

**Rural and urban contrasted –  
Regionalism in Nicholas Evans' *The Horse Whisperer***

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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee regionalismin käsitettä Nicholas Evansin romaanissa *The Horse Whisperer* (1995, suom. *Hevoskuiskaaja*). Regionalismi on kirjallisuuden tyyli joka korostaa tietyn alueen ja erityisesti maaseudun omaleimaisia kulttuurisia piirteitä ja tapoja. Tutkimuskysymykset keskittyvät siihen, miten vahvasti ja millä keinoin regionalismi ilmenee Evansin romaanissa ja miten maaseudun kulttuuri, tarkemmin sanottuna Montanan erämaa ja sen yhteisö, kuvataan ideaalina, amerikkalaisia perusarvoja vaalivana paikkana. Samalla kaupunki näyttyy synkkänä elinympäristönä jossa kovat arvot kuten kapitalismi ovat syrjäyttäneet perinteiset pehmeämmät arvot. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on osoittaa, että regionalismi on vahvasti läsnä Evansin teoksessa ja että regionalismi heijastelee mielenkiintoisella tavalla ajankohtaisia asioita modernissakin kirjallisuudessa.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen lähtökohta muodostuu regionalismin teoriasta, niin vanhasta kuin modernista regionalismista, sekä western -kirjallisuuden teoriasta, jossa keskitytään erityisesti siihen, miten Amerikan Länsi ja sen ihmiset on kuvattu kirjallisuudessa ideaalina yhteiskuntana. Kosmopolitanismi teoriana tuo pohjan kaupungin kuvaamisen tarkastelulle, sillä New Yorkin urbaani ympäristö on Evansin kirjassa tärkeässä roolissa maaseudun vastakappaleena. Lisäksi tarkastellaan niin Amerikan länteen kuin kaupunkeihinkin, erityisesti New Yorkiin liitettyjä myyttejä. Myyteistä tärkeimpänä käsitellään Frederick Jackson Turnerin rajaseututeoriaa.

Regionalistinen ote on Hevoskuiskaajassa vahvasti läsnä. Montanan maaseutu piiryy tarkkana lukijan mieleen ja perinteisten maaseudun töiden kuvataan olevan tärkeässä asemassa paikallisten toimeentulossa. Evansin yksityiskohtainen kerronta ja maisemien sekä ihmisten arjen ja elämäntavan kuvaaminen täyttää suurelta osin perinteisen regionalismin tärkeimmät tunnusmerkit. Kosmopolitanismi ja regionalismin uudempi tyyli puolestaan tulevat esiin kirjan tavassa esittää maaseudun ja kaupungin elämäntyylit konfliktissa. Kahden erilaisen maailmankatsomuksen kohdatessa tarkoituksena ei ole ratkaista ongelmia vaan tuoda esille näiden kahden maailman erilaisuus ja toisaalta samanlaisuus. Myyteillä on tärkeä rooli sekä kaupungin että lännen kuvaamisessa.

Avainsanat: regionalismi, kosmopolitanismi, western, *The Horse Whisperer*, Nicholas Evans

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## 1. Introduction

The tension between countryside and city has probably fascinated people for centuries, already since the ideas of capitalism and rising industry gathered people to growing cities, creating a gulf between the rural and urban ways of life. When extreme examples of these two cultures clash, it can be hard for both parties to understand each other as various traditions, beliefs and values are contrasted. Nicholas Evans' novel *The Horse Whisperer* (HW) was a bestseller in 1995 and it handles the subject of rural and urban regions and their ways of life in a rather modern setting. In spite of the success, *The Horse Whisperer* has not been studied extensively and, therefore, this thesis means to broaden the academic discussion on the novel. Furthermore, by having regionalism as the viewpoint this thesis also brings forth an example of regionalist fiction in rather modern literature, strengthening the idea that regionalism is still relevant in modern literature and that regionalist texts such as *The Horse Whisperer* reflect the contemporary phenomena in an interesting manner.

*The Horse Whisperer* tells the story of a well-to-do family, the Macleans, from New York. The novel begins when the teenage daughter Grace, the only child and the apple of her parents' eye, ends up in a riding accident where she loses a part of her leg and her good friend dies. Grace's horse, Pilgrim, is severely injured as well and loses his trust in people. Consequently, the life of the family turns into a crisis as the traumatised daughter does not begin to show any signs of mental recovery after the accident. Grace's mother Annie realises that there is a connection between Grace and Pilgrim, and the only way Grace can be saved is to heal Pilgrim first. Frustrated with the situation and against everyone's advice, Annie decides to do the impossible and drive her daughter and the horse all the way to Montana where a skilled horse whisperer Tom Booker can help them. Finally, in the therapeutic atmosphere of the western countryside, Pilgrim and Grace both start to trust people again and heal. However, the

life of the family changes for good when Annie develops a relationship with Tom, and in the end she is not sure whether she wants to return to her old, stressful life in New York or stay in Montana with Tom.

Few studies have examined *The Horse Whisperer* to the extent that it deserves to be studied, regarding the novel's success as a bestseller. The film adaptation of *The Horse Whisperer* in 1998 has gained more academic attention than the novel. It is noteworthy that the film version deviates from the original story to some extent. Timothy J. Brown's (2004) article studies the impact of myths in the representation of competing cultural values in the film. He recognises two grand mythical narratives behind the story, the metropolitan and western myths, and concludes by saying that the tension created by the two competing myths results in an understanding of a more complex social reality than the fixed view the grand myths alone suggest. In addition, a recent study has been conducted partially simultaneously with this thesis; Nora Mattsson's master's thesis (2017) discusses the concepts of Western genre, wilderness and culture in Evans' novels *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Loop*. Her viewpoint is the Western genre and she examines the ideology behind the Western romance visible in the novels. As a conclusion Mattsson states that both stories, especially *The Horse Whisperer*, correspond to the typical Western genre with regard to character types, opposition of East and West, and human-animal relationships. Still, as can be observed, not much academic discussion has been focused solely on the novel version of *The Horse Whisperer*, which is one of the reasons motivating this study.

Regionalism is the central theme around which the research questions in this thesis revolve. Regionalism is a literary tradition first introduced in the nineteenth century that concentrates on describing the unique features of a geographical region. Other important concepts for this thesis involve cosmopolitanism, the Western genre, the West as a myth and New York in literature, which will be explained in detail later.

This thesis seeks to answer two central questions. First, how does *The Horse Whisperer* represent regionalism? The question will be addressed from a rather traditional point of view, focusing on the rural region of Montana and the West as a larger context, as well as from a more modern angle considering the urban New York and cosmopolitanism as representing regionalism. Second, how is the rural West, more precisely Montana, pictured as an ideal society, while the urban space is pictured as distant and alien? This contrast is evident particularly in the first half of the book. At the beginning of the novel, the feeling conveyed to the reader is that Montana is a peaceful, safe, and friendly environment and thus understandably a place where anyone would feel welcome, whereas New York is seen as an unstable, cold, and obscure place. However, as the story continues, this dichotomy between the two worlds is not as clear-cut as might seem. Towards the end the stereotypical views mix and blur as the main characters learn about each other's culture. It is also noteworthy that in literature and culture in general, both landscapes, the rural West and the modern city, are surrounded by strong myths affecting the readers' impression of them. It is thus necessary to discuss the mythical side of these concepts as well.

I argue that *The Horse Whisperer* is a good representative of regionalism because of the way in which it pictures rural Montana as an ideal society, with the help of myths. In addition, the constant comparison between the countryside and city life is a feature of regionalism. The landscapes and ideas that Evans introduces in his novel are largely typical of regionalist texts. What is more, Evans plays with the myths by strengthening them on one hand, while on the other hand the myths are also mixed and blurred, resulting in an open ending where neither landscape is proved to be better than the other. Cosmopolitanism and open ending bring a modern touch to the novel which, nevertheless, can still be read as an example of regionalist literature.

Structurally, the core of this thesis consists of three main chapters, Regionalism, The West, and New York, which discuss the important theoretical themes. The thesis can be thought of as a journey through time that starts with the regionalism and the local viewpoint of the nineteenth century, moves on to the nationalism of the Western world in the twentieth century and finally concludes with the twenty-first century global New York and cosmopolitanism. The analysis is woven into these theory chapters, thus producing an uninterrupted flow of conversation between the theory and analysis.

## 2. Regionalism – the local viewpoint

“...[R]egional fiction as a curio cabinet – a literary genre wherein endangered folks and folkways get stuffed and displayed.” (Arthur xii)

The quote from Arthur of regionalism as a “curio cabinet” is an exaggerated definition of regionalism, although it does have some truth to it. The quote represents the traditional sense of regionalism, the features of which will be explained in this section. In contrast, regionalism of the twentieth and twenty-first century is much more than simply portraying past traditions. In this thesis, this kind of classification is made between the traditional and modern regionalism. Traditional regionalism refers to the regionalist ideas and texts before the tradition was absorbed into other literary theories in the mid-twentieth century. New or modern regionalism, then, refers to regionalism that resurfaced towards the end of the twentieth century and has continued to develop since that.

This chapter of the thesis explains the origins of regionalism, the different readings of this literary tradition and how it has changed over the centuries. As a part of modern regionalism, cosmopolitanism is also introduced in section 2.2. The aim of the included analysis is to find answers particularly concerning the first research question of how *The Horse Whisperer* represents regionalism.

*The Horse Whisperer* can be read as a heavily regionalist text, in the traditional as well as more modern sense, since it promotes many of regionalism's core ideas. Harris offers three different readings of regionalism, traditional, feminist, and cultural (335), and while traits of all three can be found in *The Horse Whisperer*, certain readings are more prominent in the novel than others, as will become clear in the following.

## 2.1 Regionalism

Regionalism, also known as local color writing, is commonly understood as highlighting the local traditions and values. It aims at preserving the unique culture of a certain area that is constantly in danger of extinction in the globalising world (Hsu 37), thus producing a fundamental gap between the two entities, the local countryside and the global city. The core idea of regionalism is “the belief that each region creates a culture of its own; the working of its environment creates a state of mind – a regional consciousness – that distinguishes it from other regions” (Lehan 164). The working of the land according to traditions is a prominent feature of regionalism and, accordingly, the description of roaming cow herds and cowboys in vast valleys is also present in *The Horse Whisperer*.

Regionalism is considered to be a subcategory of realism, its common themes being everyday life, ordinariness, and smallness or plainness (Hsu 44). Regionalism depicts the stories of particular people, their lives and histories in a certain place, while problematising the relationship between the local and the national (Harris 328). Many of these elements are present in *The Horse Whisperer*, for example emphasis on the ordinary life and description of daily routines.

*The Horse Whisperer* is initially a story of two very different characters, Tom the horse whisperer from Montana and Annie the businesswoman from New York, whose life and surroundings Evans describes in a rather detailed manner. This touch of realism lingering on daily details of different characters' lives gives the reader a good idea of the routines and environment of their everyday life. For example, the morning routine of Grace has nothing special about it, but the portrayal of the house and surroundings are essential in creating the realism:

The light on the landing outside Grace's room was still on. She tiptoed in her socks past the half-open door of her parents' bedroom and paused. She could hear the ticking of the wall clock in the hall below and now the reassuring, soft snoring of her father. She came down the stairs into the hall, its azure walls and ceiling already aglow from the reflection of snow through undraped windows. In the kitchen, she drank a glass of milk in one long tilt and ate a chocolate-chip cookie as she scribbled a note for her father on the pad by the phone. (HW 5)

The reader can get a full understanding of Grace's morning sensations because of the depiction of different lights, sounds, and ways of doing things. There is light on the landing and on the azure walls, ticking of a certain kind of clock, soft snoring, tiptoeing, scribbling; all conveying the way a 13-year-old experiences a perfectly normal morning. Later in the novel, equally detailed is the passage regarding Tom's morning routine as he shaves his beard. The lighting in the bathroom changes the colors of his sunburnt face, Tom has to stoop because the bathroom is “dingy and cramped”, and he is listening to local news as he shaves (HW 102). These glimpses of the characters' ordinary lives are pertinent throughout the novel, giving special importance even to the smallest routines, thus highlighting the local, personal ways of living.

Harris writes that originally, regionalism was a counter-reaction to master narratives in the late nineteenth century (329). Instead of writing stories about the homogenous, national America, regionalists wanted to focus on smaller regions and their uniqueness (329). According to Hsu, the regionalists' thesis was that the United States is such a vast and complex entity that it is not possible to have only one ideal model representing it. Therefore, regionalism should foreground specific regions, cultures, landscapes, and their characters and portray them as parts that compose the greater unit (Hsu 45). This regional diversity becomes evident in *The Horse Whisperer*, where two geographically and culturally different groups are introduced: the busy

New Yorkers from the East and the rural cowboy ranchers from the West. Despite their differences, both groups have an important role in their cultural environments on opposite sides of the same country. In the city, the businessmen and -women constitute the work force of the East that pulls the strings of the economic capital and maintains the system there. In the West, and more specifically in Montana, ranchers are equally important to their environment by producing meat and other commodities and by maintaining the local traditions. Thus, in *The Horse Whisperer* America is seen as a country where at least two very different worlds live side by side, together comprising a heterogeneous whole.

The earliest regionalist fiction was published in New York -based periodicals in order to make the readers feel culturally superior to the “uncivilised” people portrayed in the regionalist stories (Arthur xiii). Indeed, one significant part of nineteenth-century regionalism was language and how different groups were represented by the means of various dialects. Brodhead argues that regionalism's goal was “to provide an urban consumer-reader with an imaginatively knowable rural “other” against which they could measure their own sophistication” (Storey 197). This rural other, the local color characters, had their own typical ways of speaking and different dialects alternated in dialogues (Harris 332). At first, the regionalist characters were portrayed as weird or even barbaric and clearly not on top of the linguistic hierarchy (332). However, after Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* even characters with a strong accent could have morally and emotionally more complex roles (333).

*The Horse Whisperer* does not overtly emphasise differences in dialects like the first regionalist texts do, but the contrast between the rural and urban characters is, to some extent, conveyed to the reader through language. The main characters mostly use rather standard language, but there is more variation with some of the minor characters. For example, a young man who helps Tom with his horse clinics in the West uses expressions such as “here y'all are”, “he sure must of”, and the double negative “ain't never seen” (HW 284). Tom's brother also

speaks informal language, as can be observed in the use of abbreviations in his comment: “This guy's one of 'em, Annie, I tell ya” (HW 264). Even Tom's replies do not always adhere to grammar rules, for example when he says that Annie “rides good” (HW 234), instead of saying that “she rides well”. This is an interesting opposition to another conversation that Annie has with her daughter, because she scolds Grace for saying that she does not sew “as good as Elsa” and corrects this by saying “Not as well as Elsa, you mean” (HW 59). This shows that Annie is more pedantic with grammar than Tom or Grace, perhaps to stress her role as a highly civilised adult and urban character or because she works as a magazine editor and has to be careful with language. Moreover, Annie's British accent or English expressions are remarked on a number of times. For example, her assistant asks her whether it is an English expression to say “I want to burn his wrinkled ass” (HW 30), and when Annie calls Tom for the first time he “could tell immediately who it must be” because of her accent (HW 126). However, this kind of remarks are quite rare and the characters' language is not the main technique for creating a feeling of different cultures in *The Horse Whisperer* because the vernacular expressions appear only occasionally. More importance is given to the long paragraphs narrating the story instead of lengthy dialogues between the characters where their speech styles would be prominent. Still, even the few details revealing something about the speakers' backgrounds is enough to enhance the regionalist impression in the novel.

*The Horse Whisperer* represents traditional regionalism also by portraying the landscapes of the countryside in detail and in a proud and admiring manner. The nature sceneries in general are appreciated in *The Horse Whisperer*, for instance the upstate New York countryside “looked like a Christmas card” (HW 14), but the longest paragraphs are dedicated to the Montana landscapes. The lands of the Booker ranch are portrayed in detail, picturing the meadows, valleys, and two creeks along with the herons, beavers, and trout inhabiting the wilderness (HW 169-170). Description of the surrounding view often initiates the reader into a

new chapter or section and functions as the frame for all events taking place in the region, therefore giving the landscapes as much importance as the actual events. This implies that it is not only the movement and action that counts, but also the stillness and peace of the nature have high value simply because they exist. For instance, when Annie is going to the ranch to collect Grace, the surrounding, peaceful mountains and endless roads serve as the setting for the action: “She turned west onto the unmarked gravel road that went in a straight line for another fifteen miles to the ranch and the mountain valley beyond. ... Curlews strutted on the road in front then glided away at the last moment into the pasture” (HW 187). The proximity of nature becomes evident as the birds capture her attention and flee to the pastures. What is more, past and present times are combined in the Montanan landscape: “She traveled north and looked out over the plains to her right where the black shapes of the cattle stood out against the pale grass like the ghosts of buffalo from another age” (HW 214). The reference to the vast plains and another age creates a feeling of continuity where history and past generations are attached to the present day. This feeling is something that the atmosphere of New York lacks. To the reader, the Montanan wilderness and the vast valleys appear as unique and as something worth preserving and protecting.

The traditional regionalism had seen its best days by the turn of the twentieth century. Still, Campbell claims that regionalism did not disappear in the early twentieth century even though its popularity decreased (47). Instead, she suggests that it became fragmented and regionalist ideas were incorporated into new literary trends such as naturalism, as a result of a “shift from realism to naturalism” (5). Woods (344) agrees by saying that regional literature became unpopular because it was seen as too sentimental, nostalgic, and not universal enough to discuss the early twentieth century themes, but the core ideas of regionalism such as favoring the unique regional traits survived in other literary traditions. Be that as it may, by the mid-twentieth century, regionalism had become a minor tradition that was associated with

femininity, domesticity, and other “lesser” labels because it was mostly written by women (Harris 333). Regional was the same as non-national, which in turn was almost a synonym for non-masculinity (333). For decades, regionalism was forgotten and embedded in other traditions, but only to be reborn and found again later.

Harris observes that regionalism resurfaced towards the late twentieth century, thanks to literary feminists (334). According to Harris, feminists saw regionalism as a movement that gives a voice to women, whose viewpoint is often neglected and silenced. Thus, the new main goal of regionalism was to change the reader's perspective and challenge the dominant, “male” attitudes (334). This kind of feminist reading of *The Horse Whisperer* is possible, since the main character Annie is a woman and the story is told mostly from her perspective. Throughout the book, Annie is the one who has to make important decisions one after another and her decisions always have a remarkable effect on other people's lives. For example, when everyone else is suggesting that Pilgrim should be put to sleep, Annie does not listen to them. Instead, she arranges the trip for Pilgrim, Grace, and her to Montana without asking anyone's opinion, relying on her own intuition and power over others: “She already knew what she was going to do. But she wasn't going to tell Robert, or Grace, until she had it all arranged” (HW 147). She even defies Tom's decision not to help Pilgrim, since Tom refuses to see the horse again after their first meeting, but, nonetheless, Annie decides to drive the animal all the way to Montana. This strengthens Annie's role as a feminist role model because Tom the cowboy can be seen as the male hero of the novel, and the fact that Annie neglects his advice and acts against his counsel can be read as a feminist statement on women's ability to make important decisions and act on their own.

The cultural reading sees regionalism as reflecting the events and issues of the bigger, national context on a regional level (Harris 334). In the case of *The Horse Whisperer*, this would mean that the focus on the rural community and its peaceful life is emphasised as a reaction to

the hectic atmosphere in cities which favour competition and being available round the clock. Moreover, the clash of the two cultures and the way Annie the cosmopolitan behaves can be read as a critique towards the urban lifestyle. For example, Annie is often working over the phone and her phone using results in many troublesome situations as she does not always take others into consideration. The urban and countryside attitudes are contrasted for example when Annie attempts to contact Tom Booker for the first time. She calls Tom's home number at the ranch while he is away and asks that Tom be given all her four phone numbers in order to contact her. When Tom hears about this, it is already late and he decides it would not be appropriate to call Annie at that hour: "He looked at his watch. It was ten-thirty, which made it one-thirty in New York. He put the pad back on the table and switched off the light. He would call in the morning" (HW 126). This implies the differences between the two locations, already on the practical level of different time zones, but also on the level of manners and what is considered as appropriate. In addition, Tom values sleep and relaxation over the requirement of being available twenty-four hours a day. The two lifestyles clash when, in the next paragraph, Tom wakes up to the sound of his phone ringing as Annie calls him at five in the morning. Although Annie does apologise for the early call and says that she thought Tom would already be awake (HW 127), she quickly moves on to explain her horse problem, thus giving little importance to the fact that she had just woken him up from his sleep. This indicates her hasty way of life in the city, whereas Tom did not hurry with the call. Sometimes Annie is also quite cold and unfriendly if her decisions or her pride are threatened. For instance, she refers to her colleague as "the rat" and "the little shit" when the colleague criticises Annie on a newspaper (HW 13-14). Thus, *The Horse Whisperer* suggests that the values of capitalism and globalism, a need to be always available despite one's location, flourish in cities and turn people into impulsive, impertinent creatures, which is in sharp contrast with the Montanans' warm and moderate manners.

Furthermore, the cultural approach of regionalism is interested in the presence or absence of ethnic minority groups in regionalist texts (Harris 335). According to Harris, sometimes regionalism has been deemed exclusionist or even racist since most regionalist texts do not include many ethnic groups. *The Horse Whisperer* mostly adheres to this tradition since it does not highlight racial issues. There are a few occasions where a Jamaican nanny (HW 36) or a Chinese manager (HW 103) appear, but these characters are mentioned only once or twice and do not have a major role in the story.

Harris reminds that, regardless of the reading, the core concepts of regionalism remain the same: interest in people and culture of a certain region, question of land and its uses, and competition over how land should be used (335). She notes that the new, twentieth-century regionalism differs from the older regionalism in that it has a stronger emphasis on the changing demographics and time; it describes the chain of generations and families or the changing life of different groups such as immigrants over a long time period in relation to the environment (337).

A good example of this is how profoundly Tom and his Booker family's history is narrated. Several pages are dedicated to the story of how Tom's great-grandparents settled in Montana more than a hundred years ago and started a ranch (HW 110). The family's history concentrates on demographics and how the generations follow each other, who inherited the ranch, and how many children each couple had. Important information is, for example, that Tom's great-grandparents lost two children on their journey westward, Tom's grandfather had two sons, and Tom's father married a girl from a nearby town and they had three children (HW 110-111).

Equally high value is given to the description of the environment and its impacts on the family's life. The ranches' size and the quality of the land are always mentioned. For example, their first ranch was “a hundred and sixty fertile acres” by a river, which later grew to twenty

thousand acres of “poorer pasture, rough sage-strewn hills of red gumbo gashed with black volcanic rock” (HW 110-111). When the family is forced to move, their next ranch is pictured as seven thousand acres “where the high plains ran smack into a hundred-million-year-old wall of limestone, a place of harsh, towering beauty” (HW 113). The detailed information on the environment implies that the surroundings have been studied closely and that the environment is highly appreciated and an inseparable part of the family's life. Specifying the quality of the land indicates the dependence of the family's wellbeing or livelihood on the circumstances that the environment provides. In addition, the note that the limestone on their ranch is a hundred-million-years old links the whole family to the circle of life, as the old stone belongs inextricably to the landscape where they live their daily lives.

Yet another regionalist feature in *The Horse Whisperer* is the question of land use, which has a significant role in the history of the Booker generations. The family has always made their living by running a ranch and working cattle on horseback and they have thus been dependent on the environment and at the mercy of its powers such as drought or floods (HW 110). The cattle herding is pictured as an ideal life that most of the Booker family wants to lead. The time spent on horseback on the meadows, driving cattle for days and sleeping under the open sky, seems to be the preferred way of life, a means for the Bookers to experience the greatest happiness. When the family had problems and there was a danger that the ranch would be taken from them, the only escape was in the nature, on the meadows, doing what was their calling: “The only time he remembered his father happy during this time was in the spring when for three days they drove the cattle up to the summer pastures. His mother, Frank and Rosie came too and the five of them would ride all day and sleep out under the stars” (HW 113). The gathering of the whole family is emphasised in order to show that the cattle business brought the family together. Everyone was needed, not only as workforce but also as a part of the happy group.

The regionalist focus on a family's history does not only apply to Tom's character. Annie, as a counterpart, reflects the changing world from the global point of view. Her family story is also narrated rather thoroughly. She is the daughter of a diplomat, was born in Egypt, has lived in Malaya and Jamaica and traveled all her childhood around the globe with her family until her father died when she was ten (HW 32), which makes her the icon of global interaction and multiculturalism in *The Horse Whisperer*. The chain of generations comes evident as Annie's teenage years and life with her grandparents in England are recounted, revealing much less fortunate relations with her childhood family than in Tom's case (HW 240-241). A feeling of rootlessness haunts Annie because she has never stayed for long in one place: "All her life she had lived where she didn't belong. America wasn't her home. And nor, when she went there now, was England. In each country they treated her as if she came from the other. The truth was, she came from nowhere. She had no home. Not since her father died. She was rootless, tribeless, adrift" (HW 165). Annie does not represent a culture of a certain region because she does not clearly belong anywhere, for which the word rootless, and has a broken family, to which tribeless points, which seems to cause problems. Therefore, globalism and cosmopolitanism are connected to negative outcomes in *The Horse Whisperer*, whereas having roots tightly in one region, like Tom does, results in much more stable and stronger people in spite of possible problems.

New regionalism tackles questions that have to do with the modern trends. Kowalewski notes that the absence of invigorating and specific cultural features in the life of an average American is a problem that new regionalism tries to solve (12-13). Nowadays, America has become a vast cultural desert filled with identical towns and cities, where people are surrounded by "landscape of sprawling, look-alike suburbs, traffic-choked expressways full of drivers on cellphones, and huge, corporate superstores with acres of parking lots" (Kowalewski 12). The increasingly global world gives an impression that all places are uniform, with the same hotel

chains and same television channels everywhere (Augé 173). In a way, new regionalism comes back to regionalism's original ideas by promoting unique, regional features over global phenomena.

Indeed, in 1996, almost the same year as *The Horse Whisperer* was published, noted historians argued that regionalism was becoming increasingly important in the more and more global and nationalist world (Hausladen, "Introduction" 2). In 2003, Kowalewski proves their point by listing a number of venues, such as regional museums and cultural pride festivities, where "[t]he signs of a strong, expansive interest in and support for regional identity are effervescing" (8). *The Horse Whisperer* is without a question a part of this movement, since it presents the readers a view of the ordinary life of a specific region and does that with admiration towards the rural lifestyle. There are barn dances, church going, late dinners with the whole family, and cattle driving, all featuring the uniqueness and warmth of the regional culture in Montana as people gather together to perform the habitual customs. Particularly branding the calves appears to the reader as an important tradition where everyone belonging to the community has their own important role, especially at the Booker ranch:

On a lot of ranches they left it until later, but Frank branded in April because the boys liked to help and the calves were still small enough for them to handle. They always made an event of it. Friends came over to help and Diane laid on a spread for everyone afterward. It was a tradition Tom's father had begun and one of many Frank kept going. Another was how they still used horses for much of the work other ranchers now used vehicles for. Rounding up cattle on motorcycles wasn't the same somehow. (HW 184)

The branding is undeniably a tradition that has evolved around the yearly need to mark the new calves. Instead of simply performing the task and going home, the family has turned it into a social event that involves meeting friends, spending time together and eating well. Everyone has their traditional role; it is mainly men and boys who handle the calves, while women, notably the rancher's wife, prepare and serve the food. This maintains the customary division of work on the ranch. Modern vehicles are not accepted as part of the Booker family's branding event, since they represent something unfamiliar and would disturb the innermost feeling or the regional consciousness, as Lehan calls it (164), that the traditional work on horseback symbolises. All this reinforces the value of traditional, regional ways of living in contrast to the global and nationalist trend preferred elsewhere. Furthermore, Tom's comment to Annie on the risk of a possible branding iron mark on her shows admiration and pride towards the traditional culture as he says that "Back in the city you might be proud of it" (HW 190).

Thus, specific regions and their traditions are interesting again, but the scope does not have to be limited to rural areas only. Although regionalism is often thought of as covering only rural themes, Kowalewski points out an interesting feature of new regionalism by saying that the urban areas do not have to be excluded. Instead, Kowalewski insists that "given the nation's expanding population, a regional writer interested in capturing the texture of contemporary existence would be hard put *not* to address some aspect of urban life" (13, original emphasis). He adds that often the stories alternate between the rural and urban settings. However, the urban is mostly seen as replete with negative sides of life and thus depicted as "bland, intolerant, unhealthy, and consumer-oriented" (14). This is the fundamental attitude in *The Horse Whisperer*, which pictures New York as full of angry, busy people with big problems in life, whereas the Montanan countryside is a peaceful society where friendly people live in harmony with nature.

Yet another feature of regionalist texts that applies to *The Horse Whisperer* as well is a certain mode of narration. Zagarell recognises “two standard regionalist formulas” present in most regionalist texts (642). In one formula the narrative is constructed around the experiences of an urban character in a rural environment, and in the other formula the city dweller himself narrates the tale, acting as the observer or possibly as a participant in the rural life, always foregrounding contradictions between the two cultures (642).

*The Horse Whisperer* is an example of the first kind of narration, where a third-person narrator tells the story of two urban characters and their sojourn in the countryside. Annie and Grace travel from New York to Montana, a region that is totally new and foreign to them. There they encounter a culture that is very different from what they are used to. The novel is about their experiences in the western region and how they, little by little, get accustomed to their new environment. A third-person narrator illustrates their adventures and verbalises their sensations along the way. For example, when Annie and Grace arrive at Choteau, a town near the Booker ranch, the town is pictured from Grace's point of view as she tours the streets for the first time:

After Annie left, she went out exploring. There wasn't much to explore. Choteau was basically one long main street with a railroad on one side and a grid of residential streets on the other. There was a dog parlor, a video store, a steak house and a cinema showing a movie Grace had seen over a year ago. The town's only claim to fame was a museum where you could see dinosaur eggs. She went into a couple of stores and the people were friendly but reserved. She was aware of others watching as she walked slowly back down the street with her cane. (HW 174-175)

Grace has always lived in New York and thus, as an urban citizen who is used to city life, the few streets of Choteau seem weird and abandoned to her. She feels herself a stranger as the local residents are reserved and watch her as she goes. The movie from last year at the cinema serves as evidence for the timelessness enveloping Choteau and the whole region, in contrast to the modern and vivid rhythm of New York. All these remarks show how Grace studies the streets as an observer of the rural life in Montana.

The weather and scenery are another notable element depicted through the New Yorkers' eyes: "For five days the skies had been clear and they were bigger and bluer than she'd 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" (HW 187). This quote clearly shows how Annie, as a foreigner, is amazed by the nature of the unfamiliar region and reveals Annie's incipient affection towards the new scenery. Words such as "frenzy of phone calls" and then a "calming pool" contradict New York and Montana, distinguishing the two worlds from each other: one is stressful and busy, the other calm and harmonious.

## **2.2 Cosmopolitanism**

In a similar way as Kowalewski above, Arthur states that modern regionalism also has a cosmopolitan side to it, and not everything is nostalgic description of disappearing customs of the rural regions. He writes that regional literature is "alive and vital", and, furthermore, "it is more invested in articulating commonalities across cultures than it is in articulating differences", trying to resist binary oppositions such as blue state versus red state -thinking (xii). Regionalism does not only discuss the relationship and differences between the local, the national, and the global; equally important are similarities between these three (xii). This interest in similarities is the cosmopolitan flavour that new regionalism has. In other words, Arthur says that the

connection between periphery and center, between part and whole, is the crucial question that cosmopolitanism seeks to answer (xxi).

According to Arthur, cosmopolitanism values differences because they create an intimacy that can only be accessed by exploring something totally different from one's own culture. Still, beneath the surface, this intimacy allows for consideration of the similarities between seemingly different cultures (xv). Arthur's reasoning seems somewhat complicated, but he suggests that this core of cosmopolitanism even applies to fiction in general:

[...] why we read and write fiction in the first place: not to find ourselves but to find someone very different from us, someone whose very difference from us produces an otherwise unavailable intimacy. This understanding of difference as an occasion for intimacy is ordinarily defined as “cosmopolitanism,” a sensibility that promotes thoughtful consideration of the commonalities among dissimilar cultures. This consideration, for the cosmopolitan, is mediated by shared human qualities not shared local knowledge. (xv)

This kind of attraction created by difference realises in *The Horse Whisperer* as Annie and Tom's relationship deepens. At first, they seem considerably different and even annoying to each other. For instance, Annie's numerous phone calls and attempts to force Tom to help them and Tom's recurring refusals do not appear as a good start. Still, as the story develops further, they begin to understand each other despite all the opposite features they have on the surface. For example, when Annie and Grace move to the creek house on the ranch, Tom thinks it is strange that Annie prioritises work over other matters when settling in to a new place: “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” (HW

200-201). Even details concerning basic needs such as sleep are neglected, which is not reasonable from Tom's point of view. Similarly, Annie is amazed by Tom's horse handling skills and how he defies death (187) and horrified by the harsh manner in which the calves are branded by the cowboys (193). This implies how different their lifestyles and cultures are on the surface, Annie valuing her job above all and Tom living the traditional cowboy life with all its tough and sometimes dangerous ways. However, feelings beyond the surface remain the same even if people are used to different customs. After Annie and Grace have settled in the creek house, Tom thinks of the pain the two are experiencing because of the accident and recognises the same feeling in his own past when he lived in the same house with his troubled wife (HW 201). In addition, in the same passage other sensations such as guilt and love are connected to all of their lives, proving that feelings and unhappy occurrences are part of everyone's life in spite one's culture or differences on the surface. Thus, while contrasting differences between the two cultures, the underlying, more profound message *The Horse Whisperer* has to say is that all human beings are, in the end, the same. This can be understood only through the intimacy created by difference, as cosmopolitanism suggests.

What is more, the same idea of similarities existing beyond differences applies to different regions in general. Arthur writes that there is no need to define which city or region is the most "American"; all regions are different, yet, on a deeper level, there are many similarities between them such as many global issues, which makes the regions equally American (xviii). In *The Horse Whisperer*, New York and Montana are mostly depicted as fundamentally different, but there are some elements that apply to both. Residents in both regions need to make their living in some way and, therefore, capitalism and profit are present in both locations. In New York, capitalism is the motivation for most action, of which Annie the workaholic is an example and which will be discussed in the later chapters, but the idea of profit is not unheard-of in Montana either. Tom's brother Frank is often described as having "a keen commercial

nose” (HW 115) and as “the better businessman” (184), who encouraged Tom to charge his customers for fixing their horses and start his horse clinics in order to make money. In other words, at least a need to earn a living and matters of economy are essential parts of both environments and elements that connect the rural and urban regions on a deeper level despite the seemingly different cultures on surface.

Features of the cosmopolitanist theory have also been found in postbellum regionalist texts written by Sarah Orne Jewett, the foremost regionalist of her time. Already in the 1870s, when Jewett's novel *Deephaven* was published, the rural and cosmopolitan dimensions were present and the relationship between the two unclear as the capitalist, cosmopolitan influence was growing in the United States (Zagarell 639). According to Zagarell, regionalism combined rural and cosmopolitan elements in various ways and expressed concerns over topics such as gender constructions, class-related issues, the nature of community, and environmentalism (641). These are themes that are still important to some extent in the world of *The Horse Whisperer*, even over a hundred years after *Deephaven* was published. For example, gender constructions are visible in the countryside because there are distinct male and female roles which include different tasks on the ranch. Women take care of the house and children while men perform the ranch duties. These traditional roles are less clear in New York as can be seen in the Maclean family, where both parents are equally important breadwinners and the division of housework is more even. Another important element from Zagarell's list that can be observed in *The Horse Whisperer* is the nature of community. In the countryside, grand feasts and traditional events such as barn dances or cattle driving (HW 280, 301) gather together the whole family and friends, allowing people to socialise and maintain relationships with each other. The community seems close and warm and supports its members in everything, protecting them from the negative occurrences in life as best as possible. An example of this is when Tom helped his father at the ranch when they had difficulties in life (HW 114). In contrast, the communities

in the city appear smaller or less benevolent. Maclean family only has three members and their relatives live far away, leaving the three on their own. Annie's work team can also be counted as a community, but the constant competition (HW 296-297) labels the team as having a totally different, negative nature than the countryside community. In short, these two examples of gender constructions and communities show that *The Horse Whisperer* handles the same questions that cosmopolitanism and regionalism discussed in their early days.

Finally, regarding cosmopolitanism, a certain tension is typical in cosmopolitanist texts. Zagarell senses in *Deephaven* a tension between the cosmopolitan or urban and the native that springs from Jewett's background: "In what may be a reflection of Jewett's dual loyalties in the 1870s to the rural life she had known since childhood and the cosmopolitan circles to which she and her family also always belonged, *Deephaven* places the cosmopolitan and the native in conspicuous tension" (641). Indeed, *tension* is the right word to describe the feeling in *The Horse Whisperer* on many different levels, because it can point to a tension between the different customs, between different cultures, or even to the romantic or erotic tension between Annie and Tom, who represent the different perspectives of cosmopolitan and rural. In the heart of this tension are questions concerning the compatibility of the rural and the urban. Can they exist together? Can they be combined? Is a conflict inevitable, or can it be evaded? In this sense, Arthur's thoughts on cosmopolitanism above are very pertinent; differences attract each other and create an intimacy that permits similarities, such as an individual's need for love, to surface. These similarities that exist everywhere are, in the end, the basic needs of a human being: love, a need to belong to a group, a need to be close to other people and to be understood.

### **3. The West – the national ideal**

The mythical American West, and the impressive Montana more precisely, provides the setting for most of *The Horse Whisperer's* events and serves as the peaceful milieu where Annie, Grace and Pilgrim begin to heal and understand the important things in life. On this life-changing journey, the unique regional characteristics that regionalism is bringing out in the novel are essentially traits connected to the West. The concept of the West is interesting in the modern setting *The Horse Whisperer* offers, since the idea of the West is not a new concept but, nevertheless, its influence in *The Horse Whisperer* is remarkable even though the story takes place in the modern times. This chapter includes a definition of the West as a concept and answers particularly the second research question of how the rural West is pictured as an ideal society in *The Horse Whisperer*. Important themes are the idea of the West and the West as a myth, Turner's frontier thesis, and Montana in literature as a part of the Western regionalism. First, section 3.1 provides a definition of the concept of the West and how it connects with regionalism. Second, section 3.2 concentrates on the mythical side of the West and the region's reputation as a land of heroes and hope. Lastly, section 3.3 briefly discusses the Montana region and its role in the Western world and in *The Horse Whisperer*.

#### **3.1 The West as a concept**

The West being an ambiguous and complex concept, it is best to begin by defining its physical borders. Geographically, a simple definition is to say that the West begins around the 98th or 100th meridian where the climate changes towards drier conditions (Witschi 4). However, Witschi notes that the eastern borders of the West have always been unclear and there are probably as many ways to define the region as there are scholars. In terms of states, the most

common definition of the core area, the unambiguous West, includes at least the western parts of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and sometimes Texas, and all of Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, as well as the eastern parts of Washington, Oregon, and California (see figure 1; Hausladen, “Introduction” 8-9). Hausladen also notes that, in the late twentieth century, the idea of the West expanded towards the east, thus including the whole of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. This was due to the depopulation of the western Plains which no longer supported agriculture. In *The Horse Whisperer*, Tom and his family's ranch is situated in Montana, which is clearly part of the West. Therefore, the family and its customs can unquestionably be counted as Western, at least on the basis of their location.

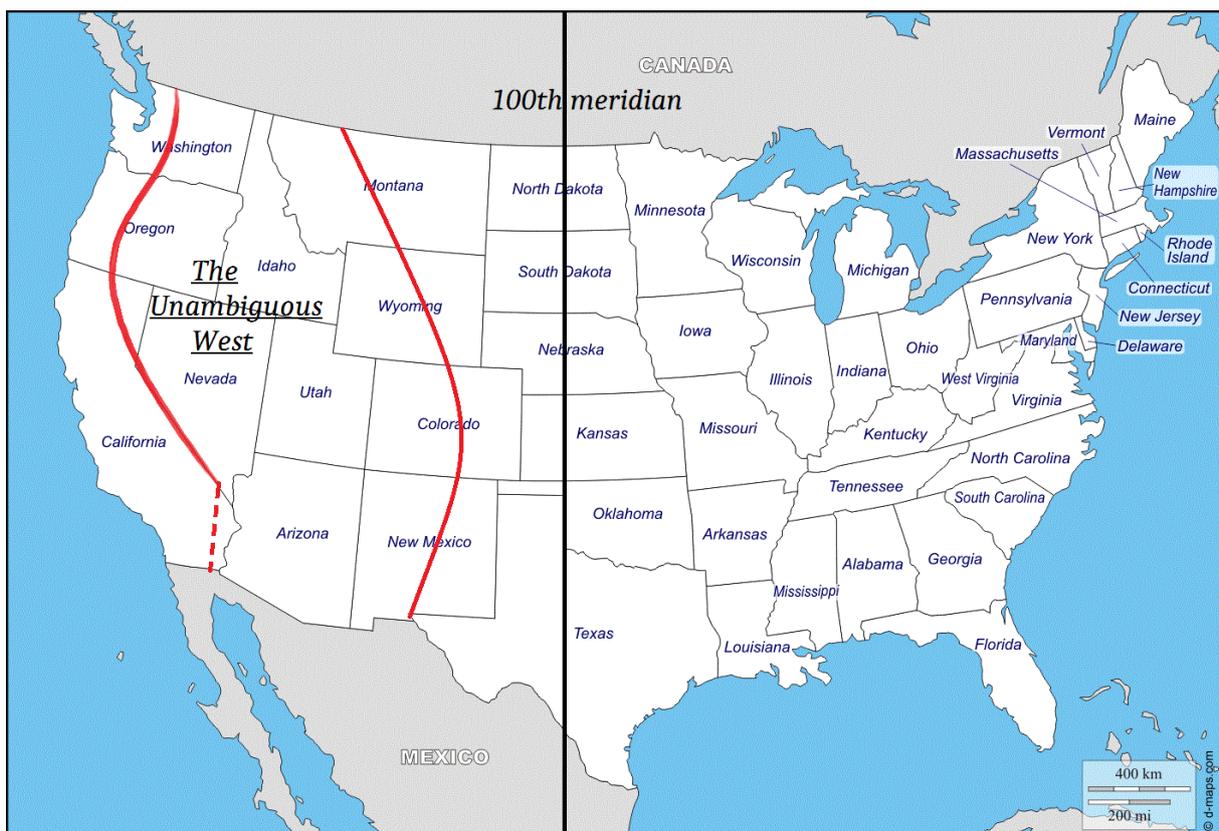


Figure 1. The unambiguous West and the 100th meridian (Map edited from D-maps.com, data from Hausladen, “Introduction” 9).

However, the American West is also, as Witschi calls it, “an extremely powerful idea” that has been defined and redefined in numerous books, movies, paintings, and in the minds of people over centuries (4). The idea of the West is about a certain attitude, about praising traditional American values and way of life. Witschi notes that recurrent themes are frontier, opportunity, honor, individualism, and justice and heroism, for instance. These are relevant themes in *The Horse Whisperer*. The idea of the frontier surfaces from time to time, especially when nature and wildlife are portrayed or otherwise discussed, and the region where the Bookers live is sometimes explicitly referred to as “the Front” (HW 118). Opportunity in the West and individualism become apparent as Annie independently decides to arrange the trip to Montana and the journey to the West proves to be the only possible solution to the Maclean family's problems. Honor, justice and heroism are labels that especially Tom's character, together with many other (male) figures, represent in *The Horse Whisperer*. All these examples show that *The Horse Whisperer* is strongly centred on the crucial themes connected to the West. In effect, the Western culture and environment is pictured in the novel as ideal, as a wondrous place where the national American values have become part of the daily life and where the same values still exist today.

A deeper inspection of Tom's character as a truly Western figure is crucial regarding the question of how the rural West is pictured as an ideal society. Tom is an inseparable part of that society, an incarnation of all the fine qualities attached to the Western idea. Lehan refers to this as a state of mind and agrees with Witschi by stating that the West is such an immense region that it is easier to understand it as an idea, as a state of mind, than as a physical place (147). In Lehan's words, this “state of mind usually includes the reality of a beneficent nature worked by a rugged individualist who lives intuitively by a code of justice and a belief in the priority of democracy”. Tom is definitely an individualist, an independent and self-reliant man who does not and will not depend on others. This becomes evident when his problematic relationship with

his wife and the reason for their divorce is discussed: “Until at last he realized that what she had needed from him was need itself. That he should need her as she needed him. And Tom knew that this was impossible. He could never feel such a need, for Rachel or anyone else” (HW 124). In other words, he is a strong-minded person who prefers to be single rather than part of an unhappy relationship where the two sides are dependent on each other. The paragraph continues with the observation that Tom has always had an “innate balance” in his life because he lives in cohesion with the other parts that constitute his environment. This balance points to his individual, inner peace and high self-esteem as well as his connectedness to nature around him. Furthermore, it is mentioned that Tom felt guilty for the divorce, which reflects his sense of justice, moral and benevolence. He did not want to hurt his wife but felt that divorce was the right thing to do in the end. Since Tom is one of the protagonists in *The Horse Whisperer*, his characteristics and behaviour form the prototype of a Western cowboy character for the reader. The fact that Tom corresponds almost perfectly to the admired, national cowboy figure proves that *The Horse Whisperer* means to promote these features as part of the Western world.

Other, especially male characters in *The Horse Whisperer* behave in a similar way as Tom and thus highlight the same values in life. For example, Tom's nephew Joe shows benevolence as he offers Grace a chance to ride his horse and helps her to get on the saddle (HW 258-259), and democratic values are apparent as the local men decide to organise a party for Annie and Grace before they leave (HW 388). Together these characters comprise a notable part of the local, ideal community, thus turning the whole society into an example of American values. The importance of male characters as role models reflects the masculinity generally associated with the West, which Henry Nash Smith discusses as he examines male heroes in western novels and notes that women were usually pictured as passive and genteel (112).

The western state of mind, or “distinctive regional identity”, as Hausladen calls it, was produced by Western regionalism (Hausladen, “Introduction” 5). The West is seen as a unique

place and, therefore, texts highlighting features typical for the West can be considered to be regionalist at the same time. This explains why it is important to discuss the concept of the West in this thesis. The central western characteristics are to a great extent the same traits that regionalism emphasises in *The Horse Whisperer*.

The whole concept of the West can be seen not only as a region but as a process, as an idea connected to myths and frontier experience. Hausladen explains that the term *region* simply means the geographical area and its formation during the frontier experience, while *process* refers to more abstract themes, namely the changes in the social interactions and cultural environment within the Western region (“Introduction” 6). He remarks that nineteenth-century Western literature usually discusses frontier history, the region, whereas twentieth-century Westerns concentrate on the regional history, the process, after the frontier was gone and had developed into tales about the mythical region (6,4). In a similar way, Lehan highlights the importance of the distinction between the two terms by saying that the frontier is understood as “the spearhead” of the westward movement, the geographical area beyond the borders of the occupied area, and region is the conquered side of the border, behind the frontier, with already existing economic and political customs and cultural traits (164).

The story of the Booker family in Montana that *The Horse Whisperer* portrays is mostly connected to the idea of process. The frontier has been tamed, for the most part, since the events are set in the late twentieth century and the novel concentrates on more abstract things than the geographical frontier such as culture, family relations and fixed, yearly routines. However, occasionally there are references to the wilderness that still exists beyond the safe borders of the ranch, a wilderness where only law of nature is valid. This can be understood as remains of the frontier, where humans are still at the mercy of nature. For example, there is a passage where memories of a harsh winter are retold in order to provide the reader with a sense of fierce and unforgiving climate: “Winter came and it was the coldest anyone on the Front could remember.

The snow drove down the valleys and made pygmies of the giant cottonwoods along the creek. In a blitz of polar air one night they lost thirty head of cattle and chipped them from the ice a week later ... ” (HW 118). History and past generations are closely linked to the West as part of the process or social interactions and the fact that there was no one who would remember a similar winter highlights the hard conditions. A sudden blitz was enough to cause great losses to their cattle farming business which shows how easily their hard work could be destroyed by nature. Still, the family members appear hard-working and resolute as they take action with the dead cattle, reflecting the admired personality traits in the West. In addition to the harsh winters, the occasional remarks about a grizzly bear (HW 202) or a mountain lion (102) attacking or killing people serve as a proof of the remaining frontier.

Although the cruel nature seems to be a dangerous and solely negative factor at first, the frontier has a significant effect on the process of generating a certain picture of the western people. The survival in hard conditions links them to the equally persistent and resolute generations before them, generating a feeling of a region where the ideal characteristics persist and are inherited from father to son.

The most significant frontier thesis, on which the above theoretical thoughts are based, was introduced by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. He indeed suggests that the national American spirit was formulated thanks to the challenging conditions during the frontier period, when the task on the western borders was to “win the wilderness” and turn it into a civilisation (2-3). Turner goes on by describing the movement as “expansion westward with its new opportunities”, creating an admiring attitude towards the heroic people and the possibilities of the “Great West”. This idea of the West as a land of opportunity serves as a basis for many Western novels and its influence can be seen in *The Horse Whisperer* as Annie and Grace travel west in order to heal and start anew. When they have stayed with the Bookers for a while and learned the customs of the countryside, progress in Grace's mental health can be observed when

she experiences a comical moment with others of the community: “And together they laughed loud and long and Grace felt part of them and that life perhaps might yet be good” (HW 250). In other words, with the help of the community and atmosphere of the West, Grace senses a possibility that the future can be better. This new opportunity emerges thanks to the “Great West”, as Turner says. After Turner first introduced his ideas, the frontier thesis and the idea of the West have seen various interpretations, some in favor of and some against Turner's thoughts, but for the purpose of this thesis the idea of the West as somewhat wild and full of hope is a valid one.

The Western genre's message has changed over the years. According to Hausladen, at first the goal was to tell stories about the ideal Americans as part of the process of nationalisation. Nowadays, the objective is quite opposite and closer to regionalist ideas; to provide a counter-reaction to the “homogenizing forces of nationalisation and globalization” (“Introduction” 11). However, in *The Horse Whisperer* both viewpoints can be seen. Tom the horse whisperer represents an ideal American of the Western world, corresponding to the model of the old West: honest, hardworking, strong, and independent individual who helps his fellow Americans with their problems. At the same time, Tom's character can be understood as a counterreaction, as a regional and rural counterpart to Annie's character who is an equally strong but more urban and global type. The manner in which the West and its characters are pictured in *The Horse Whisperer* creates a tension between the two environments, as the modern city is contrasted with the traditional, national, mythical West.

Kollin writes that the West is typically seen as

a land outside time, a terrain that somehow escapes historical changes. Within this logic, the region came to hold significance as anti-modern space, a prelapsarian

landscape that offers a refuge from the turmoil and conflict located in the hyperdeveloped centers of the nation and the rest of the world. (515)

This quote describes the fundamental attitudes in *The Horse Whisperer* towards the West and the relationship between the West and the eastern urban regions. The urban and the rural spaces are even referred to as totally different worlds (HW 118). When Annie and Grace are on their way to Montana, the landscape of Iowa prairie is where a feeling of “dislocation both of time and space” occurs (HW 151). Even though Iowa is not part of the unambiguous West according to Hausladen above, the Midwestern Iowa with its rather western scenery is still fundamentally different than New York and closer to the Western countryside than city. Therefore, the quote from *The Horse Whisperer* explicitly articulates the feeling of timelessness on the countryside from Annie's point of view. In contrast, Tom is impressed by the energy of New York City when he visits his son there, but at the same time he is “glad that he didn't have to live here” (HW 131). To Tom, New York represents constant movement and restlessness, which is in opposition to the culture in Montana. The rural community in Montana is pictured as a traditional, peaceful milieu where cowboys run the errands of the farm while women take care of the children and the kitchen. All this feels like going back in time as the landscape changes from the turmoil and haste of New York into the spacious scenery of Montana that indeed provides Annie and Grace a refuge from stress, pain, and other urban conflicts, a possibility to leave behind the quarrels with husband and the bullies at school.

The quote from Kollin about the timelessness of the West also goes well with the ideas of regionalism according to Campbell: “In celebrating not disruption but continuity, not timely events but timelessness, local color seeks to affirm what is usable about the past and ordinary” (7). The “past and ordinary” of the peaceful West appears to be the remedy for Annie and her daughter's troubles, thus proving the way of living in the West to be usable and valuable.

Regionalism values the same details in the Western culture which constitute the core idea of the West, such as the landscape with its pastures and cattle herded by cowboys, and portrays them in a practical manner by concentrating on the everyday life.

### **3.2 The mythical West**

Hausladen announces that “No region is more associated with the concept of myth than is the American West“ (“Introduction” 5). The thought of the West as a mythical concept springs from history and from the time when Americans first settled on the continent and more profoundly when they started to move westward around the 1840s, supplanting the native peoples and acting as a superior race. The West was fitting for their purposes and the settlers saw the region as “the nation’s last chance to create a white racial utopia” (Pierce xii). Later, respected individuals such as Theodore Roosevelt expressed their admiration towards the white frontiersmen and helped to create an idea of the western white people as tough, brave, hard-working, freedom-loving heroes (x). Henry Nash Smith wrote about the West as a symbol and a myth in 1950. Pierce observes the subject from a racial point of view, bringing forward important criticism against the frontier thesis and the idea of the West because of their neglect of other than white people, but more generally Pierce's writings explain well how the West became a myth. After all, the region as myth is mainly a part of white man's history and a white man's dream. As mentioned above, *The Horse Whisperer* does not discuss racial matters to a great extent and all the characters in the novel are white, which in turn follows the idea of West as a concept belonging to white people.

A brief discussion of myths in general is needed in order to better attach the notion of myth to the thesis. Generally, the concept of myth is a vague one and hard to define. Burnett even suggests that an exhaustive definition is close to impossible; opinions and perspectives

vary and cause debates because myth can be as obscure a concept as time or consciousness (xii). Undoubtedly, Burnett's statement can be connected to nearly any concept if examined vaguely enough, but in the case of myths there seems to be a connection with the most inner feelings of human mind that concerns all myths. According to Vickery, the creation of myths satisfies a basic human need (ix) which Barnett probably points to by stating that myth “answers to an inner imperative to adapt to change and circumstance” (xii). Since myths include an “emotional patterning”, they have the ability to move the reader, to evoke feelings such as great delight or terror (Vickery ix-x).

In other words, myths appeal to feelings and basic human needs, which explains why they appear fascinating and, as Paul writes, in American literature are often interrelated with the idea of American exceptionalism (16). Paul goes on by noting that “[h]istorically, myths have often been considered to be pre-modern constructions and interpretations of the world whose powers have been waning since the onset of the Age of Enlightenment” (26). Myths are a way of constructing worlds and realities for a certain culture or society and, therefore, they have a social function as belief systems through which they bring together all members of the society (Paul 27). However, in modern times myths are sometimes connected with wishful thinking, fiction, and even propaganda (Paul 26). In *The Horse Whisperer* the connection of the mythical West with supposedly better past times does indeed suggest that what remains of the good old times is situated in Montana countryside. In short, myths are to be understood as constructions of reality, past and present, which have an important function as part of the society and its members' identity.

Indeed, Paul announces that together with other significant myths such as the myth of the Founding Fathers or the myth of the self-made man, the myth of the American West comprises the basis for the national American identity (11). She continues by saying that each of the “foundational myths” provides a different view to the American culture (11). Vickery

writes that recognising a certain myth in a text allows for a further analysis on its meaning for the whole story (ix). Myth and archetype can be used as a literary method for comparison and differentiation (x). Therefore, the myths present in *The Horse Whisperer* need a closer examination of their purpose in the novel and are an essential part of the story thanks to the emotions they evoke in the reader. According to Paul, the reason why the important American myths still attract the readers even today is their adaptability and their ability to provide the background for various different stories over time (11). In *The Horse Whisperer*, some of the greatest American myths play a role in a modern setting, linking the old patterns or cowboy heroes and ideal communities to the contemporary world.

In *The Horse Whisperer*, several of the foundational myths of America can be detected. Depending on the viewpoint, traces of myths such as the myth of the Pilgrims, Puritans and Promised Land or the myth of the self-made man can be noticed, but the strongest one and the one relevant to this thesis is the myth of the West. Admiring the rural ideal and positioning the West against the East, or the country against the city, are traditional and important themes in the myth of the West which suggests that America has rural roots that should not be forgotten (Paul 312). The West is not pictured as a geographical area, but rather as a particular way of life in a certain society that is associated with themes such as “pre- or anti-modern, traditionalism, folk culture, and specific cultural codes and idioms” (312), many of which are important topics in *The Horse Whisperer* as well.

Hausladen explains what made westerns popular and the West mythical in the first place. Most importantly, the Western genre emerged to save the endangered masculine spirit of the country and to strengthen true American values (“Cowboy Rides Away” 297). The threat to American culture in the late nineteenth century was due to restlessness in the United States caused by the past Civil War, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, economic depression, and the various non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants settling in (297). Hausladen adds that the ongoing

urbanization introduced more feminine attitudes which were in contrast to the rural, national, male values and seen as bad influence. Therefore, westerns were composed of elements that would nourish the forgotten original values.

To describe the change from a wilderness into a mythical land, Pierce explains how the perception of the West transformed during the nineteenth century:

From the acquisition of Louisiana in 1803 to the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century, visitors, boosters, and intellectuals had successfully reinvented the West, transforming it from an alien and dangerous world of possible racial degeneration into a homeland for powerful but increasingly alarmed Anglo-Americans. The land itself did not change markedly, its mountains, plains, and deserts still remained, but it underwent an intellectual reinvention that remade inhospitable into idyllic. (7)

In other words, the thought of a mythical land was an illusion created by people who had dreamt of a fresh start, of a land where the basic American principles such as freedom could prosper. The ones telling the tales represented all kinds of (white) people, as Pierce writes, and they all had the same message that the West was something unique. Geographically, the region was always the same, but the stories told of the West had the power to change “inhospitable into idyllic”, and reality into a myth. *The Horse Whisperer* continues this tradition by showing the West as a region where old customs still exist and where people from the East can travel to recover.

What is more, Turner has had a great impact on turning the idea of the West into a mythical land of hope and opportunities and into a model of American ideals. About the frontier movement he writes: “And to study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, ... is to study the really American part of our history” (4). With this kind of writings,

Turner and his followers mythologised the West by praising the exceptional character of the frontiersmen and by leaving out marginal groups such as Native Americans and blacks (Hausladen, "Introduction" 5). The American exceptionalism was thus born in the western landscape, maintaining the thought of the West as a place full of hope even after the frontier was gone (Pierce 10).

Hausladen lists three basic components of the mythical Western formula: the cowboy figure as a hero, the frontier experience as an essential part of the story, and the West as landscape ("Cowboy Rides Away" 297). All these three actualise in *The Horse Whisperer* and some of them have already been discussed to some extent. The Western landscape of Montana provides the setting for most events in the book and is admired on several occasions and the presence of the frontier is a frequent topic in the novel. Tom Booker is an archetype of a cowboy whose heroic actions save people from all kinds of trouble throughout the book. The mythical viewpoint is notably centred on Tom's character, but together the landscape coloured with meadows and cattle and the frontier behind it create a mythical feeling that connects the story to the mental image of the West where cowboys and cattle roam free.

In mythical Westerns, the picturesque American West provides the setting where all the action takes place (Hausladen, "Cowboy Rides Away" 298). The nature scenery, largely untouched by man, obtains mythical features in western literature. According to Henry Nash Smith, "the untouched nature is a source of strength, truth, and virtue" (71). In *The Horse Whisperer* the vast meadows and endless roads framed with mythical clouds of dust and sunshine are an inseparable part of the narration and often highly admired especially by the New Yorkers. For example, when Annie's husband Robert first arrives on the ranch, the dust-cloud forms an illusion of a curtain that opens and reveals the wonderful sight: "The dust-cloud they had stirred from the road overtook them and drifted slowly ahead, dispersing gold on a stark burst of the sun. [...] 'Wow,' Robert said. 'Now I know why you guys don't want to come

home” (HW 329). Robert's comment contrasts the rural and urban environments and implies that the view and the West are somehow better than New York because Annie and Grace do not want to return home. Hausladen explains that recurring wide open spaces and mountains represent something anti-urban, anti-Eastern and male and serve as the setting in most westerns despite the actual geographical diversity the region has. The same pattern of rugged landscapes framing the events occurs repeatedly throughout the novel. For instance, when Tom drives across the Montana region in heartache, “[o]nly the mountains seemed to offer some slim hope of comfort” (354). The scenery is mentioned frequently, especially whenever someone travels on horseback or by car, for example as Tom and Annie go riding: “They rode up along the creek and crossed at the ford ... As they moved up into the lower meadow the cattle stepped lazily aside to let them pass. The cloud had broken away and scattered from the snow-covered tops of the mountains ...” (221). This proves that *The Horse Whisperer* reclaims the old methods of the West in creating a sense of a mythical setting. Westerns' rather simplified version of the western landscape attempts to maintain the myth and formulate a national identity in repeated locations where transformation, regeneration, and resurrection happen (Hausladen, “Cowboy Rides Away” 301-302).

According to Hausladen, the cowboy would be a heroic, sometimes solitary frontiersman who fights against any other group disturbing the peace on the frontier and performing “transgressions against society” (“Cowboy Rides Away” 298). Hausladen notes that the disturbances are often somehow connected to the urban East. In *The Horse Whisperer*, the disturbance obviously comes in the form of the New Yorkers, Annie and Grace, who arrive on the ranch without giving notice. More profoundly, their presence alone does not create the transgressions, but rather the problems that they bring with them from the urban East, such as desperation and depression. The values that the New Yorkers symbolise, notably capitalism and globalism, threaten the Western values because they represent the modern, changing world

which is in opposition to the stable, respected traditions of the West. Although Tom does not exactly fight against the cosmopolitans, he acts as the adapter between the two worlds, helping the Montanans and New Yorkers understand each other. For example, when Diane, the wife of Tom's brother, expresses disapproval of Tom's decision to help Annie, Tom calmly explains that the guests will cause no harm to them (HW 183).

Crimmel agrees with Hausladen's basic definition of a mythical Western by stating that, in the standard definition of western American literature, the western landscape is largely dedicated to the heterosexual, white, Old West -influenced male characters (367-368) such as Tom Booker. Crimmel estimates that this kind of stereotypical, familiar figures are still common in the western literature in the twenty-first century, although the range of topics connected to westerns is nowadays more colourful than some decades ago (368). *The Horse Whisperer* combines new, cosmopolitan ideas with the old themes and in this mixture Tom corresponds perfectly to the old role model of a cowboy.

Tom's heroic actions reach mythical, almost supernatural dimensions when he saves Grace from the attack of wild horses and dies as he confronts a fighting stallion. It is stated several times that Tom could have saved himself and walked away from the danger, but instead he continues to approach the bolting horse (HW 408-409). This raises questions that give a mysterious feeling to Tom's final moments; what was he thinking when he, an otherwise rational man or even a role model, did not retreat even though he had the chance? Grace's reasoning further increases the mythical side of the story:

The settling dust was still too thick for Grace to be sure, but she thought she now saw Tom open his arms a little and, in a gesture so minimal that she may have imagined it, show the horse the palms of his hands. It was as though he were offering something and perhaps it was only what he'd always offered, the gift of kinship and peace. But

although she would never from this day forth utter the thought to anyone, Grace had a sudden, vivid impression that it was otherwise and that Tom, quite without fear or despair, was somehow this time offering himself. (HW 409)

The settling dust and small gestures possibly created by Grace's own imagination produce an impression of mysterious circumstances, where the factors which resulted in Tom's death remain unclear, thus leaving space for imagination and myth. Showing the palms of his hands to the horse can be seen as a sign of submission, honesty, and friendship towards nature. That is to say, with this gesture Tom expressed nonverbally all the qualities that he represents as a cowboy in his final moments. Furthermore, the possibility that Tom actually deliberately offered himself to the stallion in order to save Grace attests his role as the heroic figure. Essential characteristics of the West and of a heroic cowboy crystallise in this tragic event that takes place in the wilderness: the frontier and its dangers, nature, and a solitary, fearless cowboy showing his benevolence and bravely offering his life in exchange for another.

Obviously, the greatest hero in *The Horse Whisperer* is undeniably male. When it comes to female characters in westerns, Hausladen explains that less prominent roles are reserved for them. In mythical westerns, women were often included not in the glorious company of heroes but in the marginal groups, representing civilisation and the advancement of society (Hausladen, "Cowboy Rides Away" 300). On the countryside pictured in *The Horse Whisperer*, there are few female characters and most of them are mentioned only once or twice. They are wives of the Bookers' male friends, or customer servants in the town. Diane, the wife of Tom's brother, is the only woman who is a relatively important rural figure. She has some influence on the family's affairs because she is in charge of the household affairs, and she criticises Annie and Tom's relationship on several occasions. However, her comments seldom have any notable effects on anything having to do with the ranch affairs, apart from children- and kitchen-related

matters. Consequently, she can be counted as a minor character in the fashion of the traditional West.

In contrast, Annie as an urban character symbolises modern, urban civilisation and the city where the advancement of the society towards new is rapid and obvious. Annie has great influence over other characters and she always has the final word in her family's decisions, even concerning minor things such as the horse's name: "She [Grace] had wanted to change his name to something prouder, like Cochise or Khan, but her mother, ever the tyrant liberal, said it was up to Grace of course, but in her opinion it was bad luck to change a horse's name. So Pilgrim he remained" (HW 10). As a strong businesswoman who has been given the label "tyrant", Annie is in contrast with Diane, who has the traditional role as a housewife. Thus, Annie does not quite fit the traditional Western scenery. She does correspond to the idea of a female figure as a representative of civilisation, but otherwise her role as an authoritative female protagonist cannot be counted as a traditional western figure belonging to the rural society. This highlights her backgrounds as a cosmopolitan, as a stranger who joins the rural community from outside the region.

The distinction between cosmopolitans and rural people began already at the end of the nineteenth century. With industrialisation came the divide between urban and rural identities. Lehan explains that after the frontier was gone and there was a rise of urbanism around 1890, some people "feared the city and took solace in the wilderness" (67). The urban people were separated from nature, whereas the rural people wished to remain as part of the surrounding nature. Thus, the "city brought the wilderness into being, creating separate identities for life on the land versus life in the city, identities that then became the basis for an idea of self" (67). These separate environments then created mythical ideals; on the one hand there is the primitive, nature-oriented wilderness, or frontier, and its independent individuals, and on the other hand the civilised urban realm with industry and progress-oriented, wealthy townsmen (68). *The*

*Horse Whisperer's* story is based on this division as the protagonists, Annie and Tom, attempt to understand each other even though they belong to fundamentally different worlds. Both correspond to the mythical ideals presented above, which shows how carefully *The Horse Whisperer* follows the typical images of urban and rural characters in the West.

However, in the stories about West, the real and the mythical dimensions are intertwined and cannot be fully separated (Hausladen, "Introduction" 5), as is the case with *The Horse Whisperer*. Mythical features are used in the novel to strengthen the exceptionality of the region and its people, thus presenting it as an ideal society, but as regionalism is a subcategory of realism, there are also realist elements present. In *The Horse Whisperer*, the mythical can be seen in the heroic characters and in the remedial atmosphere, whereas realism is clear when the landscape and geography or ways of living are described.

### **3.3 Montana**

As explained above, Montana has always been part of the unambiguous West, one of the states that belong inextricably to the idea of the West. According to Wright, *The Horse Whisperer* and similar works have painted such a lovely, even mythical picture of Montana that amenity migrants have set the region as their destination (96). Therefore, in his attempt to contrast the urban and rural environments, Evans has carefully chosen an excellent location to represent the ideal countryside and successfully used the Montanan imagery to create a picture of a mythical, desirable society.

The myth of the West is strongly present in the traditional Montana literature where rancher heroes and romance are common themes (Cook 58) along with the iconic western scenery discussed above. In *The Horse Whisperer*, the Booker ranch is situated in the deep periphery of Montana countryside. A feeling of isolation in the wilderness arises as the journey

from the nearest town of Choteau to the ranch is described as a forty-minute drive by car where “for the first twenty miles ... Annie's was often the only car” (HW 187) and where the Rocky Mountain Front is “looming” in the distance (214). The ambiguous whereabouts and a sense of wide, empty space everywhere enhance the mythical character of the ranch that is located somewhere in the distant Montana countryside. When examined from the perspective of the myth of the West where the frontier and wilderness exist side by side with the simple society, *The Horse Whisperer* pictures Montana as a perfect place for this myth to become alive. Cook refers to Montana as a “fantasy space” that is, geographically and figuratively, far from the metropolitan cities, industry and all possible negative associations (57). Instead, Montana has “powerful mythic associations” relating to the proximity of nature and romance (57). The vicinity of nature that is peculiar to Montana literature realises in *The Horse Whisperer* not only in the isolated location in the wilderness but also in the way the characters such as Tom connect with the animals and nature throughout the story.

According to Harrison (x), Montana literature represents a vast array of different stories and genres. Similarly, Weltzien reports that Montana literature, especially after the 1970s, comprehends many new topics that attempt to shift away from the traditional, sometimes even criticised role of Montana literature as solely Western literature (127). Still, the idea of the West is a considerable part of Montana literature, and the region has been referred to as a metonym for the literary West (Weltzien 127). Harrison notes that some of the most significant works of the American West are situated in Montana and written by the local authors (x). The Montanan landscape is perfect for novels about the West and its plains and meadows provide a suitable base on which to construct the ideal society in *The Horse Whisperer*.

What is typical for Montana literature is the realist and naturalist tradition (Harrison x), which can be observed in *The Horse Whisperer* as well. Landscapes, the individual's relationship with nature, the vastness of the West, cultural history, family, property, and

sometimes bleak daily lives of the middle- and working-class are recurrent themes (Harrison xi). For example, a completely ordinary phenomenon such as weather is pictured as especially Montanan when Annie complains about the cold spring. Tom replies that there is a Montanan expression concerning the weather: "... if you don't like the weather in Montana, wait five minutes" (HW 203). Montana is pictured not only from the local residents' viewpoint, but also from the strangers' aspect. For instance, when Robert visits his wife and daughter in Montana he buys a travel guide to Montana and learns basic facts about the region, such as the population and history of Butte (HW 324). The occasional remarks about Montana locate the Booker ranch and their close community more explicitly to Montana, which gives the reader a concrete idea of the place where the events take place, instead of picturing only a vast and vague notion of the West. As was discussed earlier, the West is rather an obscure idea, whereas Montana is a real place and a suitable location for a Western story. In other words, Montana provides the reader with an actual image of an ideal society, which together with the realist and regionalist style assures the reader that the ideal society pictured in the novel might actually exist.

One might ask whether the fact that Evans is not a Montanan affects the reading of *The Horse Whisperer* as an example of Montanan literature. Evans was born in Worcestershire, England, and has lived most of his life in England (Evans 2017). However, Harrison (xii) mentions a number of authors who were not born in Montana but are nevertheless considered to be important Montana writers. Harrison's answer to the question is that it is possible to count someone as a Montanan writer if he has the spirit of a Montanan and he discusses at least some of the "hallmark Montana themes". Thus, the ability to grasp the true Montanan values, thoughts, and atmosphere is more crucial than the question of whether the author has spent most of his lifetime in Montana or not.

Harris (337) mentions the same problem of author's roots in her essay from a regionalist point of view and she notes that, originally, regionalist texts were seen as nostalgic, reminiscing

about the past times in the writer's home region. Harris states that nowadays, however, this need not be the case and the author can also have other kinds of bonds to the region he is writing about. In *The Horse Whisperer's* case, the strong influence of regionalism and Western literature on the book definitely justifies its place among Montanan literature.

#### **4. New York - America's global center**

The aim of this chapter is to examine how regionalism is present in *The Horse Whisperer's* conception of the urban New York. This will provide more answers to the first research question by emphasizing the traits of both traditional regionalism and modern regionalism in *The Horse Whisperer*. As will become clear, at first New York in the novel seems to be the nest for various negative sides of life, but this attitude changes towards the end as the rural and the urban intertwine. Even though New York in real world consists of many different parts, *The Horse Whisperer's* version of the city largely concentrates on the areas central to the protagonists' lives, the upstate New York and Manhattan.

Like the West, New York in *The Horse Whisperer* is portrayed mostly from mythical perspective and often the negative sides of the city are highlighted. Chapter 4.1 examines especially the portrayal of New York City in *The Horse Whisperer* and how it corresponds to the picture that the city has in literature in general. This outline of the city is then analysed from the regionalist viewpoint. The urban space in *The Horse Whisperer* is pictured as distant and alien in order to create contrast between the city and the country. However, a return to the frontier myth and cosmopolitanism in chapter 4.2 shows that there are similarities between the two worlds, especially in terms of mythical approach, which shows that *The Horse Whisperer* adheres to many of the ideas of both old and new regionalism.

##### **4.1 New York in *The Horse Whisperer***

Reichardt labels New York as the “capital of the second half of the twentieth century” and the “prototypical modern city” (191, 194). New York City is generally connected with globalism and capitalism. Reichardt states that the city is not only the center of global trade and finances,

it is also multicultural and thus global in that sense, thanks to immigration. Literature, art, languages, music, traditions and many other culture-related concepts mix and flourish in New York. As a prototypical modern city, New York functions perfectly as the counterforce of Montana in *The Horse Whisperer*, generating friction between the local or national ideals and the modern, global world.

According to Sauter, narratives about New York often provide the reader with only a narrow view of the city, through the protagonist's eyes, which results in a personal, fragmented impression (20). Sauter remarks that this impression can be negative, expressing helplessness and impotency before the vast urbanity, or positive, as the urban environment gives strength and power to the individual. *The Horse Whisperer* produces a rather negative picture of New York that is constructed largely from the perspective of different characters, notably Annie and Tom, following Sauter's ideas. The city may appear in a positive or negative light depending on the person through which it is depicted in *The Horse Whisperer*, but majority of the glimpses outlining the city's ordinary life are rather pessimistic. From the Maclean family's perspective, most things in the city only remind them of their problems, especially after Grace's accident that envelops the whole family in a gloomy, depressed state of mind through which they depict the world. For example, Grace compares her school day to the ones she had before the accident. She used to "race up the stairs to the classroom", laughing with her friends, but now she is alone and has to take the elevator that was "a slow and ancient thing" (HW 142). Another example is when the overall view of the East Side of New York is briefly described as Annie ponders the solution to the family's problems. She sees the lit windows on the other side of the park and thinks how each window has "a different life with its own special pain and destiny" behind it (HW 147). The focus is on the dark side of life, on the slow elevators and the pain that everyone supposedly encounters in life, which then connects with their life in New York and with the fact that the city does not offer any solutions to their situation.

Globalisation is a concept closely connected to New York and Annie's character. Reichardt defines the term globalisation as the interconnectedness of all places around the world concerning various fields such as economics, information technology, culture, and politics (191). The result of globalisation is “that the influence of nation states and the importance of national boundaries are decreasing ... and that the dominance of the economy over other systems such as culture ... is increasing” (Reichardt 195). Thus, in global cities such as New York, the borders of nations and nationalities are becoming blurred, space and location are becoming less meaningful, and economy is taking over culture. Annie is an example of the blurring nationalities. Having lived in many countries before settling in New York and with a career that involves traveling even to the most exotic places, such as Senegal or an undefined Pacific island (HW 31, 150), Annie describes herself as rootless and thinks that this fact had been her greatest strength in many ways, especially at work as a journalist (HW 165). Annie's background and success in the business world of the modern city proves that her kind of international, adaptable person fits the New York setting remarkably well, thus emphasizing the global side of New York City.

In addition, as population concentrates in metropolitan areas, the global cities then communicate more easily with each other than with the periphery, which creates a gulf between these two worlds (Reichardt 198). The communication between global cities is made possible with the help of various machines that the rural environment lacks. For example, Annie has all the important equipment with her when she moves to Montana, all of which Tom does not recognise: “... he helped her bring in all her computers and fax machines and some other electronic gadgetry whose purpose he couldn't begin to guess” (HW 200). The machines belong to the urban world and appear as redundant to the rural people, thus forming a gulf between the two worlds and in the way they communicate. Reichardt remarks that global cities are closer to each other than other less global locations despite the geographical distance between the cities

(198). In other words, New York is, in a sense, closer to Tokyo than to Montana, which distances the two regions in *The Horse Whisperer* from each other on the level of communication. This division touches upon fundamental basics of human life since communicating is, inevitably, one of the most important basic skills in order to connect with other people. The fact that Tom and Annie cannot fully understand each other's ways of communicating and do not use the same means to do that further stresses the differences of the rural and urban worlds.

What is more, in the late twentieth century, the city has been seen as part of a worldwide network of people and technology that does not have a clear center and where personal identity is not tied to spatial matters (Reichardt 194). Everything is in constant movement and space or location has become irrelevant. For instance, thanks to all kinds of technical machinery, Annie is able to work anywhere and anytime: on the train, at home, even in Montana. In addition, all the various countries where Annie has lived before settling in New York have modified her and become part of her personality, for which reason she represents the global viewpoint as well. The global atmosphere of New York and the unimportance of space is in sharp contrast with the ambiance of the countryside, where everything is rooted in local traditions and stability and where the concrete location and geography have a great role not only in the aesthetic sense but also as the source of income through land use.

In *The Horse Whisperer*, there are some general observations of the ordinary life in the city which mostly support the individual characters' view of the city as an inhumane and dark place. The New York taxi drivers, for instance, seem to think that “blaring their horns and yelling at each other” is the best way to survive in the traffic congestion on a snowy morning (HW 28). The streets and people alike are pictured as “grey and dreary” in the city that seems to be hopelessly unhappy throughout the year: “It was the season of gloom, when the new year had been in long enough for all to see it was just as bad as the old one” (HW 90). All this is

framed by the unnatural “sodium glow of the streetlamps” which makes the apartment building appear as colourless (101). The description of the city is replete with negative words such as grey, gloom, or colourless. There are a few occasions where the city is connected with positive thoughts, for example, in Robert's opinion, the “icy, clear blue New York days” are perfect for a refreshing walk (HW 141), but their influence in promoting the city's good sides is weak.

In literature, New York has marked the place for capitalist and social ambitions (Sauter 19). Everything seems to be connected with profit and economy. According to Salmela and Ameal, the city can be pictured as a renewing force that shapes the people as part of an economic process, especially if they arrive from outside the city (319-320). In a capitalist system, the constant competition results in “creative destruction”, where everything from individuals to environment, buildings, even the cities themselves, are made to create profit and can be destroyed and forgotten as better, newer innovations take their place (320). This constant regeneration shaping the city becomes evident in *The Horse Whisperer* when Annie is arranging the trip to Montana and is asking for a month's leave from work over a lunch with her boss: “The old bastard would probably be lunching at this same table tomorrow with her successor. She'd been half hoping he would just come right out with it and fire her” (HW 150). As can be observed, the idea of profit is central. If one cannot work effectively, there is a great risk that she will be fired and quickly replaced with someone more profitable. As an experienced businesswoman, Annie is aware of this as she hopes that her boss would simply fire her instantly, instead of protracting the inevitable.

There are numerous passages in *The Horse Whisperer* which draw a close connection between city life and economy. The feeling conveyed to the reader is that in the urban environment everything revolves around money and the city people constantly raise the question of financial issues. For example, when Annie is desperately trying to persuade Tom to travel to New York and see Pilgrim for a second time, she mentions that money is not a problem:

“‘Couldn't you spare just a day or two? I don't care what it would cost.’ She heard him give a little laugh and she regretted saying it” (HW 146). The discussion gives an impression that one can get anything in New York if she has the right amount of money. However, this rule is not valid in Montana because money is not equally appreciated on the countryside. Tom's reaction of amusement comes as a surprise to Annie and she has to regret using this kind of approach with Tom. Thus, New York is pictured as the global, money-centered zone, in opposition to the more humane Montanan countryside.

Tom's experience of New York follows the formula that Sauter suggests, presenting a narrow view of the city through the individual character's eyes. During his stay in the city, Tom frequently notices things that are typical for cities and often related to economy. There is a short section that reveals how Tom's son Hal lives in the city, funding his studies and paying the rent by working at a fast food restaurant. The explanation of how Hal funds his way of living in the city fits well the New York scene, since financial issues are important in that environment. There is also a paragraph where Tom encounters a beggar on the street and gives him five dollars: “There was a young guy, standing on a corner, begging. His hair was a matted tangle of rat's tails and his skin the color of bruised parchment. His fingers spilled through frayed woolen mitts and with no coat he was hopping from one foot to the other to keep warm” (HW 132). The beggar personifies inequalities and class struggle, phenomena that are present in everyday life in the city and which result from the prevailing capitalism. The fact that one paragraph is dedicated to an unknown beggar shows that, from Tom's point of view, the beggar was something unusual that he does not see in the countryside. Beggars in rags are part of the city setting, highlighting the negative sides of urban life.

In a wider respect, Annie's character is the incarnation of the hectic and profit-oriented atmosphere of the city. She is described as dominant, stubborn and strong-minded person who is always at work, leading a busy career. She is easily irritated and does not always bother to

be friendly. For example, on the phone, there is “[n]o goodbye, but then there rarely was with Annie” (HW 74). Particularly in the first half of the story, Annie's lifestyle becomes evident on many occasions. She prefers the train over the family's car because she can work there and the “Friday-night crawl of traffic invariably made her crabby and impatient” (HW 4). What she “hated most about weekends” is all the newspaper she has to read through because of her job as an editor (HW 11). The examples feature her quick temper and the amount of work she has to do even on weekends, coloured with negative feelings such as impatience or hate. Annie appears to be the end product of the constant pressure that is immanent in the city and, therefore, she is a good example of an urban person who travels West and changes there.

From the regionalist point of view, the reader can sense the cruelty of the city through Annie's character. This is because of the constant fear of losing her job, which eventually does happen, and because of the way she behaves as a result of the stressful life. According to Storey, the regionalist texts of the late nineteenth century can be read as stories of characters who are victims to the capitalist and modern values, or “insidious inequalities”, prevailing in cities (199). Storey suggests that the early regionalist writings criticised the urban-defined norms, showing that modernisation has negative effects on people's wellbeing. *The Horse Whisperer* follows this idea by dedicating numerous chapters to the detailed description of life in New York and how it affects the characters, notably concentrating on Annie and her family's troubles. What is more, the stay on the countryside changes her personality towards better. After she has lost her job and the newspapers in New York publish ironic, mocking headlines of her situation, she is explicitly referred to as a victim (HW 325). However, her reaction to the provocative headlines is surprisingly calm, “nonchalant” even, and Robert is amazed by this as Annie tells him that she is glad to start something new and that she is “tired of all the power games and the politics” (HW 325). With this comment she emphasises the competitive, stressful life she has lead in the city and admits that the urban life values power over other, more humane goals. The healthy

countryside appears as the initiative force for the positive progress in Annie. This becomes evident especially when her tranquillity is expressed together with the fact that she had returned from the cattle drive a moment ago which seems to have initiated the process towards serenity, thus proving the rural, even peripheric environment to be better than the city. For the most part, urban environment appears as vicious and merciless, causing misery to its residents.

#### **4.2 The new frontier or a place for happiness?**

Despite all the negative attributes given to New York City in *The Horse Whisperer*, the city also has another, more positive side observable through some urban characters. It is not explicitly stated what exactly converts the urban environment into a place that provides its residents with happiness and energy. Still, some characters in *The Horse Whisperer* imply that the positive energy does exist in cities as well. The uncertainty concerning its source generates a feeling of mystery and myth.

The mythical background and the happiness created by the environment are mutual features to both regions, the rural and the urban, despite the great differences on the surface. Cosmopolitanism observes especially the similarities between two seemingly different environments or persons, as was discussed earlier, and examining these cosmopolitan features together with the city's positive aspects in *The Horse Whisperer* is the aim of this last chapter.

As can be seen, New York is no less mythical than the West. Sauter suggests that American cities adopted the frontier idea from the West at the end of the nineteenth century (19). With the frontier gone, new experiences and ambitions were suddenly found in cities:

In fact, one could argue that the American city had become the new frontier where modern experiences like urbanization, industrialization, immigration as well as

women's emancipation and suffrage caused all kinds of sensations on the human scale from smoothly lived assimilation and acculturation to deeply felt alienation because of shifting living situations. (19)

In a way, cities now provided adventurers with excitement and spontaneity, a possibility to challenge oneself for better or for worse. Neil Smith describes this new urban frontier as a space where workers and the unemployed live side by side with the wealthy businessmen, which results in unrest and even riots and class war. The "urban wilderness" can be seen as "the habitat of disease and disorder, crime and corruption, drugs and danger", a common thought especially in the 1950s and 1960s (N. Smith xiii). This "savagery", performed by the lower classes, was then replaced by "urban pioneers" and civilisation that came with the urban frontier movement and gentrification (xiv). This is a rather harsh understanding of the urban landscape, but in *The Horse Whisperer* New York does seem more unstable and dangerous than the countryside and some references to the class struggle are visible in the novel, for example when Tom encounters the beggar on the street in New York City.

However, Salmela points out a naturalistic view that the slums and presumably perilous streets actually represent the wilderness and correspond to the nature in the countryside (285). Sometimes referred to as "the urban jungle", among other nature-oriented metaphors, American cities have always had a connection with the wilderness (285). The frontier mythology can be applied to cities when the "bad" neighbourhoods are seen as the unpredictable frontier whereas the better neighbourhoods represent development (286). In *The Horse Whisperer* the picture of the city is constructed from the characters' perspective, introducing only some, quite reputable neighbourhoods in central New York City. The Maclean family have an apartment on the Upper West Side and Tom's son Hal lives and works in Greenwich Village. If these neighbourhoods are thought of as representing development, in *The Horse Whisperer* these parts of the city

strengthen the idea of the urban environment as modern civilisation connected to technology, wealth and quick changes. From the regionalist viewpoint, cities are, consequently, presented as rather different from the tradition-oriented countryside. Nevertheless, in the city setting there are some details that point to the urban environment's wilderness. For example, when Tom visits his son in a diner, there are “four men in suits and a lot of wrist jewelry” sitting near them, discussing “a deal they'd done” (HW 131). These men remain mysterious to the reader, especially when Hal explains to Tom that the men are “not the normal kind of clientele”. This comment together with the outfit of the four men and the topic of their conversation suggests that they are gangsters or other men with connections to the criminal underworld, which corresponds to the wilderness of the countryside.

Augé claims that globalisation tends to weaken the frontier idea (173). He writes that a global city provides a connection to all other cities and places in the world, thus creating one large world-city where the frontier idea does not apply since the notion of space becomes obsolete. The world-city, or a global village, refers to Marshall McLuhan's idea of a future where electronic media results in a simplified world where people are connected with the help of technology. Still, Augé remarks that each city itself is a separate world, where people are not simply a mass of global, urban people because various groups, for example ethnic, religious, social, or economic groups, actually create many frontiers inside the city. Annie is simultaneously a global person and a New Yorker belonging to the upper class. She is global because of her backgrounds explained earlier, but also clearly a cosmopolitan citizen who is wealthy and has great influence on the local magazine industry in New York City. To her, the beggars on the street or mob bosses represent totally different worlds even though they exist in the same city. From Annie's point of view, the distant social groups are only unfamiliar characters she passes by on the street and not something she interacts with in the novel. Between each of these groups there is a frontier Augé describes, creating separate worlds inside the same

environment. Even though the lower-class groups do not have a significant role in *The Horse Whisperer*, the occasional references to them imply that the class differences do exist in New York City and that they can be understood as creating frontiers inside the city.

*The Horse Whisperer* also discusses and attempts to understand those who enjoy urban life. The story is not only promoting the rural environment as an ideal, but an equally important theme is pondering the question of whether it is possible to unite the two worlds of city and countryside or not. For example, Tom's ex-wife Rachel is described as a lovely and sympathetic character who eventually chooses city life instead of Montanan countryside. The reason for her unhappiness in Montana is not explicitly explained and there seems to be no clear reason why Rachel prospers in the urban environment but not in the countryside. The rural setting affects her mental health and she is described as depressed and lonely in Montana (HW 117). The fact that she perceives rural life as lonely is interestingly contradictory to the way how Annie and Grace experience Montana. To them, the rural community offers refuge and support, thus increasing their feeling of communality and social cohesion. Instead, Rachel becomes alive in the city, where she enjoys all the "concerts and movies and fancy restaurants" available (HW 118). The attractions alone do not explain her change of mood in the city, but since her deeper sensations are not revealed and Rachel remains a minor character in the novel, the actual reason for happiness in the city remains obscure. All in all, there must be something good and worthwhile in city life after all, but which, from the rural point of view, is impossible to understand. The benefits of urban lifestyle remain hazy, which gives New York and cities in general a somewhat mythical appearance; despite the competitive atmosphere and other harmful aspects, some people can live happily in a city, but the reason for that is not explained. This increases the mystique of the urban environment and evokes similar mythical sensations as the West and the countryside.

In essence, by narrating the tale of two different worlds with their different residents and lifestyles, *The Horse Whisperer* implements the exact function of regionalist literary texts. Lutz writes that regionalist texts aim at presenting the diversity of regions and cultural voices to the reader by dramatizing the tensions relating to regions, classes, sexes, or communities (28). However, Lutz goes on by arguing that the goal is not to find a solution or conciliation between the two sides but simply to portray the diversity of cultures and the interaction between them. *The Horse Whisperer* is essentially a novel about two cultures clashing and how both sides learn new aspects from each other as the story develops, revealing many differences on the surface, but also similarities beyond it. At the end, Annie and Grace return to their home in New York, perhaps as changed persons, but still as New Yorkers and urban characters, while the Montanans stay on their ranch and continue their traditions as they did before. Therefore, in accordance with Lutz's theory, there is no actual attempt to combine the rural and the urban for good and solve the possible problems. Instead, *The Horse Whisperer* narrates the relatively brief encounter of the two worlds and brings forth the differences between them, and both environments are surrounded by equally mythical backgrounds.

With regard to the role that cities originally had in regionalist texts, *The Horse Whisperer's* view of New York adheres to the old style. Zagarell focuses her analysis on older regionalist novels than *The Horse Whisperer*, but she brings forward an essential function of regionalist texts that still applies today. She states that regionalist writings portray rural regions as a refuge from the national and global concerns, as separate, authentic worlds that are free from issues that are changing the world and possibly causing problems in the cities (642). She continues by saying that the urban environment is pictured as inauthentic and this inauthenticity consists of “the modern, the manufactured, the commercial, the urban, and, increasingly, the foreign” to which the rural regions provide an alternative (643). Since these elements are inseparable components of urban life in *The Horse Whisperer*, for example foreign and

commercial relate to Annie because of her multi-national background and her job in the magazine business, the understanding of cities in *The Horse Whisperer* follows Zagarell's thoughts of a basic regionalist story.

Thus, the authenticity of the rural regions promoted in regionalist texts always stems from the contemporary elements existing in more urban places, Zagarell notes (643). In a sense, by providing an escape from the contemporary issues by presenting a rural region with opposite, traditional values, regionalist texts actually implicitly focus on the contemporary issues and reflect the phenomena affecting people's lives on the national and global level. For example, one contemporary issue that *The Horse Whisperer* wishes to criticise or comment on could be the increasing globalism in the world that is shaping the world everywhere, turning metropolitan centers into similar masses of concrete and people while forgetting the important humane dimensions in life. The story of Annie and Grace who travel West and change there fundamentally implies that the important basic values such as love and righteousness can still be found in the rural regions, notably in the West. In short, regionalists texts are always timely since they oppose the prevailing global values and will continue to do that as long as there is a gap between rural and urban regions. New York, with all its negative sides and mythical benefits, is therefore a crucial component in *The Horse Whisperer*, without which neither setting, the rural nor the urban, would stand out as a unique entity with a culture and regional identity of its own.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis has been a journey through the regionalism and local landscapes of the nineteenth century to the nationalism of the twentieth century West, finally arriving to the globalism and cosmopolitanism of the twenty-first century which blends together all the previous traditions and allows many kinds of interpretations to be made. *The Horse Whisperer* includes all these ideas and deciding the strongest focus of the book depends on which features one gives the most weight. Essentially, the cosmopolitanist tension between the rural and the urban appears to be the fundamental question or problem around which other themes revolve in the end. The purpose of this thesis was to examine how *The Horse Whisperer* represents regionalism, traditional as well as modern, and how the rural West is pictured as an ideal society, with the help of myths.

It is safe to say that *The Horse Whisperer* is most profoundly a regionalist text from the traditional as well as from the more modern point of view, including traits of the cultural and feminist reading and cosmopolitanism. It promotes the traditional western values and, nonetheless, shows curiosity towards the modern ways of living in the cities. What is more, the cities, or more precisely New York City, seem to obtain their own mythical way of life, a certain kind of unique, cosmopolitan culture of their own which *The Horse Whisperer* attempts to understand.

Regionalism is very strongly present in *The Horse Whisperer* with regard to its core concepts: the importance of nature and its admiration through landscapes, question of land use, and demographics and history of different families. Furthermore, the cosmopolitan features as part of regionalism connect the urban environment with the rural setting. There is a tension between the rural and urban worlds and their different habits, creating an intimacy that results in the final fact that all people are the same in the end.

The West in *The Horse Whisperer* is seen as a vast region, or rather, an idea, where ideal society exists with its heroic, hard-working people. The effect of Turner's frontier thesis is visible in the text and in the way the western people are described. The kind of western regionalism can be observed in *The Horse Whisperer* when the frontier and the process of the West are discussed and in the way the community and the members of the Booker family reflect the ideal American characteristics. Montana provides a setting and landscape that, as an actual, existing region, anchors the picture drawn of the West to real world, making the attempt to locate the ideal society in the West more effective.

The urban and the rural world views culminate in the characters of Annie and Tom. On the one hand, Tom is the western hero of the novel, an archetype of a cowboy. He represents the Western, male values of Old West, where heroes like him form an ideal society. On the other hand, Annie represents the modern, hectic, urban setting and its values such as capitalism and globalism.

This thesis has shown *The Horse Whisperer* to be a mixture of old and new literary traditions which can be observed notably in the ambiguous manner in which the city is pictured. The urban environment has many negative and positive sides depending on the perspective. New York is portrayed mostly from the characters' perspective, creating a narrow, rather negative picture of the city. Annie can be interpreted as a victim of the urban values in the style of the older regionalist texts. It seems that life in the city results in unhappiness and stressful life. However, the city is also shown in a positive light, thanks to cosmopolitanism and the frontier myth that the urban wilderness has inherited from the West. City life does have good sides, the source of which, however, remains blurred to the reader, creating a mythical appearance similar to the one surrounding the West. Both ways of living can grant their residents happiness which reflects the fundamental similarities between city and countryside environments and their necessity to fulfil people's basic needs.

Even though it has been over twenty years since *The Horse Whisperer* was published, the topics discussed in the novel such as globalism are still relevant today, which makes the book an interesting subject for research. In the world of ever-increasing globalisation and nationalism, the local viewpoint is becoming more and more important in order to remind us of the value of ordinary life, communities and traditions. Regionalism also serves as a counterbalance to the prevailing capitalism. In addition, cosmopolitanism reminds us that beyond the surface, all places and people are fundamentally the same and experience the same needs and problems in life. Compelling novels such as *The Horse Whisperer* present these ideas to the reader in an inspiring manner which seems to attract the readers. Therefore, it would be interesting to continue research on regionalist novels and perhaps on literature of the twenty-first century that would even better reflect the contemporary, global issues.

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