section: both have the prelude of the first kiss scene, then the actual intercourse scene repeated several times, and then the postlude of

post-sex self-reflection or conversation between characters. In both novels, love follows sex, as is typical for a romance narrative. Both *The Loop* and *The Horse Whisperer* present a high degree of self-reflection and conversation of the characters between sex scenes. For instance, after their first kiss, “Annie waited to feel shame at what she’d just done. But it never came” (*The Horse Whisperer* 361). After their first time in bed, Tom “knew that with the dawn would come, if not regret, some colder new perspective” (*The Horse Whisperer* 415). Furthermore, many of the tropes familiar for sex scenes in romance narratives are present. Euphemisms replace organ names or verbs describing action: “the tilt of him” is used instead of ‘a penis’, sex organs are referred to as simply “it” or “there” (*The Horse Whisperer* 412), and sexual verbs are avoided with the help of expressions like “hack it” or “do it” (*The Loop* 435-436). I mentioned in the theory that overactivity, referring to characters doing multiple things at the same time, is another trope typical for romances. To give an example in *The Horse Whisperer*, overactivity happens in the scene where Annie and Tom have sex and Tom manages to imagine a pair of birds at the same time, and talk about this to Annie. Gosa states that men being active and women being passive is also an element of sex scenes in a romance, but I think the issue of passivity/activity is visible in the novels on another level, as explained. I claim that both *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop* can be read as modern western romances: they mix the traditional genre elements of the Western, such as genre themes and character types, with the typical plot of a romance, and are placed in modern time. At the same time, though, they also look back in history, reflecting on various issues that have had an effect on the formation of the Western genre, and support traditional values.

4. East / West

As noted in the theory section, the Western genre is very strongly tied to the landscape of the West. The landscape depicted in discourses of the West is constructed not only as “a material place” (Ray 138), consisting of the “elements of geography, flora and fauna” (Westron, “The Significance of Landscape” n.pag.), but also symbolizing the civilization and traces of it, which are dispersed across the land: “rural communities and cities, and all the detritus those communities produce” (ibid.). Depictions of surroundings, such as landscapes, and the impact the surroundings have on characters, are central for constructing differences between East and West in Evans’ novels, as well. As I explained in the theory, the variation of the romantic western of the 1920s, developed mainly by Grey and Hart, introduced sceneries where, for instance, mountains and cattle ranches in the West were crucial. In both *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*, the most central plot events and twists occur at ranches or out on the mountains. Moreover, many of the effects that the East/West dichotomy has are built by describing characters’ backgrounds and emotional lives and their attitudes towards each other. This is part of the novels’ *regionalism*, a concept where differences between Easterners and Westerners are created as different mindsets of the habitants (Westron, “The Stories We Tell” n.pag.). It is therefore “important in defining a community” in the way that through its signifiers and myths, “a community embodies its sense of itself” (Dobozay 5). According to Mahoney and Katz, it is possible that regions in literature are constructed “for outsiders and by outsiders . . . to enforce and reinforce” differences, norms and ways of thinking about others (xv). However, Westron points out that belonging to a place is specifically important for Western American identity: “the challenging conditions of the Western landscape are part of what differentiates the West – particularly the rural West from the East, and the ability to cope with these challenges is one of the things which Westerners claim sets them apart from

Easterners” (“The Stories We Tell” n.pag.). Thus, I do not claim that the East and the West of America, as regions and regarding their habitants *are* very different altogether, but I will point out where, in Evans’ novels, such constructed dichotomies can be traced, and how I think they reflect on wilderness and culture.

I will begin by observing how New York City is depicted in *The Horse Whisperer*. To begin with the Annie’s family’s home, their apartment building door in New York City is described “colorless in the sodium glow of the streetlamps” (123). The impression given is that the building does not evoke any emotions in Annie, and that the streets of NYC are uninviting with their artificial light. As I explained earlier, in the convention of the Western genre, the contrast between the East and the West has been illustrated for instance in terms of their relationship with nature. As Wister expressed the thought, the West, which is connected with wilderness in the Western tradition, enjoys a specific kind of natural light that the East rarely encounters. Definitely, there is a lack of light present in the aforementioned short phrase’s depiction of the street view in New York City. Annie’s apartment is portrayed as being very much a home for cultured people: it was “on the eighth floor of an elegant old building on Central Park West . . . The [living] room was lined at one end with books and there were pieces of African art and a grand piano” (23). There are stacks of unread East coast newspapers, *New York Times* and *New York Post*, accumulating in the corners of their home, and it is stated that nothing makes Annie as nervous as those: “all those words let loose on the world” (ibid.) and she has not nearly enough time to read them. As was noted earlier, Annie was born in England, and it is described that when Annie first came to New York City for work, she managed to get her first job in the city by “bluffing her way into a job on *Rolling Stone*” (48). Later on in the narrative, New York City is described as feeling artificial to Annie, alluded to theatre as she looks out of the window:

She stood there. . . looking out across the treetops of the park toward the towering apartment blocks on the East Side. It was like a stage backdrop, ten

thousand tiny windows, pinpricks of light in a fake night sky. It was impossible to believe that inside every one of them was a different life with its own special pain and destiny. (175)

This theatrical allusion once again suggests culture. Theatres are places where performances take place, so this allusion possibly refers to Annie's life as one big performance, indicating that perhaps she is not facing her deepest emotions or letting them on the surface: it is stated that constant action has "become a substitute for feeling" in Annie's life (195). Moreover, the reference that bluffing works in NYC indicates that the city is artificial and cold, and that the people in NYC are insincere, pretending to be something different than what they truly are. Annie lives in the middle of urban culture, her home is full of cultural artifacts, and her work is related to culture.

Annie is, however, numb and incapable of handling her emotions regarding events and circumstances in her past: her miscarriage, marriage, or her daughter Grace's accident, which resulted in leg amputation. Furthermore, even England, which is mentioned only briefly in the context of Annie's childhood, is given only negative qualities: England is mentioned as "a strange, wet, cold place where nobody smiled" (278). As I noted, Annie is originally from England, which is even further east from the point of view of west America, but she feels like she does not belong to either England or New York: "The truth was, she came from nowhere. She had no home . . . She was rootless, tribeless, adrift" (195). This refers strongly to the situation of the settlers I referred to earlier: the feeling of not belonging, having left England, and not yet accustomed to their new environment in America. More proof for this reading offers the fact that in several places in the novel, there are explicit, intertextual references to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which Slotkin defines as "the closest literary analogue of the Puritan model of the heroic quest" (39). It should also be remembered that the names Grace and Pilgrim themselves can be read as symbolizing Annie's search for hope and some kind of new profoundness for her life from the West. Her

motive for her westward quest is to heal her relationship with Grace, inside whom “something was dying” (122). According to *Collins* online dictionary, ‘grace’ has the meaning of “the kindness that God shows to people because he loves them.” Symbolizing the whole process is the wounded Pilgrim that Annie literally drags through the USA. Accordingly, in the same source as above, the word ‘pilgrim’ has the meaning of a person “who makes a journey to a holy place for a religious reason”.

In Tom Booker’s experience, New York City is “cold and gray” (158). He observes a beggar in one corner (*ibid.*), notes the pace of the city life and is happy he is only visiting. He observes the Hudson station as “a sorry sort of place” (159). His remarks are further described: “Once grand old buildings were rotting away. Many of the shops . . . were boarded up and those that weren’t seemed mostly to be selling junk. People tramped the sidewalks with their shoulders hunched against the rain” (*ibid.*). Whereas New York is for Booker lifeless, colorless and more or less despicable, the Montana around him displays itself mostly in vivid colors and smells, often even in shades of white, gold or silver. The following extract depicts Tom’s world, as he views it in the early morning, with purity, and noteworthy is the analogue between the moon and the living body, connecting the living to the wilderness: “A quarter moon the color of dappled bone still stood in the dawning sky when Tom stepped out through the screen door and onto the porch . . . The world was white and brittle with frost and no breeze ruffled the clouds made by his breath” (232). Describing the world as white refers to pure and untouched wilderness, to virgin land. The same scene continues: “The branches of the cottonwoods along the creek were laced with silver and over their heads he could see the eastern sky starting to glow pink where soon the sun would show” (234). The following extract, in turn, describes the vividness and diversity of the nature around Tom as he is on a horseback trek with Annie: “The cloud had broken away and scattered from the snow-covered tops of the mountains and the air smelled new, of roots

uncoiling. There were pink crocus and shooting star already showing in the grass and a first hint of leaf hung like a green haze on the cottonwoods” (257). Another horseback trip pictures again the beauty of the wilderness: “The grass was thick and dark . . . Above, only the highest peak remained and its angle had rolled to give a glimpse of a western slope where a sliver of snow glowed golden pink in the long-gone sun” (350). Similar vividness is later described from Annie’s point of view during a barbeque dinner: “The sound of their laughter filled the space among the cottonwoods. The sun went down and between the silhouetted trees Annie watched the molten surface of the creek take on the pinks and reds and golds of the dimming sky” (398). Adding to the connotations of purity and happiness, the mountains have also meant safety for the Bookers: even for Tom’s father, the distant mountains of the West had been “like comforting walls, protecting all he held dear from the turbulence beyond” (135). All in all, descriptions of Montana in *The Horse Whisperer* invite the reader to associations of delight, beauty and safety. On the contrary, the novel constructs New York City through negatively resonating adjectives and through depictions of people that seem unhappy. This way of viewing the urban, civilized landscape matches with what was stated in the theory chapter, in the discussion about wilderness and the nostalgic longing for “a passing frontier way of life” (Cronon 8). This view, which regards wilderness as essentially truer and freer than urban environments, entails seeing cities, constructions of civilization, as “confining, false, and artificial” (ibid.). The words ‘artificial’ and ‘false’ also support my reading of Annie’s life in NYC as a theatre play in which nothing is genuine, and emotions and reactions are acted instead of actually experienced. Yet, Annie returns to the East, which may be interpreted that her time in the West was more about her personal quest, and not so much about actually changing her life, after all.

When Annie and her family face their ultimate tragedy, the horse-riding accident that affects the whole family, the tragedy is a catalyst for change, and Annie decides

to drive to the West to meet the famous ‘horse whisperer’. I mentioned in the chapter about male/female romances that Annie has not been able to feel anything positive, only anger and frustration for some time. The dynamic business life in New York and the people around her there have made Annie feel cross, critical, and unable to connect with her daughter, husband or herself, and overall, “things had become strained” (72). Even weeks after the family had faced the tragedy, “she hadn’t wept once since the accident” (103), so it is hinted that she has difficulties coping with the incident. However, as Annie drives through the continent with her daughter and the horse-trailer, different kinds of emotions begin to rise, and I interpret that here the progress of transformation begins. As they drive a highway through Iowa and the prairie spreads “flats and featureless to nowhere, lit fitfully through the rushing cloud by vivid, rolling shafts of sun” (179), Annie, who is used to having things under control, starts to feel insecure, faced with such an infinite scenery: “In such a landscape there was a dislocation both of time and space and Annie felt the inkling of what could, if she were to let it, become panic” (179). A similar experience by the protagonist of *The Loop* will be introduced in a while, so in both Evans’ novels the wilderness of the West seems to have a breathtaking impact on the women from the East, who are generally described as irritated and tense. As was noted, in *The Horse Whisperer*, Annie has not even been able to cry in many months before her trip to the West. However, as soon as Annie and Grace have crossed into Montana, Annie takes a break from driving. She wanders down a road by herself, comes across a war monument on a hill where over two hundred soldiers were slaughtered, and bursts into tears in front of it: “She stood there and looked out across the vast, rolling plains of wind-flattened grass that stretched away from this sorrowful place to a horizon where sorrow was infinite. And she started to weep . . . She wept for Grace and for Pilgrim and for the lost souls of the children who’d died in her womb. Above all, she wept for herself and what she’d become” (194). It has been stated that wide-open landscapes of western literature transform individuals,

but also discipline them (Agruss 555). Moreover, Gersdorf explains that the narrative associations of a desert landscape stem from the Bible: the space has symbolized “a spiritual process of emergence, one that will lead to religious, social and cultural renewal” (171). In this scene, the openness around her makes her let go of control, and she feels renewal through tears.

After arriving in Montana, Annie and Grace settle to the town of Choteau for their first weeks, before they are invited to move to the Double Divide ranch where Tom Booker works with their horse. From Choteau, they drive daily to the Double Divide. Usually, Annie drives Grace and Pilgrim there in the morning, returns to Choteau to do some long-distance work, and collects them again in the evening. During the drive Annie has time to take in the changes she feels, resulting from the changes in her physical and psychological environment: “For five days the skies had been clear and they were bigger and bluer than she’s ever known skies could be. After the afternoon frenzy of phone calls to New York, driving out into this landscape was like plunging into an immense, calming pool” (217-218). Now culture and work life in the East coast is referred to as ‘frenzy’, given a negative connotation as being frantic, whereas the western wilderness landscape has a consoling, even empowering effect. The landscape is further described as Annie drives: “The plains stretched endlessly away to her right and as the sun arced low, toward the Rockies on her left, the winter-worn grass around her turned to pale gold” (ibid.). Shortly after this, Annie reminisces driving the same route the day before; how she had had a conversation with Grace, and “it was the first time she’d talked freely and happily since they’d left New York” (219). It seems like having vaster space physically around the mother and daughter relieves some tensions between and inside them, as well. As I stated in the theory chapter, interest in wilderness has also been directed at psychological and psychiatric value that wilderness can have for people. One of the first writers on the theme was author and environmentalist Sigurd Olson, who in

his writings from the 1930s up until 1970s, claimed that when a person comes in touch with wild nature, he could regain perspective in his life and feel generally happier and more complete (Nash 265). Later, Olson's thoughts have received clinical evidence from psychologists and psychiatrists (ibid.). One theory, explains Nash, is that a wilderness experience may help "simplify and slow down lives made overly complicated by civilization" (ibid.). This tends to happen to characters of western romances, as noted. Another theory is that whereas urban environments tend to render helplessness in individuals, wilderness enhances creativity, capability and problem solving (266). As Nash states, the phrase "wilderness therapy" began to appear in the discourse of mental health from the 1970s onwards (ibid.). The positive impact that the wide, open spaces of the West can have on a person is also a recurrent theme in narratives of the West, states Westron (n.pag. "Perception, Character and Mood"). Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that descriptions of wide, open areas of land are essential for the frontier myth (Busby 48).

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that after Annie has begun to fall in love with Tom, she suddenly feels a powerful urge to go to church one Sunday. As I mentioned earlier, in *The Horse Whisperer* there are intertextual references to and even extracts of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Slotkin explains that the English Puritans, who were confused by their old, European beliefs and the dangers of their new environment, formulated their experiences into "an elaborate concept" (38), where the New World was seen primarily ". . . in terms of a psychological and spiritual quest . . . for salvation in the wilderness of the human mind and soul" (39). *Pilgrim's Progress*, notes Slotkin, is an archetype of this concept. In this concept, Slotkin continues, "England was often portrayed in terms of the City of Destruction" (40), which could be a possible explanation to why not only New York, but also England is portrayed as grim and joyless in *The Horse Whisperer*. On the other hand, I came to think of Annie's feeling of converging with God as a reflection on the wilderness as a

space with biblical connotations, discussed by Gersdorf. After Annie has been to the church one Sunday, for the first time in a long time, Annie decides to give up her job and joins Tom's crew for an overnight cattle drive. On this trip, it is described how the mountains tilt over the riders' heads "like cathedral walls" (349). In *The Horse Whisperer*, this kind of biblical imagery on the wilderness of the West creates parallelism with the Puritan journey in the wilderness.

The constructed contrast between the East and the West is also visible in the way some characters of *The Horse Whisperer* view horseback riding. Whereas Annie associates the possibility of danger to the activity, a risk that one must be aware of, Tom believes horseback riding to be all about trust and balance. As Grace climbs back in the saddle after her accident, Annie asks: "Shouldn't she be wearing a hat? . . . She meant one of those safety helmets people wore in England and back east and he'd said well no, not unless she was planning on falling off" (325). When Booker rides a young colt he has only ridden for the first time some days ago, already "the horse, like all the others he'd raised, had a good soft feel" (234). It seems as if the eastern way of interacting with horses entails opposition where the rider, who is not in a total understanding with the other species, must protect her/himself in case the animal acts in an unforeseeable way. I am thinking about culture in terms of control again: if the rider cannot gain full control, he or she comes to see the animal as a possible threat, one from whom the rider must protect her/himself from. This idea is related to the larger idea of man's control over nature. The Western rider, however, does not juxtapose the two species, as he/she already feels one with wilderness and it is more about feeling the animal. Yet, it should be noted that the West was conquered, and a reference from *The Horse Whisperer* to the white man conquering the West will be given in the next chapter.

The Loop depicts the wilderness of the West in similar terms as *The Horse Whisperer*. In the opening scene, where the Montana land is depicted from the wolf's

perspective, the diversity of the landscape in terms of height, shape, flora, color, and dimension is highlighted:

He had set out the previous evening, leaving the others in the high country where even now, in July, there lingered spring flowers and patches of tired snow in gullies shy of the sun. He had headed north along a high ridge then turned east, following one of the winding rocky canyons that funneled the snowmelt down from the divide to the valleys and plains below . . . Even through the night, wherever it was possible, he had stayed below the timberline, edging the shadows . . . (3-4)

In another scene where two side characters, biologists Dan Prior and Bill Rimmer, fly an airplane over the land, searching for sightings of wolves, the nature is described as follows:

All morning they'd combed the peaks and the canyons, using their eyes as much as their ears, squinting into the shadowed spaces between the trees, scanning the ridges and creeks and lush meadows for some telltale sign; a carcass in a clearing, a flock of ravens, a sudden flight of deer. They saw plenty of deer, both white-tail and mule, and elk too. Once, flying over a wide ravine, they startled a grizzly bear feeding with her cub in a patch of buffaloberries and sent them bounding for the shelter of the forest. Here and there they came across cattle, grazing the "allotments," high summer pastures that many ranchers leased from the forest service. (42)

In a similar way as *The Horse Whisperer* introduces the nature of the West in a diversity of colors and species, so does *The Loop* stress how the land is covered with plants, the foliage is in full growth and the land varies in shape and structure, providing safety and a home for several different species. All in all, the Montana landscape in both novels is depicted as highly vital and diverse.

Regarding *The Loop*, I will now talk about the experience of Helen Ross. Helen is invited to Hope, Montana, in order to track the wolf behind the attack on the Calder family's dog, and to gain knowledge of its whereabouts and the size of its possible pack. As was stated earlier, Helen is writing her dissertation on wolves and has earlier been doing field research in Minnesota. Although Helen has spent her childhood in the East, more precisely in the city of Chicago, she does not feel at home in the city. On her visit to New York, the traffic fumes and the "relentless glare and blare" of the city make her anxious and angry (49) and she

just wants to get out of “the stifling and clamor of Manhattan” (62). There is a similarity between Evans’ two novels in this respect, as in both *The Loop* and *The Horse Whisperer* NYC represents the urban, which in turn is given very unpleasant connotations. To stress the impact of the city and its culture on Helen, she is described as not being mean-spirited by nature, but instead living her life “at the danger end of generosity, prepared to give the benefit of even the most doubtful doubts” (50). For the past few years Helen has been living in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in the very eastern shore of the USA, so it is fair to say that when she arrives in Montana, in the local people’s eyes she is, despite her personal preferences of nature over city life, an urban woman from the East.

In accordance with Annie’s first impression of Montana in *The Horse Whisperer*, Helen’s first impression of the western landscape after being picked up from the airport has an almost cathartic impact on her:

On either side of the road, the land stretched away as far as she could see . . .
Both sky and earth seemed to Helen immense, their every angle boldly drawn.
The roads ran straight and purposeful to ranches confidently placed. She found
herself both thrilled and daunted and somehow inconsequential to it all. (95)

As was already noted, vast open lands are typical in the traditional frontier legend. On her first night in her cabin in Montana, Helen begins to feel herself less anxious by breathing deeply under the open sky: “There was no moon and every far-flung star in the firmament was pitching for the job. She had never seen a sky so incandescent. The air was still and smelled of pine” (166). This is where Helen’s change begins. The nature experience makes her decide she will quit smoking cigarettes: “she sat there to smoke her final cigarette and ponder the sky’s reflection in the glass of water” (166), and she imagines how “tomorrow she would start her new life” (167). The landscape, for Helen, seems to consist of possibilities. All she hears is silence, “not the croak of a frog nor the flicker of an insect’s wing, as if the world this night were in suspended deference to the sky” (ibid.). She stares at the sky reflecting from the water and “gazing at the water, she saw the mirrored fall of a meteor and

fancied that from the distant shore of the universe she also heard its roar” (ibid.). Here, the immensity of the sky and the profound silence around her seem to speak to her innermost emotions and even raises an animal-like instinct in her, because in the following this scene, she suddenly feels an urge to howl like a wolf: “. . . she thought, what the hell, and cleared her throat and tilted her face to the sky” (ibid.). I think that this scene further proves that Helen is a typical *wild heroine / nature girl* character type of the romantic Western, discussed by Cawelti and explained in the theory chapter. Helen is once in the novel even called “the woman who runs with the wolves” (69). Furthermore, I claim that Annie of *The Horse Whisperer* is, in turn, the *sophisticated eastern woman* character, also listed by Cawelti. Both these character types, typical for the Western, are involved with the larger concept of “the West as a testing ground of character and idea”, a significant genre theme of the Western. As I explained in the theory, essential about this genre variation is that as the eastern female characters travel to the West, their formerly constructed presuppositions about life and themselves, perhaps even the foundations of their personalities, are challenged and ultimately renewed through erotic romance under the western sky (Cawelti 235). This is exactly what happens to the female protagonists of Evans’ novels.

All through *The Loop*, a difference between the East and the West is constructed through people’s alleged belonging to one region or another. This is one of the major tensions carrying the plot forward. I will give an example regarding two side characters who are colleagues, but from different parts of the USA. Wildlife officer Dan Prior observes his colleague, Bill Rimmer, and speculates the effect of their birthplaces on their work:

[Rimmer] dressed like a cowboy and that, along with his easy, laconic manner, gave him the edge over Dan when it came to placating irate ranchers . . . To such people, Dan would always be an East Coast outsider. Their main difference however was that while ranchers saw Rimmer as the man who could help solve their problem, they saw Dan as the one who’d caused it. (21)

This extract illustrates how *The Loop* continuously builds a conflict between easterners and westerners based not on their true differences in character or manner, but based foremost on their birthplace. However, through characters such as Buck Calder, it seems that *The Loop* aims at challenging this type of opposition by making Buck seem humorous to the reader. This kind of conflict is constructed when Dan Prior is faced with Buck for the first time. They have just been discussing about the wolf attack on Calder's family dog, and Prior tries to assure Buck he does not know of any cases in North America of a healthy wolf attacking a human being. Buck asks: "Tell me, Mr. Prior, where do you come from?" (31). Dan answers that he lives in Helena, Montana, but Buck continues: "No, I mean originally. Where you were born and grew up. Somewhere back east is my guess" (ibid.). Dan admits now that he comes from Pittsburg. Buck now answers: "Pittsburgh. Hmm. Grew up in the city" and shortly asks, "so that's *your* [sic] territory?" (ibid.). Dan agrees that this must be the case then. This is when Buck verbally attacks Dan: "This here is *our* [sic] territory . . . And we've got 'kind of a territorial thing' about it too" (ibid.). Moreover, this theme can be found in a scene where Helen and Buck come across with each other in a bar, and they end up talking about Luke. Buck jokes to Helen that his son is "a born bunny hugger" (265). Helen then asks if Luke has inherited this trait from his mother. Buck answers: "I guess. She grew up in the city, anyhow" (ibid.). In *The Horse Whisperer*, such discourse is not as explicit or radical. However, something similar is present in, for instance, the parts where Annie's way of life is compared to those of the women of the West. Another theme where such opposition is present is the way Annie makes comparisons between Tom Booker and her husband Robert. She thinks that Robert is "dependable" (423), always looking for "the rational solution" (398) and tends to "demystify" (399) things, whereas Tom is all "about what's going on in our hearts" (443). It seems that Annie connects Robert to reason and Tom to emotion.

The Loop also constructs the East/West dichotomy by looking back into the history of the West that was conquered by the settlers. The reader is mostly given Buck Calder's point of view on this matter, and Buck's thoughts are presented in several places in the novel. However, sometimes Buck's thoughts seem contradictory. I claim that on one hand, Buck can, at times, be identified to represent the sentiments of the Native Americans suffering from the colonizers conquering their habitat. It is interesting that while the word 'buck' generally refers to a male animal, *Collins* online dictionary also gives the meaning of a young Native American man. In the following extract, he reflects on his dislike of the people of the East coming to what he regards as his area:

It seemed wrong to hate people you hadn't met, but Buck couldn't help it. They and their type were buying up the whole damn state. There were some places you could hardly move for all the millionaires, moguls and movie stars. It seemed you were nobody in . . . New York City unless you had a ranch and a slice of Big Sky Country. The result was that real estate prices had gone so far through the roof that decent, young Montanans didn't stand a chance. (196)

Kollin notes that it is typical for narratives of the West to feel this kind of "sentiment of loss" over land ruined by, for instance, the arrival of other populations ("Environment in the Western" 5). In some cases Buck seems to feel himself oppressed by the government, as in this extract where he once again ponders various issues exasperating him:

Many a time he'd banged the table and ranted at the scandal of the federal government owning so much of the West, land he and his forebears and many more like them had watered with their own sweat and blood. It was they who, against all odds, had civilized the wilderness, planted it with decent grass and grown the fillet steaks those goddamn pen pushers ate –without so much as a thank you– in their fancy Washington D.C. restaurants. (231-232)

This extract of Buck's thoughts presents many typical issues related with the East/West dichotomy. First of all, Buck's pride in conquering the land, visible in him saying that it was *him* and his forefathers who civilized the wilderness, reflects the early Puritan attitudes regarding the wilderness of the West. For instance, Nash discusses the image of "man and wilderness locked in mortal combat": countless diaries, memorials and other documents from

the frontier period represent wilderness as an ““enemy”” to be ““conquered”” (27). Moreover, as noted, for instance Spurgeon has claimed that the Western has commonly utilized this early Puritan idea of a wilderness that must be conquered by man, so as not to be conquered by the wilderness itself. However, to the reader, there are negatively resonating references to the idea of conquering, for example that it has involved cruelty as blood has been shed. Present in the extract is also the question of ownership of land, in the way that Buck is furious about the central government “owning so much of the West”. According to Spurgeon, possession of land has always stood for power in the early Puritan view and also in most Western literature: “land not cleared and plowed was a hellish place, a howling wilderness signifying the antithesis of civilization, humanity, safety and home” (83). The extract refers to Buck and his forefathers civilizing the West, and therefore he feels *he* and his people should be the ones deciding on the land, not the Eastern government. In a similar way, this extract seems to reflect the frontier nostalgia that has been discussed in several places in the thesis. In Buck, the nostalgia unravels in his hatred towards the city folk and the government who, he feels, collect the fruit of what he regards as the work done by him and his people. The idea of control is also present, as in defining what kind of grass counts as decent and where it may grow – decided by Buck and his forefathers, but now Buck feels that *his* work is controlled too much. The idea of controlling animals is visible when referring to them as “steaks” which they have grown, instead of naming the animal as cow. The derogatory expression of the people in the East constructs oppositions between the habitants of the East and West. Buck is definitely a contradictory character, as he partially identifies with feelings of oppression, feeling himself suppressed by the government in the East; and partially, he takes pride in being an ancestor of those who conquered the West and were the oppressors. Indeed, the East/West dichotomy is much more complex in *The Loop* than in *The Horse Whisperer*.

5. Human / animal relationship

The last analysis chapter will focus on the relationships the human characters form with animals in *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*. Animal imagery and symbolism in the novels is a theme that will also be analyzed to some extent, but the main focus of the chapter is in the relationships. As it turns out, in many cases the way that a human character views an animal will reveal something about wilderness and culture. Therefore, I will discuss the characters' attitudes towards the animals, how they value them, point out if they do not, and analyze what this might mean for the novel.

Horse imagery is one of the most central themes in *The Horse Whisperer*, and Tom Booker's understanding of horses and working with them is important for the narrative. Tom's connection with horses is connected with harmony and naturalness; it is described that Tom's way with horses is like a natural gift: Tom "could ride almost before he could walk" (135) and "he understood the language of horses in the same way he understood the difference between colors or smells" (136). From his grandfather and father he learns "a gentle way with the horses" (ibid.), and it is told that he does not even know there were any other ways. Moreover, Tom himself refers to his skills as some sort of in-built knowledge, saying: "A lot of these things you can't really teach. All you can do is create a situation where if people want to learn they can. The best teachers I ever met were the horses themselves" (147). Tom does not consider himself as helping people with problematic horses, but rather, he connects with horses and regards he is helping them with "people problems" (153). In chapter seven, the reader is shown for the first time the way that Booker works with horses. He is teaching one of his seminars in California where he works with a horse in a corral in front of an audience. The way he sees he is helping horses with their people is expressed in his thoughts regarding the horse owners: ". . .this was the fourth clinic in about as many

weeks and seeing the same damn fool problems cropping up time and time again got kind of wearing” (126). It is emphasized that although there are several cowboys around working with horses, Booker works in a different manner:

Wherever he worked, he made a point of seeking out the most troubled horses and offering to ride them. Many of the men he rode with had been doing the job since long before he was born and, to begin with, they would snigger behind their hands at the sight of him mounting some crazy beast that had thrown the best of them a dozen times. They soon stopped when they saw the way the boy handled himself and how the horse changed. Tom lost count of the horses he met who had been seriously screwed up by the stupidity or cruelty of humans, but he never met one he couldn't help. (138)

Booker seems to regard horses as soulful creatures and sympathize with them. He explains: “You see, these animals have got such big hearts; there's nothing they want more than to do what you want them to do. But when the messages get confused, all they can do is try and save themselves” (133). He continues: “They're the most forgiving creatures God ever made” (ibid.). Based on these extracts, it seems that Tom even anthropomorphizes horses to some extent, relating human thinking and feeling to them. Overall, Tom's way of working with horses is in the first place presented as animal-centered, in such a way that he is observing the horse's needs foremost. However, I think his relationship with horses turns slightly more problematic as the plot evolves. Towards the end of the novel, Booker's behavior changes and it seems that his principles are questioned. Once again, the genre convention of the West as a testing ground of values is evident. Even the extract written above, ending “...what you want them to do” (133), reveals this; that however horse friendly Tom seems to be in the first place, he does ultimately connect to horses an idea of controlling them. Since his stance on horses is often similar to his stance on women, as explained earlier, it is possible that for Tom, controlling the animal is connected to his sense of masculinity. On one hand Booker judges strongly the habit of horsemen breaking a horse, on the other hand he ultimately does something very similar with Pilgrim towards the end of *The Horse Whisperer*.

Spurgeon discusses the tension that the Western genre creates by the juxtaposition of herds of wild horses across a powerful landscape of the West, “one of the primary mythic signifiers by which we refer to wild and untamed nature”, while at the same time depicting the image of the cowboy and his lasso, the saddle and the bridle, the bit, the spur, and the fences of the corral (53). Spurgeon continues:

The process of breaking the wild horse, branding it, claiming it and utilizing it in the further subduing of nature through fences, cattle, and roads, follows unseen, behind the image of the wild herd. It is a complex and powerful metaphor of desire and domination, of colonialist nostalgia and Manifest Destiny. (ibid.)

In accordance with what Spurgeon has described about the twofold imagery of horses in the Western genre, *The Horse Whisperer* presents images of both, and the scene where Tom breaks Pilgrim is where the dilemma manifests in the novel. First, the novel introduces the image of a herd of wild mustangs when Annie and Tom are on their romantic overnight trek: “They startled no deer but saw instead, maybe a half-mile on toward the mountains, a small band of mustangs . . . It was a family band of seven mares, five of them with foals. There were also a couple of colts . . . The band stallion Tom had never seen before” (421). The couple cannot help but be in awe of the beauty of the leading horse. The animal is described: “He was magnificent. Deep-chested and strong . . . His coat was a perfect white” (ibid.). In fact, it seems that the leading stallion is described in a very similar manner as the wilderness of the West as a whole has been described in the novel, implying purity in his white coat and grandeur in his power. Therefore, this particular untamed horse does seem to signify the whole untamed nature. The stallion’s power is further highlighted in a description of him fighting another wild stallion, both of them rearing, kicking and thwacking their teeth. Wilderness and freedom are certainly emphasized in the scene. On the other hand, Hunt argues that in the literature of the American West, horses can sometimes be viewed as “symbolic of humanity in its full variety in harmony with landscape” (239), and the scene where Tom and

Annie observe the wild horses can also be interpreted as them seeing a reflection of their own vulnerability and freedom in the moment, and a whole spectrum of other emotions in them.

Creating a strong contrast, the very next chapter depicts the breaking of Pilgrim the horse, who has not yet subdued to be ridden again although some progress has been made. Until this point, Tom's way of working with Pilgrim has been presented as relatively horse-centered: "He was taking each day as it came, just letting Pilgrim take his time and make his choices", describes Grace (240). The ultimate goal has all the time been to help Pilgrim become rideable for Grace again, and towards this goal Tom has proceeded with baby steps, observing the horse's capacity to take things in day by day. However, soon after Tom notices his romantic feelings towards Annie, he begins to anticipate that he might need to take a more dramatic step with the horse. My interpretation for this is, as was already explicated in the romance part of the analysis, that he feels failure or pain for his own so-called domestication, loss of independence by feeling attachment to a woman, and therefore he feels he needs to reinforce his sense of masculinity. Moreover, the already noted theme of the West as a testing ground of moral is present. Regarding Pilgrim, Tom explains to Annie that "many times a troubled horse would get worse before he got better and you had to let him do that, let him go beyond the brink, to hell and back even" (285). One should keep in mind that earlier in the novel, Tom had thought he would not want to go that way with Pilgrim. However, after Tom and Annie's romance has pinnacle, it seems that Tom experiences such an inner contradiction that he needs a way out of the situation, and sets himself a nearer deadline for Pilgrim's progress. Tom resorts to laying the horse down using force, although he states, ". . . it's not always pretty to watch . . . I don't like doing it unless I have to" (435). What happens in the scene is that Tom and his helper, Smoky, rope Pilgrim so that he can only use three of his legs, and wringing the ropes tighter and tighter they force the horse to finally submit, after being worn out from all the resistance and fighting. It is clearly against everything Tom

stands for in his work, and even Annie observes this, but cannot think of any possible explanations for Tom's behavior:

It seemed to Annie so wrong, so out of character, for Tom to be doing this. She had seen him be firm with horses before but never causing pain or suffering. Everything he'd done with Pilgrim had been designed to build up trust and confidence. And now he was hurting him. She just couldn't understand. (438)

To stress the horribleness of the situation, it is described that Pilgrim was "covered in sweat" and "panting like some desperate asthmatic smoker and the sound was so rasping and terrible that Annie wanted to block her ears" (438). After Pilgrim has kept on fighting for a long time, he finally kneels for a moment. Even then, Tom and Smoky put more and more pressure to the lasso line attached to the horse, until it is described how "Pilgrim snorted like a wounded bull. There was foam spewing at his mouth. His flanks were filthy where the sand had stuck to his sweat . . . And at last, slowly, he keeled over on his side and lay his head on the sand and was still" (439). When the episode is over and Pilgrim finally lies on his side, Tom explains what he did to the severely upset Annie and Grace who were watching. Grace accuses Tom for forcing the horse, but Tom claims: "It was hard as hell, but he could have gone on. Gone on making himself more and more unhappy. But what he chose to do instead was to go to the brink and look beyond. And he saw what was there and he chose to accept it" (442). I think that in this line, Tom on one hand scapegoats Pilgrim for his own behavior towards the horse, and on the other, he actually talks about himself and his death that looms ahead. Ultimately, Grace can finally climb back in the saddle and her Pilgrim feels as "fine and collected and smooth as silk" as he used to be (444). My interpretation of this scene has several dimensions. First of all, I think this is the extreme reverse side of the horse imagery typical for the Western that was discussed by Spurgeon. As was already mentioned, whereas the images of muscular and beautiful wild horses running free reflected the American idea of freedom, the reverse side of the coin is the image of breaking the wild horse, which in a larger sense reflected owning the nature in the sense of the

colonialist nostalgia for domination. Many of the relevant tropes that Spurgeon listed are present: the corral with its confining fences, the cowboy with his lasso, the saddle and the bridle. On the other hand, I think this scene reflects the “domestication of the hero”, also a typical theme of the Western that was already discussed in the context of the male/female romance. After Tom has fallen for Annie, the woman from the East, he also loses touch with his wilderness-based values, where control is not important. Yet, now that he is dependent on the woman and his core values are threatened, his actions also change and he uses control over the horse. Finally, I want to point out how, in the theory chapter, I discussed how the Western originally presented the West as a testing ground of moral. I think this scene shows that Tom is not as straightforward and good as he seems on the surface. As stated in the theory chapter, an efficient way of stereotype vitalization is to give a character complex features that may seem to contradict with what the character embodies. Therefore, as noted, the reader of the Western can at times be misguided by the hero’s seemingly high moral code. By letting Annie take hold of him, Tom loses his freedom, which entails masculinity in the Western. He feels the need to compensate this loss and regain his sense of masculinity by using force on Pilgrim, which is against his personal moral code. This is an unbearable situation that Tom escapes by seeking death and to restore his freedom. I conclude that in the scene above, culture takes over wilderness, in the sense that Pilgrim is now cultivated back to the pet horse he is expected to be.

Whereas horse imagery and horse discourse is significant for *The Horse Whisperer*, so is wolf imagery and rhetoric for *The Loop*. Much of the wolf discourse revolves around the thematic of whether to protect or destroy the wolves that have migrated in the surroundings of the town of Hope. As it is explicitly stated, “wolf recovery had long been a political football but lately all the goals seemed to have been scored by the politicians who opposed it” (46). Some characters are strongly opposed to wolves, as will be explained later

in this chapter. To make the question all the more complicated, even the conservationists in the narrative struggle with the question of how to best conserve the animals. For instance, both Helen and Luke want to save the wolves, but initially Luke resists Helen's methods of collaring the wolves. Luke insists that in this way, the animal cannot be as free as it deserves to be:

It wasn't that he thought she meant to harm the wolves. Far from it. But once she got the collars on them, they wouldn't be free. They could be found and gotten rid of whenever anyone chose. It was weird these biologist people didn't get it. But maybe in the end they were just like anyone else, unable to stand other creatures being truly wild and forever trying to tame and shackle them. (211)

The method that Helen uses entails that a wolf is anaesthetized, a collar with a tracker is put around its neck, the animal is dewormed and vaccinated, and when it wakes up its whereabouts and geographical movements can be followed. The theme of how to best conserve the wolves is an ecocritical one, but I also think that it reflects the larger issues of how to best protect the wilderness in America. For instance, Nash notes that wilderness conservation, as it is in the USA today, has gone through several different phases stemming from varying, conflicting perspectives. The prime of wilderness conservation dates to the 19th century, and the first conflict was “between those who defined conservation as the wise use or planned development of resources and those who have been termed preservationists, with their rejection of utilitarianism and advocacy of nature unaltered by man” (Nash 129). The first national parks were established around the same time; Yellowstone National Park in 1872 and the Adirondack Forest Preserve in 1885, but not in order to protect wilderness, states Nash (149). However, as a response to the realization that the frontier was to become a concept of the past, an interest in wilderness preserves grew rapidly (*ibid.*). Nowadays, there are environmental movements that have set their sight in the future, with an idea of sharing the planet's nature with other species, and with the goal of protecting instead of simply

restoring (Nash 385). As I already explained in the chapter on male/female romances, the last image of wolves in *The Loop* portrays a pair of wolves that is released into the wild without any collars or trackers, and this may suggest a possible outlook of a future where preservation is no longer necessary. On the other hand, the scene could reflect the fantasy of freedom, so important for the American state of mind.

In the first chapter of *The Loop*, the border between wilderness and culture is pictured in a scene where a black alpha male wolf roams through the woods towards the town of Hope, Montana. This scene invites the reader to immerse him/herself into wilderness by looking at the landscape through the wolf's perspective. The same perspective is used on other parts as well, but as Robisch admits, Evans mostly does not use anthropomorphism and “maintains a humble speculative position as to wolf cognition and behavior” (331). The first wolf of *The Loop* navigates through the rocky canyons and shadowy forests, trotting carefully out of sight of humans, but as he approaches human residences the first comparison between wilderness and culture is made: “From a mile and a half away came the mingled smells of the valley. Of cattle, dogs, the acrid tang of man's machines. And though he must have known, without ever being taught, the peril of such things, yet on again he went and down . . .” (5). In this sequence, both cattle and dogs refer to something man has cultivated, rooted the wilderness out of them, and man's machines, the tools for cultivation, smell bitter and irritating to the wolf – everything connects to danger. The wolf seems to have a built-in understanding to react with wariness to all of this, whereas he himself is the embodiment of wilderness in this opening of the book: he senses death, his understanding of nature is high due to his instincts, and he connects with other animals “in an ancient communion” (5). Further in the same scene, the town of Hope is described: “Its sides were ridged and thick with pine” (5) but, as the wolf can see from above the tree line, “both mountain and forest gave way grudgingly to pasture” (6). My interpretation of this phrase is that wild land is

anthropomorphized, as it is given negative emotions after it has been decreased and replaced with pasture, which is cultured land bordered by the human for his domestic animals. Here Evans constructs an opposition between wilderness and culture, according to the American tradition.

As it happens, the chain of events begins as the wolf preys the pet dog of the Calder family, who live in the periphery of Hope. From here, the discourse of wolf-haters versus the environmentalists in *The Loop* is set, a dichotomy that forms the tension that carries the plot on through the book. Though it may sound contradictory at first, in this discourse the Western people and the local media are the wolf-haters, and therefore they represent culture, whereas biologists and environmentalists, mostly born and raised in the cities of the East, represent the wilderness. Hope is described as “wolf-hater heartland” (16) from the point of view of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Wolf Recovery officer Dan Prior, and furthermore, the local media reports the event using the expression “wolf attack” (17). The wolf recovery agency is described as being in strong disfavor in Hope, and Buck Calder accuses Prior’s team for being responsible for the wolves wandering nearer to human settlements, and complains about the ranchers not being able to defend their livestock and property against the wolves. Calder and the media demand Prior’s team to take responsibility over the wolf and assume them to know the wolves’ every move, whereas Prior thinks that although his office tries to keep track of the wolves by collaring them and locating their moves, “the animals should be truly wild and live as naturally as possible” (44). Here again wilderness and culture are opposed.

The Loop’s chapter eight looks back in time as it depicts the town of Hope’s birth story, and coincidentally its history of wolf hatred, from over a hundred and fifty years back. As Robisch argues, in *The Loop* “history is mythified” (332). Hope is located in a valley that has “great hinterland of wilderness” (104) which attracted “white hunters and trappers” (99)

in search of beaver pelts, and gradually the hunters formed a colony. It is indicated that the location had even earlier been a residence of the Blackfeet Native Americans, also shortly referred to as “savages”, while the spot had, because of deer and elk, also been a “special place for wolves since ancient times” (99-100). As the beaver is hunted down, the white hunters turn to wolfing in order to answer to the growing demand for wolfskin coats from the fashionable “city folk” of the East (100). This is a strong East/West reference, which I read as a reference to colonialism: it is the eastern people that contribute to the mass killing. The last mention of the Blackfeet tribe is on page 101, with a strong opposition between the whites and the Natives: “A man could freeze to death with no trouble at all and lose his scalp too, for of all the white invaders, the wolfer was the most reviled and the Blackfeet killed him when they could”.

As to how Hope developed a hatred for wolves, it is implied that since the society had settled and massacred the millions of buffaloes the wolves had earlier fed on, the wolves now sometimes turned to the easy prey of cows, “slower and dumber and easier to kill” (103). Adding to this an arctic winter killing nearly all livestock, the people needed something or someone to blame their losses for, and thus “the wolf became Hope’s scapegoat”, now preferably caught alive and tortured (104). *The Horse Whisperer* also introduced the idea of scapegoating the animal for the mistakes of the human, in Tom’s explanations for his deeds. It is mentioned that even later the wolves in every national forest were ordered to be killed in favor of the livestock industry, but in the wilderness around Hope some survived (ibid.). Although the ‘savage people’ are not discussed in more detail or depth in the novel, I think there is a clear juxtaposition of wolves and the Native American people as the habitants of wilderness, suffering from decreasing living space and victims of the massacre of millions, due to the culture and way of life of white people from the East. Nash points out that indeed, from the 1960s onwards, many Americans have seen a resemblance between wilderness and

Indians, “as victims of the same fixation on progress, growth, and competition which threatened countercultural values such as peace, freedom and community” (251). Nash explains that this is the result of a new kind of questioning of established values in America (ibid.). Moreover, as I stated in the theory section, typical for the Western is its setting as the encounter point for the East and the West, civilization and wilderness, of settled societies and lawlessness, and these themes are present in *The Loop*.

Luke Calder’s relationship with animals is described as something special and exceptional, especially contrasted with that of his father’s. For instance, Luke is not comfortable with his father’s hunting pastime – instead, he does not want to harm animals: “He’d never been afraid of any animal. Already he had found that it was easier to make friends with them than it was with human beings. The ranch dogs, cats and horses, even the calves, always seemed to come to him rather than the others” (122). Luke feels most often empathy, and very rarely fear towards animals: “. . . all that Luke had ever feared in animals was their judgment. Not simply of himself, but of all his species. He saw the wrongs they suffered at man’s hands and knew, by virtue of his own strictured tongue, how it felt to be unable to speak out against oppression” (ibid.). It is implied that Luke prefers a vegetarian diet, as the “taste and texture” of meat “often made him want to gag” (123). Another example of how Luke sympathizes with animals and nature is visible in a scene where he is investigating wolf tracks with Helen, and she encourages him to crawl into an abandoned wolf nest to see what it is like. When he reaches the end of the tunnel, the wolves’ chamber, and is literally inside nature, swallowed by land and surrounded by soil, he feels unity with his surroundings and contentment in the moment:

He thought of the mother wolf curled in this womb of the cold earth, giving birth to her pups, pictured her licking their blind faces clean and suckling them . . . for some reason [he] remembered something he’d read, about how life was a circular trip from the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb. He had never understood why anyone should fear the perfect nothingness of death. He would have happily died right here and then. (241-242)

The difference in attitudes between the father and son in *The Loop* is emphasized in a flashback scene where Luke reminisces the only hunting trip he was ever invited to join with his father. As Robisch concludes, hunting is pictured sacred to father Calder, profane to the son (332). Luke only ever goes on the trip to please his father, and the trip ends with an opposite result. The depiction of the trip begins by portrayal of the wilderness as peaceful, pure and untouched in the small hours, lit and colored by the rising sun:

The two of them rode out before dawn under a mottled November moon that lit the breath of the horses and made shadows of them on the sequined snow. An hour later they were up in the forest, standing silent with the horses on a high crag while they looked back to see the sun scale the world's rim and turn the snow-swept plains to a sea of crimson . . . The snow was fresh and fluffy . . . They barely spoke and when they did it was in whispers. Otherwise, but for their breathing and the creak and crunch of their boots in the snow, the forest was still. (123)

The hunting does not go according to plans, when Luke hesitates to take the shot at an elk that he has in scope: “Half of Luke’s brain screamed at him to hand his father the gun right then. But the other half assessed this moment for what it was: a final chance to be something in his father’s eyes. He must take the creature’s life for his own to have any value” (126). This extract also reflects over Buck’s views on masculinity: in order to be a real man, one must dominate. After a long inner debate, thirteen-year-old Luke finally pulls the trigger, but that is not the end of it; when they reach the fallen elk, his father rushes him to finish it. Buck says to his son that a hunter must finish what he started, and to claim ownership for his kill, it must be Luke’s shot. However, Luke refuses to shoot, and it is ultimately Buck who puts the elk down with sad disappointment. Even that is not the end of it, because now Buck needs to disembowel the animal: “This was the deal, he explained, as he slit the belly and reached up inside to sever the windpipe and haul out the elk’s steaming heart and liver and lungs. It was a

sacred moment, he said” (130). The trip ends with the same scenery as earlier; the setting that was pure and untouched when the father and son arrived is now looking appalling and bloodstained: “Luke looked back and saw the gut piles and the snow soaked wide with blood and it occurred to him that if there was indeed such a place as hell, this was how it must look and where surely now he belonged” (ibid.). I interpret that this description symbolizes America’s violent past as oppressing the Native Americans: the initially pure land is turned into a bloody battleground in a similar way to how the settlers invaded the West.

Later in the novel, in a scene where Luke sees a wolf play with Helen’s dog, *The Loop* underscores the way Luke regards all life and all species as equal. Although Luke first has some fears regarding the situation, he soon witnesses the wild female and the domestic male canines interact in a playful union: “Luke was waiting for her to pounce and rip the dog’s throat out. But she didn’t . . . suddenly the wolf went down, flattening her chest to the snow and putting her head down on her outstretched paws, still wagging her tail. Luke couldn’t believe it. She wanted to play” (415). I think that this scene, in a fantastic manner, symbolizes that peaceful co-existence is possible in spite of differences, and furthermore, the scene suggests gender equality, by mentioning the sex of both the dog and the wolf.

I will now discuss Buck Calder’s relationship with animals in even more depth. It seems that Buck Calder’s hatred of wolves reflects the early Puritan attitudes towards the animals of the wilderness. Even though Buck does not manage to receive an affirmative statement from a veterinarian concerning that a wolf was behind a calf that was found dead on his pastures, Buck simply “knew in his bones that the wolf was to blame” (140). Nash points out: “Along with the obstacle it offered to settlement and civilization, wilderness also confronted the frontier mind with terrifying creatures, both known and imagined” (28) and continues: “wild animals added to the danger of the American wilderness, and . . . the element of the unknown intensified the feelings” (28). Furthermore, the New Worlds immigrants saw

in wilderness an opportunity presented to them “to behave in a savage or bestial manner” (29). Indeed, as the novel’s plot evolves, Calder and his gang of supporters act in a more and more savage manner – I will return to this topic shortly.

To give an example of Buck’s attitudes towards wolves, in the beginning of the novel there is a scene where the Calder family have arranged a media briefing regarding the wolf attack on their family dog. In this scene Buck states firmly to the camera: “The wolf is a killing machine . . . He’ll take anything he can. And if it wasn’t for this poor, brave dog here he’d have taken my grandson” (24). I think it is ironic that Buck regards the wolf a ‘killing machine’, although he himself successfully raises cattle to be slaughtered for the meat industry. It is possible that the phrase ‘killing machine’ is used as an effect to draw attention to Buck’s business; I cannot think of many more machined ways of killing than livestock farming. Therefore, it is the human who is the mass killer. Moreover, this line of speech also reveals a juxtaposition of a domesticated dog versus his wild ancestor, where the pet dog is glorified, and the ancestor denigrated and viewed as terrifying, although both have the same instincts; the domestic animal’s instincts are only diminished, extinguished or modified, therefore cultivated, to suit the preferences of man. Clearly, Buck does not regard that all life is equal, but instead thinks that some variants of a species are more justified to exist than others. This might once again reflect on the way the Puritans violently colonized territories of the West and invaded living space from the Native Americans. In this sense, the wolf comes to stand for the more general savage “other”. As noted in the theory, Otherness is often associated with wilderness. Furthermore, whereas Buck very openly hates wolves, he is very proud of the cattle he raises. He even seems to identify himself with a bull, as is evident in a line stated to his friends at a bar. Buck refers to his children being born at intervals of two years, and says: “Only breed your best cow every other year . . . That’s the way to get prime beef” (37). He feels especially proud about the purity of the race of the cows he breeds. It is

stated that regarding the Calder ranch, “their reputation for purebred Black Angus surpassed all competition. Calder-bred bulls and the richness of their seed were renowned throughout the West and beyond” (35). Even when one of Buck’s lovers complains on how Buck smells, he simply boasts it is the smell of “purebred Calder bulls” (317). I interpret the emphasis on the purity of blood to be another reference to the Puritans’ domination – note the stem referring to *purity* in the term ‘Puritan.’ Once again, the wolf is the savage “other” – the impure, the deviation from the norm.

As noted, Buck’s fear and anger towards the wolves culminates in his thinking that he and his followers have “a war on their hands” (299) and acting accordingly. Towards the end of the novel, Buck’s anger culminates in his shooting two wolves, after which he gathers a group and sets out to destroy the rest of the pack. As discussed above, the immigrants on the frontier used their fear of wilderness to justify violent acts. Therefore, the finale could symbolize the settlers’ fears and the violence used to face them. Moreover, typical for the romantic Western of the 1920s was the gradually increasing violence towards the end, where the pinnacle would be a confrontation between the hero and the villain. In the penultimate chapter, there is a great confrontation, when Helen and Luke with their supporters oppose Buck and his entourage. Buck claims ownership for killing the wolves and demands that he is the one who takes the next shot; and blinded by his anger, Buck mistakes his own son for a wolf and shoots at him. Luke survives, but in the narrative this is the pinnacle of Buck’s domination, and after this scene he is portrayed as a weakening old man.

As was noted in the theory section, in *The Loop* there is a character that I recognize as ‘the sacred hunter figure’, present in the Western and discussed by Slotkin and Spurgeon. Spurgeon explains that originally, the sacred hunter myth in general involved “regeneration through violence enacted upon the body of the earth” (21). This means that in traditional Anglo American versions of the myth, after slaying his prey, the hunter’s deeds

would be justified by emphasizing the “heroic male adventure commodified by visual and symbolic proofs of the hunter’s heroic stature and, therefore, his rightful and proper triumph over his prey” (ibid.). Further, an idea of nature sacrificed for man was amplified with “the vision of a feminine landscape within the patriarchal bounds of Anglo American culture and the long-standing tradition of associating Native Americans with what appeared to early Anglo colonists as a ‘howling wilderness’ both encouraged and justified this exploitation” (22). I think that *The Loop*, however, follows more in the lines of the renewed version of the myth of the sacred hunter, where physical regeneration is no more possible for the hunter. Spurgeon explains that in the renewed myth “man’s relationship to the wilderness is one of butchery”. Because no animals survive the butchery, the outcome is man’s degeneration instead of regeneration (32). Spurgeon explains that in the new version of the sacred hunter myth, the degeneration of man is signified by images of piles of bones, “stretching across the prairies in which the mythic figure of the sacred hunter has been reduced to that of the bonepickers, ragged children gathering dead evidence of the now-vanished herds” (32-33). Accordingly, *The Loop* tells the story that the footings of Hope’s main road were laid from slaughtered wolves’ skulls, which the hunters boiled and added to pave the road. As decades went by, “the road of skulls crumbled and succumbed” (107) until at last the land was leveled for a park – and from there on, children played on the mat of bones. This could be viewed as symbolizing the USA as a whole, as the country’s history is as violent as the fictional one of Hope’s; the same kind of symbolism was visible earlier in the case of the buffaloes and the Natives. To return to the sacred hunter figure, the character I refer to in *The Loop* is called Joseph Lovelace. He is already an old man, a character who is a second-generation wolf trapper, and Buck Calder hires him to destroy the wolves in secrecy. Noteworthy is the character’s name: Lovelace has a diction that sounds very similar to the word ‘loveless’, and the character indeed is not loved by anyone, nor has he himself loved anyone excepted his

long since deceased wife. He is depicted as the ultimate enemy for the wolf, who has learned the trade secrets and the most gruesome methods from his father. From him, Lovelace also learned to use “the Lovelace loop”, a particularly cruel weapon that can slowly and painfully kill a pack of wolves, both the adults and the cubs:

At dawn you would find five or six pups, hooked like fish around the den and still alive, though too tired by now to make more than a whimper. More often than not, their mother would be there . . . if you had found yourself a good spot . . . you could catch the whole pack, shoot the other adults one by one . . . Only when you were sure you had them all, did you go in and finish the pups off with an ax or the butt of your gun. (106-107)

Lovelace never uses the Lovelace loop himself on the wolves in the novel, because after shooting some, he begins to question himself; instead, it is Buck who lays the trap.

It is underlined that Lovelace does not believe that animals have feelings, as he reminisces a conversation with his wife about the topic. Ultimately, Lovelace freezes to a lonely, slow death in the deep of the forest, and I think this symbolizes that the wilderness wins. Nevertheless, Lovelace seems to go through some sort of moral awakening right before he dies: “the wolfer wanted to say sorry but there was no one to say it to” (467). In *The Loop*, the sacred hunter is given his chance for moral *regeneration*, but physically, *degeneration* is his destiny. This is also what happens to Buck: as discussed earlier, his appeal fades, he loses his power, and weakens physically. Moreover, what makes the idea of the wilderness ultimately winning more powerful, is that among Lovelace’s last thoughts he finally questions his own presumption that animals do not possess souls. The hunter even longs for atonement for his deeds: “he thought maybe the pup he’d shot the other night before might not be dead after all and if he could only find the entrance to the mine, he might yet be able to save it” (468). As Lovelace feels regret and longs for forgiveness, it seems that the wilderness has managed to question and transform even the wolfer’s essential assumptions and verdicts. As the hunter’s lonesome death approaches, he comes to the mine where he has thrown the dead

wolves: “it was as good a place as any” (ibid.). Lovelace sits in the cold, his back against a tree for a long time waiting for death, and when it finally comes, “there was no clamor or fanfare of pain, nor any vengeful recitation of his sins” (ibid.). The nature is still as snow keeps falling, “his withered skin was almost as pale as the snow” (ibid.). There is something similar in this scene compared to the one where Tom dies in *The Horse Whisperer*; in the other novel as well, after conducting violence on an animal, the character seeks for forgiveness and death from the wilderness. My impression of this scene is that wilderness does win, and the sacred hunter dies, but wilderness wins in a nonviolent way, even giving the hunter a chance for atonement; therefore, nature is not the malign tormentor that man often is.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to identify the kind of ideology that Nicholas Evans’ novels *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop* promote – foremost, what they say about wilderness and culture. In order to find out, I needed to identify the conventions of the literary genre that Evans uses in his novels, and explain how the novels can be read as modern western romances. In this final chapter, I will summarize how my analysis of *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop* answers to the aims stated in the introduction chapter of the thesis.

I came to the conclusion that Evans’ novels are not ideologically empty. From Storey’s five different ways that popular culture can promote ideology, *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop* use the following: introducing a system of ideas articulated by particular people; drawing attention to conflicts of inequality or oppression; and operating with textual connotations. The novels ideologically reflect on the mythology handled in the narratives.

Both *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop* can be read as modern western romances: they employ a variety of tropes and genre elements typical for the Western, as

discussed in the theory chapter. Regarding character types, both portray cowboys, and the female protagonists are sophisticated, eastern women, who journey to the West. Both depict the Montana landscape as their milieu, and the most important plot turns take place in the nearby wilderness, which is always on the background. Thematically, the opposing forces of wilderness and culture are continuously present. The narratives are also essentially romances. The romances are experienced close to nature that affects the forming of the romance, for instance by reinforcing the characters' emotions. The endings of the novels resemble each other, as well. Therefore, the novels have very similar frames. However, beneath the surface they also differ from each other. I will now discuss in more detail what I found out in each of the analysis chapters.

In the first analysis chapter, I had two goals: to identify the gender representations of the central characters of the novels, and to analyze the heterosexual romances between the protagonists. In the beginning of both novels, the main female characters are unhappy in their current life situations. They are depicted as strongly connected to culture: they are born in cities and living on the East coast, and both are initially portrayed in the urban setting of New York City. Especially Annie is given strong cultural connotations regarding her job, home, and way of life. Both novels construct femininity in a way that implies that the protagonists are not particularly feminine; references to their looks and behavior reveal this. For example, according to these constructions, a tendency that is not considered feminine is activity. Among other things, activity manifests in the novels through physical activity and ambitiousness in work. In the end of both *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*, the female protagonists continue life in an established relationship: Annie with her husband, and Helen with Luke. The change that the characters go through is foremost visible through them finding inner harmony and direction in life through feeling healed by the love of their western lovers. Therefore, I conclude that typically for the Western romance, the novels support a traditional

idea of marriage, or at least a steady heteronormative relationship, and imply that this is the key for women to find happiness. Moreover, the women also become more passive in the course of the novel, as is characteristic of romances. For Annie, this is more obvious, as she gives up her job. However, since Helen settles for life with Luke and finds happiness in him, instead of actively orienting herself towards her own plans, it can be claimed that she also becomes passive. It is implied that life in the domestic sphere is more *natural* for women than working.

The men in the novels – the cowboys – have very different destinies. In *The Horse Whisperer*, Tom acts against his personal work ethics after he has fallen in love, and consequently escapes the relationship with self-destructive behavior and dies. I argue in the thesis that Tom acts in a suicidal manner in order to regain his freedom, escape the attachments of the relationship, and seek forgiveness from the wilderness. Hence, *The Horse Whisperer* implies that freedom is a masculine man's true essence, and that domestication through heterosexual relationship results in losing this freedom. In *The Loop*, Luke's transformation can be viewed as simply growing up, but nevertheless, he is also freer to actualize his future dreams in the end. *The Horse Whisperer's* portrayal of masculinity is more traditional and more nostalgic, introducing an independent, nomadic outdoor man, who is not afraid to fight for those important to him. *The Loop* is more complex, as it first introduces Buck almost as a caricature of the cowboy, rugged and masculine; however, as his insecurity, arrogance, and his heartless intentions are revealed through his violent actions, he loses his charm, and the character fades. Luke, on the contrary, is first introduced as only distantly resembling a cowboy, but his character changes towards the end. For instance, he decides to fulfill his dream about university studies instead of staying at the ranch. This reflects that *The Loop* is not as nostalgic as *The Horse Whisperer*, but instead more future oriented: new kind of American heroes are welcome, even ones for whom sensitivity is a

strength. The cowboy who orients himself for an academic degree also suggests a new kind of synthesis between wilderness and culture.

The second analysis section discussed East and West in Evans' novels. My intention was to identify the novels' regionalism and the kind of opposition that is constructed between the regions. This happens mostly through landscape depictions and through the characters' attitudes and thoughts. I found out that the East is very strongly connected to urbanity and culture, and given foremost negative connotations, such as 'lifeless' and 'unauthentic'. The West, on the contrary, is portrayed through the wilderness, depicted as a breathtakingly colorful and beautiful land, where life flows vividly in its various forms. In this sense, the novels follow the tradition of the Western genre. However, *The Loop* is once again more complex. Through, for instance, Buck's attitudes, *The Loop* looks back in history by referring to the violent past of the West, where settlers conquered the land. The novel seems to challenge the thoughts the old frontier myth about a wilderness that must be conquered, and instead suggests protecting the land for the common good.

It is noteworthy that most of the characters in Evans' novels treat wilderness in such a way that they only give it instrumental value. For instance, for Annie, wilderness of the West works perfectly for her needs, but yet she returns to the East. It seems that *The Loop's* approach to the wilderness of the West introduces more contemporary views than *The Horse Whisperer's*. Particularly for Luke, wilderness is valuable in itself. Therefore, *The Loop* has more of an ecocritical approach to its presentation of wilderness and culture, but even this is not unheard of for the Western.

The last analysis section discussed the human-animal relationships in the novels. Discussion on *The Horse Whisperer* was mainly on horses, while on *The Loop* it was mostly on the wolves in the narratives. In *The Horse Whisperer*, the characters' relationship with horses was dichotomous, as is typical for the Western. On one hand, wild mustangs are

admired in their freedom; on the other, the domesticated horse is central for the cowboy. This dichotomy manifests itself in the case of Pilgrim. For the most part of the novel, he is somewhere in between, until Tom tames him using force, thus acting against his moral code. This scene pictures the West as a testing ground of moral, as is typical in the tradition of the Western. *The Loop* offers different approaches to the wolves living nearby the town of Hope. Buck is afraid of the wolves and aims for their destruction, and thus represents the traditional pioneer attitudes. Accordingly, the wolves in the narrative often symbolize the Natives in the wilderness near the frontier. The wolf also signifies the wilderness as a whole, in the sense of the land being conquered. Helen and Luke represent more peaceful approaches. Especially Luke thinks that all life is equal. This way, *The Loop* offers an approach where different species could live side by side, and wilderness and culture need not be opposed. I believe that naming the novel *The Loop* could signify this kind of challenging of binary thinking: besides the trap used in the narrative, 'the loop' might refer to a closed circle, where everything connects.

With this thesis, I believe that I have succeeded in adding some insight into the literature of Nicholas Evans. As I noticed that there was still not very much academic research on modern Western romances, this is a subject that another researcher could take further in the future. I hope that my thesis will inspire other researchers to study the work of Nicholas Evans, as well; perhaps another researcher could choose other novels from the many he has written, in order to gain a wider perspective of his literature.

In Nicholas Evans' *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*, wilderness is portrayed as an ambiguous environment, as is typical of the Western genre. It has some intrinsic value, but before all it turns out to be a symbolic landscape that is important for the American national identity. As such, wilderness is meaningful, as it carries connotations from the past,

evokes emotions, offers shelter, and is a good milieu for changing an individual's direction in life or coming to terms with one's true self – a perfect place to love or die.

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