

ANDY ADAMS AND WESTERN MYTH: THE FRONTIER AND HIS *LOG OF A COWBOY*

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Abstract. This article examines the position of Andy Adams' famous work, *The Log of a Cowboy*, through the lens of Western myth and the concept of coloniality. The novel has been critiqued in a variety of ways over the years, with reviews often citing the same factors in their evaluations. Foremost of these has been Adams' lack of finesse in his writing style, with his particular attention to what he deemed to be objective truth. In this study, the *Log* will be re-examined with the aim of providing a fresh insight into how veterans of the Western trails, such as Adams, viewed the dynamic space in which they lived and worked. Therefore, the concept of the frontier, viewed as a stereotypical assumption in both mythological and colonial terms, is used as a lens of investigation in order to critique Adams' descriptions and viewpoints. The study concludes that although Adams' intention was to create a work true to life on the trail, he ultimately permitted himself to become another speaker for Western stereotypes. It is proposed that seemingly innocuous literary works such as the *Log* can be included amongst discussions of colonial fiction in the wider field of American studies and, by extension, in the latter postcolonial sphere, through their construction of stereotypical discourses and the glorifying of trail life.

Key words: western trails, frontier, cowboys, cattle drives, colonial west

INTRODUCTION

Andy Adams' famous work, *The Log of a Cowboy* (henceforth *Log*), occupies a curious place in the history and literature of the American West. It is a work that has been both derided for its lack of style and character development and held up, in the words of Dobie (1926: 93), as 'the best book that has ever been written of cowboy life.' This remarkable dual position that Adams' work holds is due to his specific stylistic intent and approach to his subject. Adams' supposed aim was

to produce an account of the West as faithfully as he could remember his own experience of it. Adams was born in Thorncreek Township, Indiana, in 1859 to an Irish father and a Scottish mother. Running away from home at age 15, Adams worked several odd jobs in the West before his arrival in San Antonio, Texas, in c. 1882. For ten years after, he worked as a cowboy, driving horses up the trail from Texas to Kansas (Johnson, 1977: 203-204). It is from this working experience that Adams sought to describe life on the trail and communicate his less romantic view of frontier life. Whereas this devotion to accuracy and a 'true' depiction of life in the West is commendable, it has not served to create a novel that is renowned for its complexity or style.

It is perhaps strange that Adams should have sought to become a novelist given his lack of training as a writer or even given his limitations in terms of style. However, Adams is indeed responsible for seven major works between the years 1903 and 1927. Molen (1969: 24) has pointed to Adams' dissatisfaction with a production of Hoyt's play, *The Texas Steer*, as the genesis of Adams' writing ambitions, with him being keen to produce something more factual of his own. To this end, Adams was seeking to dismantle much of the myth associated with depictions of the American cowboy. Such myths were effectively stereotypes that were created in order to portray the otherness of those from outside the American settler identity. Thakur (2012: 241) has examined this strategy in detail for studies of colonial anxiety. According to Coffin (1953: 290-291), viewed through the prism of Rousseau's 'natural man' theory, the cowboy myth emerged as a result of Western local narratives and nationalism combined with an urge towards violence and individual law. The individualistic ideal is something also picked up on by Murwantono (2022: 194-195).

Whereas Adams chose the medium of fiction to tell his story, surprising given his desire for historical accuracy in his narrative, he seemingly failed to achieve critical success as either a novelist or historian through his restricted realism-styled work (Quissell, 1972: 211-212). Of the *Log* in particular, Carter (1981: 361, 369-370) has highlighted the apparent lack of historical research that Adams conducted prior to writing. This lack of research dovetailed with several key omissions from his trail narrative. Famous landmarks such as Chimney Rock, Colorado, were omitted entirely, and he fabricated seven Indian lakes along the trail (*ibid.*; Adams, 1903: 57-59). The *Log* and its descriptions, as such, cannot be said to be entirely factual, though this has not prevented some scholars from being fooled in the past. This was Adams' right as a novelist, of course, but it does serve to dent his supposed aim of historical accuracy, and it also connects Adams to the wider tradition of personal histories in the West (see Cavaoli, 1983; Morin, 2002; Grant, 2011;).

Considerations of historical accuracy also draw us, as Adams' readers, to look beyond the base narrative he has presented us with—a group of cowboys driving cattle up the trail from Texas to Montana—and consider what the wider context of such activity in the West was (Adams, 1903: 9, 40). For the purposes of this study, the West is viewed as a dynamic space that is not fixed in geographic terms. In agreement with White's (1993: 3-4) views, the West is seen as a space that developed

as a result of conquest and the mingling of diverse peoples over a number of years. Such a transformation of space is reminiscent of colonial processes that took place in European empires, particularly among privately interested individuals, with the ambition to dominate others and take possession of lands and revenues evident (Dirks, 2006: 27, 37-39). Therefore, Adams' *Log* serves not only Western reality but, most importantly, carries specific issues pertaining to disparate discourses, such as the emergence of western myth and how this is viable enough through the creation of narrative.

THE LOG AND AMERICAN COLONIALITY

The use of texts such as Adam's *Log* as a lens through which to view the American West presents an intriguing opportunity for critiquing nineteenth-century America. It is the concept of myth, surrounding both the cowboy and the burgeoning American state, that serves as the analytical prism in this regard. The United States' eighteenth-century evolution from settler colony to independent republic and its own journey in shaping national identity through the settling of Western territories have fed into the myth of the American West, portraying it as a place that was emblematic of an imagined American identity and concepts of freedom. At the outset, this study contends that the actions of the United States in settling the West and expanding its frontier into new territories amounted to colonial activity due to the process of settlement, the seizing of land, and the forced removal and othering of indigenous peoples. The resolution of such, however, is intimately tied up in the mythic dimension. Whereas Adams' narrative attempts to portray a factual account of 'real' cowboy life on the trails, what it has also achieved is the promulgation of an entirely different myth than the supposed romantic ideal of the cowboy. The cowboy, now held up as a mythic ideal of 'Americanness' taming a wild and uninhabited frontier, in turn serves as an instrument of the colonial process and the othering of indigenous peoples. The discourses created and maintained by writers such as Adams, his characters, and the viewpoints which developed in the wider American consciousness feed into the mythic colonial element.

The modern United States' difficult history with regard to the oppression and displacement of indigenous peoples, nineteenth-century territorial expansion, and aggression against neighboring states such as Mexico adds weight to the view discussed by Bender (2006: 45-46, 48-51) with regard to a specifically 'American' way of conducting empire. What has historically been termed 'internal colonialism,' and was more fully unpacked in the context of American exceptionalism by Mackenthun (2000: 36-37), firmly places the American West as a zone of colonial conflict. To contextualize colonialism for the purpose of this study, it may be seen as a series of acts leading to the control and domination, partially or in full, of territories and people belonging to another nation. This process often involved the physical transplantation of settlers and the exploitation of the land

and indigenous populations for the benefit of the metropolis. In the case of the American West, migrants from the East of America traveled along the pioneer trails to begin new lives in newly established territories, displacing the indigenous population in many cases. Returning to the creation of an expansionist American narrative constructed in the urban center surrounding the prospect of great riches in the new colonial space, it is evocative of the gentlemanly capitalist theory in which expansion into new colonial spaces was driven by privately interested individuals and networks in the metropolis (Cain & Hopkins, 1994: 85-6). In the American West example, this is observed in the infamous gold rush narratives and the construction of the Western railroads (Curtis, 2009: 278).

American coloniality is, however, a complicated matter due to the differing experiences of the American state and people following independence. The United States won its independence following the 1775-1783 American Revolutionary War, though the American state did not emerge out of an extractive system of colonial rule as in the case of other former colonies such as India or Indonesia, which went through a modern period of decolonization. Rather, it was a violent revolution fought between the colonial power and its own former settler population. For this reason, the situation of coloniality and postcoloniality in the American example cannot be taken as a like-for-like comparison with later colonial examples in Asia or Africa (see Cheyfitz, 1993: 118; Boehmer, 1995: 4; Klor de Alva, 1995: 247). This paper does, however, view the geopolitical behavior of the United States regarding the nineteenth-century Western frontier as colonial in nature due to the transformative nature of the process in terms of space, migration, and othering. Discussing the nature of colonial and postcolonial experiences in former colonies is, of course, also a fascinating and important field that can contribute to American studies. Innovations such as Weisman's (1995: 477-478) view that relationships between former colonies—the United States and Canada being his examples—can provide further context to the relationship between the two states. Such reassessments and critical reappraisals are at the heart of this study's aim in discussing Adams' *Log*.

The novel is of interest in the colonial sense in that Adams has sought to provide a factual description of life on the frontier for those living and working there. During much of the late nineteenth century, the West was a site of extreme change and colonial expansion. Again, the seizure of land, violence, and forced displacement of indigenous others are important factors here, and America's so-called manifest destiny and the right by divine ordination to colonize the continent foreshadow this (Pratt, 1927: 795-796; Deopujari, 1966: 490-491). Adams' work, whilst seeking to take the romance, myth, and exoticism out of the West, has instead acted to normalize the passive colonial processes that were at work on the frontier. Effectively, Adams and writers like him have succeeded in portraying the figure of the cowboy as a hero of the American way of life. Such descriptions not only reinforce existing stereotypes surrounding the process of othering but also lead their readership towards the viewpoint that American expansion in the West was a wholly positive action. For example, in Adams' (1903: 9) narrative, the 'circle-dot'

cowboys were driving cattle up the trail to the Blackfoot embassy for the benefit of the Blackfoot Indians of Montana who were placed on the reservation.

The reservation system can be seen as a determined colonial structure in that it was created in the 1850s in response to the American annexation of California, Oregon, and Texas in the 1840s. With these states then being considered new American territory, the former policy of moving Native Americans to the West needed reappraisal (Dippel, 2014: 2136). The use of cowboys as agents of colonization and colonial control can thus be established at this early juncture, but Adams' descriptions of the trail may also act as signifiers of the colonial experience. The concept of the dynamic frontier is key here, with the lack of effective government control in this space and the cowboys' interactions with Native Americans as intriguing elements. By using Adams' *Log* as a case study to discuss coloniality in the American West and, latterly, the postcolonial connotations, the great complexity of the colonial frontier is demonstrated, and new possibilities in postcolonial and migration studies are illustrated.

MYTH AND THE WESTERN NOVEL

In critiquing Adams' and his *Log*, Graham (1980: 293-296) has opined that whilst enthusiastic folklorists such as Dobie have held it up as a triumph, and others have mistakenly placed their faith in it as having complete factual fidelity, it is a work of fiction that lacks a critical standpoint and plot progression. Effectively, this means that there is no development of the characters or their contexts. This was a problem, as the Western literary industry expected characters to be presented in relation to the commonly held beliefs of the audience. By placing the cowboy within the canon of expected moral and natural values, the novelist could make their characters relatable to the reader(s) and, therefore, likely please them as well (Boatright, 1966: 11-12). By deliberately choosing not to pander to the expectations of the consumer, Adams immediately placed himself outside of popular expectations and made his product less desirable for a general reader. Even though, as Walker (1977: 276-279) has highlighted, the real cowboy was less of a romantic hero and more of a hardworking rural worker, the imagined and erroneous ideal of the cowboy aligned with what was expected by readers in urban settings. Walker's critique of Adams' *Log* identifies the importance of the cowboy myth in constructing the identity of the cowboy. In laying this out, he discusses that while Adams is adept at presenting what he describes as the 'cowness' of the setting, he also misses out on a great deal of detail. Whereas the narrative information may be very authentic and based on personal experiences, the cowboy remains a mere figure due to the lack of proper characterization (ibid.: 283-284). Despite Adams' desire to present a true account of the cowboy, he has perhaps failed to bring the cowboy to life in his novelization due to his stylistic limitations.

Adams' use of the circle-dot cowboys as a means to glorify the West as he remembered it is reminiscent of Kipling's famous use of his novel *Kim* to extol

the virtues of colonial service in British India. In Kipling's vision, India was a dynamic space full of excitement for young colonial servants. This, Parry (2002: 310-313) has concluded, was a concerted attempt to 'falsify the historical actuality by representing the internal state of India as a place that rejoices in its cosmopolitanism.' In both the Adams and Kipling examples, the characters are present in a distinctly colonial setting, including factors such as the interaction with diverse others and the transformative efforts of the subjugation of lands and peoples. The authors' aims were different, of course, with Adams pursuing his desire to construct a factual account of cowboy life and Kipling seeking to promote the opportunity to be had for young European men in the empire. The result in both cases, however, has served a similar purpose. Namely, the curation of a mythic narrative surrounding activity in the colonial space. The authors were seemingly unaware of the broader consequences of such processes, reflecting the trend of colonial actors throughout history, and were thus blind to potential postcolonial repercussions further down the line. The upshot of this was the dismantling of a symbolic discourse, the mythic element in this example, and the sudden appearance of truth. Acknowledgements of historic colonial exploitation in Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America have seen much greater discussion in recent years, though colonial processes in North America, as noted above during the nineteenth century, have been much slower to be recognized.

Adams' (1903: 31, 38, 71-83) cheerful descriptions of the circle-dot cowboys sitting around the campfire, telling tall tales, and harmoniously going about their work suggest an idealization of a mythic and rustic ideal. Their telling stories and reminiscing about old sweethearts are good examples of how the reality of life on the trail has been airbrushed in order to appeal to the mythic ideal. Whereas sociability around the campfire was indeed an aspect of cowboy life, the laid-back setting described by Adams was by no means the reality of every evening. Diarists who recorded their experiences crossing the trail have described high winds, storms, disease, and the unpredictable nature of animals as factors that negatively impacted their experiences (Letter from Finley McDiarmid to Constantia McDiarmid, 5 June 1850, University of California, BANC MSSC-B605; Raymond Herndon, 1902: 50, 92). It is a curious consideration that the West, while ostensibly offering artists and writers a myriad of possibilities, also brings with it a series of limitations based on readers' expectations. This is linked to the mythic connotations of the setting and the character of the cowboy, with consumers expecting the cowboy to be a cheerful outdoorsman triumphing over the adversity of the prairie. Adams' numerous references to the campfire are an example of this at work. Tellingly, however, the *Log's* narrator briefly referred to the fact that 'a wet, hungry man is not to be jollied or reasoned with' (Adams, 1903: 154).

Adams and the *Log* are perhaps doubly disappointing in terms of the cowboy myth since his narrative did not fully pander to the mythic element of the West, nor did his style catch the imagination. De Pillis (1963: 291), in detailing the work of Smith on the West, however, has noted how he put forward the argument that the West was more important as a symbol and myth than as a 'real' place. Adams,

in attempting to sell his vision of the authenticity and accuracy of his West, misses the consideration that the mythic dimension, so important in the Western canon, is an enlargement and not a distortion of its reality (Walker, 1977: 295). One of the key passages in which Adams' novel has potentially managed to fulfill both the factual and mythic dimensions is in his description of Dodge City, Kansas, via the cowman McNulta below.

I've been in Dodge every summer since '77 ... and I can give you boys some points. Dodge is one town where the average bad man of the West not only finds his equal, but finds himself badly handicapped. The buffalo hunters and range men have protested against the iron rule of Dodge's peace officers, and nearly every protest has cost human life. (Adams, 1903: 191)

Dodge City has a place in popular narratives of the frontier as a site of vice and a venue of frequent violence. The above quote very neatly demonstrates that this was also a consensus that Adams, as a former cowboy, held. Whereas cowboy mythology has been noted to exaggerate the folklore of the trail, Adams' depiction of Dodge, while certainly playing to mythical elements for the benefit of his readers, also contains nuggets of truth. Dykstra and Manfra (2002: 19) have assessed Adams' Dodge chapter and concluded that, whilst it was certainly a mix of fact and fancy, it also provides missing historical information about Dodge's law-reform experiment in the early 1880s. In the historical context, Adams' (1903: 195-196, 205-209) descriptions of a lecture hall riot, the assault on a dancing hall bouncer, and the prohibition of firearms in town ring true. As a result of correlations such as this, Dykstra and Manfra (2002: 38-40) have concluded that Adams was likely present at Dodge in 1882. Similarly, they have opined that he must also have received his information from both personal experience and oral histories since detailed narratives of Dodge, such as those he reproduced, were not readily available at the time of Adams' writing (*ibid.*). Graham (1980: 295), however, has critiqued Adams' chapter on Dodge as catering to the popular stereotype of the cowboy as a gunslinger.

Despite the desire for and facility with myth in the West, the argument that the life of a cowboy is less exciting than mythical narratives portray it seems apt. Atherton (1961: 2-4) has drawn attention to this in his study of cowboys and cattlemen, drawing the conclusion that, despite the popularity of the cowboy in fiction, the rancher was, in fact, the central character of the setting. Indeed, the reality of cowboy and Western life was noted to be one of great hardship and loneliness, with cowboys themselves being scruffy and leading a burden-filled life (Walker, 1960: 310-312). In Adams' telling, however, he has portrayed the lifestyle as also having the potential to be laid-back and easy-going if animals were well managed, with a distinct *laissez-faire* attitude adopted by the novel's foreman, Flood, quoted below. Whereas this description is perhaps idealistic and leans into the mythic element of the cowboy being in command of their surroundings and dominating nature, it also speaks to the practicalities of effective animal care and

management on the trail. This is something discussed in detail by Ahmad (2012: 165-167) in her work on mid-nineteenth-century emigrant wagon trains heading west across the plains.

The cowboy and his horse are, of course, inextricably intertwined in the popular imagination, with the mythic lifestyle and narrative always pairing the two together. Denoting the cowboy as being inseparable from his mount is not an isolated occurrence in terms of the history of horse and rider. Indeed, a horse was an essential piece of equipment throughout history for tasks ranging from herding to warfare. As such, there was a definite practicality to the relationship. It is perhaps more so the relationship between horse and cowboy that catches the imagination and breathes life into the mythic narrative. The horse, as such, has become essential to the identity of the cowboy. A similar relationship dynamic has also been noted by Ropa (2019: 10-11) in her examination of medieval knights and the social status surrounding their mounts. In popular representations of the cowboy and his horse, it is often the case that the cowboy and his individual horse, for example, *The Lone Ranger and Silver*, are held up as a mythic ideal. The reality, however, was that cowboys operated with a string of horses, which they continually rotated in order to prevent fatigue in any one animal, something also commented upon by Adams (1903: 14). Further dangers such as thirst, hunger, injury, theft, and toxic alkali water on the trail were also considerations.

Boys, the secret of trailing cattle is never to let your herd know that they are under restraint. Let everything that is done be done voluntarily by the cattle. From the moment you let them off the bed ground in the morning until they are bedded at night, never let a cow take a step, except in the direction of its destination. In this manner you can loaf away the day, and cover from fifteen to twenty miles, and the herd in the mean time will enjoy all the freedom of the open range. (Adams, 1903: 28-29)

The idea of dominating the frontier surroundings and the vision that the cowboy was the hero figure of the space say much about the way in which inhabitants of the West and consumers of Western fiction viewed their role in the environment. That is to say that, as the above quote describes, the West presumably construed an imaginative place where settlers tried to conquer and saw the land as a place where the settlers could seize their freedom. It is also emphasized earlier that the way cowboys treated their herd indicated their freedom. In this sense, the West is not only described as an imaginative world but extensively denotes idealized individualism and independence.

As Paul (2014: 312-314) has articulated, the West has often been considered a sort of Edenic paradise made for settlement and homemaking. Such fanciful representations served to symbolize an idealized form of pastoral simplicity and independence based on subsistence farming. These descriptions necessarily pit the idealized rural West against the industrially urbanized East of America and portray the fallacy that American settlers had a predominantly rural heritage in

the frontier zone. Such representations play into Turner's (1989: 7) thesis regarding the belief that the frontier progressively civilized Western space and helped to create American national identity and democracy. Taniguchi (2004: 28-29), in her critique of Turner, has pointed out that, following the end of trailing and the growth of both railroads and industry, native peoples were increasingly pushed aside.

Turner's thesis argued that the process of settling the West and the American people triumphing over the wilderness would assist in the remaking of America in a mold far removed from European notions of aristocracy, landed interests, and empire. This is, however, yet another example of the Western myth masking the realities of the transformation. In moving west and conquering the rugged wilderness, American settlers and their government were actively colonizing the land and subjugating people in a very similar way to European behavior in the early modern era. The assumption that America was a republic that had broken free from colonialism and was therefore incapable of acting in a colonial-imperial manner was and is a very contentious one. The displacement of indigenous peoples, the intensive farming and mining of new territories, and the American annexation of Texas from Mexico in 1845 underline this. The imagined Western history in connection with the displacement of indigenous peoples also brings us to the focal point of this study, namely, American coloniality in works such as that of Adams.

THE CIRCLE-DOT COWBOYS AND THE COLONIAL

The importance of coloniality to this study and in the wider context of the American West is best viewed through the lens of marginalized indigenous peoples in the imagined space of the frontier. There has been a school of thought that has attempted to assign postcoloniality to the descendants of European settlers, though this has been dismissed by Boehmer (1995: 4) as misplaced. Conversely, as Kramer (2011: 1348) has argued, while modern Americans may have sought to distance themselves from empire and point towards republican ideals, the imperial has long been a useful tool in studies attempting to situate the United States in global history. This detachment from empire is understood as, as proposed by Bascara (2006: vii), model-minority imperialism, which becomes a new form of domination within the practices of colonial discourses in the context of modern America. Therefore, this postcolonial context does not necessarily situate an interplay of an 'East-West' relationship in the aftermath of British imperialism in the U.S., but rather a growing concern towards racial minorities in the U.S. affected by the existence of maintaining colonial ideology and discourses. In this regard, the U.S. is as ascendant as the empire through which colonial practices, particularly the westward expansion that displaced Native Americans, became viable and conspicuous.

It is contended that America's internal expansion and colonialism across the North American continent exposed indigenous peoples to colonial processes and, ultimately, postcolonial situations. This assumption dovetails with Bender's (2006: 45-47) comments on the American blind spot to historic colonial actions,

as well as Olund's (2002: 130-132) commentary on the vast social dislocations wrought in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This also includes the social process where the U.S. grew into one nation with an extensive and expansive spirit to 'tame' the wilderness in the West. However, the western expansion of the frontier was not merely a journey or travel; as Fussell mentioned, a journey or, more preferably, an 'exploration' in the context of postcolonial study does not intend to generate experience, but it has an agenda that constructs thought by gathering knowledge through this exploration (Thompson, 2011: 21). Therefore, this western expansion cannot be taken for granted simply as the 'American spirit' where civilization started in the West. Most importantly, this westward exploration, which idealised the spirit of frontiers, subversively created and perpetuated colonial discourses, which were legitimized by writings and other accounts that served this function. One of which is the narrative by Adams, which allows expressions about human mobility and how this movement displaced minority groups while also presenting juxtapositions in favor of the dominant group. Through this writing, it produces colonial ideology by signifying civilization as an indication of advancement in life. To this extent, it is particularly important to note that the western expansion is contextualized in postcolonial America, and through this process, social dislocations are palpably revealed in the *Log*.

I shall never forget the impression left in my mind of that first morning after we crossed Red River into the Indian lands. The country was as primitive as in the first day of its creation. The trail led up a divide between Salt and North forks of Red River. To the eastward of the latter stream lay the reservation of the Apaches, Kiowas, and Comanches, the latter having been a terror to the inhabitants of western Texas. They were a warlike tribe, as the records of the Texas Rangers and government troops will verify, but their last affective dressing down was given them in a fight at Adobe Walls by a party of buffalo hunters whom they hoped to surprise. As we wormed our way up this narrow divide, there was revealed to us a panorama of green-swarded plain and timber-fringed watercourse, with not a visible evidence that it had ever been invaded by civilized man, save cattlemen with their herds. Antelope came up in bands and gratified their curiosity as to who these invaders might be, while old solitary buffalo bulls turned tail at our approach and lumbered away to points of safety. (Adams, 1903: 122)

The wilderness portrayed in this excerpt describes Adams' view of the American West as a geographic area with scenic nature and virginity of the land. This leads to constructing a picture of the 'wild' West, which somehow posits the frontier as those people of 'civilized' nature by expressing how primitive the Indians were. The *Log* furthermore contains colonial discourse through which 'travel to the west' juxtaposes significant dissimilarities; Adams uses strong expressions such as 'primitive' vs. 'civilized,' which, on the other hand, represent self and other. In depicting the Indians as primitive, the frontier is being contrasted with significantly

different communities by disparaging views towards Indians as ‘other’—to an extent, a sense of othering the Indians exhibits the idea of, in colonial discourse, subjugating one’s culture as inferior to another.

Flood had read the letter, which intimated that an appeal would be made to the government to send troops from either Camp Supply or Fort Sill to give trail herds a safe escort in passing the western border of this Indian reservation. The letter, therefore, admonished Mann, if he thought the Indians would give any trouble, to go up the south side of Red River as far as the Pan-handle of Texas, and then turn north to the government trail at Fort Elliot. (Adams, 1903: 122)

It is also intriguing to see that this act of othering leads to misconceptions or stereotypical characteristics about Indians; the appropriation of Indians who were notoriously narrated as beasts or potentially being troublesome erroneously becomes a falsified fact. Ironically, this stereotype seems to be validated as truth and is perpetuated in narratives. Evidently, this legitimization of particularly Indian characters is presented in the *Log*. In the above excerpt, it is described that a group of cowboys plotted a strategic solution to overcome the ‘troublesome’ Indians, which is also mentioned repeatedly through the book. The repeated image narrated in the story created a discourse that this distorted narration is potentially harmful, which deceives people’s perception of these Indians. This later is even more perilous because it is reproduced within the same discourse, what is known as colonial ideology.

In addition to the context of Adams and the *Log*, the most visible signifiers of coloniality and the colonial process are the circle-dot cowboys’ interactions with and descriptions of indigenous peoples. There are several descriptions of these throughout the text, such as the one quoted below.

He was a fine specimen of the Plains Indian, fully six feet in height, perfectly proportioned, and in years well past middle life. He looked every inch a chief, and was a natural born orator. There was a certain easy grace to his gestures, only to be seen in people who use the sign language, and often when he was speaking to the Apache interpreters, I could anticipate his requests before they were translated to us, although I did not know a word of Commanche...In dealing with people who know not the value of time, the civilized man is taken at a disadvantage, and unless he can show an equal composure in wasting time, results will be against him. (Adams, 1903: 137-138)

The crux of descriptions and stereotypes such as this is that they serve to distance the colonizer from the colonized. Effectively, this is the process of othering, which has been expanded on in the colonial arena by scholars such as Thakur (2012: 241) through the work of Bhabha. The narrator’s description in the above quote seeks to describe the racial characteristics of the chief to a domestic audience. The inclusion of this description in the *Log*, rather than being intended

as an informative statement, appears to be an attempt to play to the mythic element of the West and thus increase interest amongst Adams' readership; the insatiable appetite of the readership for Western novels was likely a factor in this (Atherton, 1961: 3). In Walker's (1977: 295) view, such usage of the mythic component would be tantamount to the author's acceptance of such myths. This would be despite Adams' supposed desire for authenticity and factual accuracy. The mythic or othering aspect of Adams' description in the above quote, reinforcing the concept of the stereotype, appears more likely to be the primary thrust behind it due to the context of the character Wyatt Roundtree's later quotation regarding diverse others in North America: 'Speaking about Mexicans and Indians...I've got more use for a good horse than I have for either of those grades of humanity' (Adams, 1903: 182-183).

The racial descriptions and negative stereotypes put forward in the *Log* also align with wider narratives from European colonial empires; for example, descriptions of indigenous peoples as lacking a proper concept of time and appearing to be uncivilized from the colonizers' perspective. The work of Alatas (2013: 231-236) is particularly important here. This is further connected to Saïd's (1979: 1-3, 40) work on the concept of Orientalism and its use as a means of dominating others in the colonial space. Such representations lean into the mythic element of assumed identities once again. This can also be seen in the following excerpt:

The town struck me as something new and novel, two thirds of the habitations being of canvas. Immense quantities of buffalo hides were drying or already baled, and waiting transportation as we afterward learned to navigable points on the Missouri. Large bull trains were encamped on the outskirts of the village, while many such outfits were in town, receiving cargoes or discharging freight. The drivers of these ox trains lounged in the streets and thronged the saloons and gambling resorts. The population was extremely mixed, and almost every language could be heard spoken on the streets. The men were fine types of the pioneer,—buffalo hunters, freighters, and other plainmen, though hardly as picturesque in figure and costume as a modern artist would paint them. For native coloring, there were typical specimens of northern Indians, grunting their jargon amid the babel of other tongues; and groups of squaws wandered through the irregular streets in gaudy blankets and red calico. The only civilizing element to be seen was the camp of engineers, running the survey of the Northern Pacific railroad. (Adams, 1903: 335-337)

By exemplifying so-called empire attitudes, borrowed from Thompson's concept on othering, towards the Indians, they are excluded from the 'civilized' categorization. This in turn emphasizes that othering is inextricable in this account of American West narrative, as can be seen in the following illustration: 'The only civilizing element to be seen was the camp of engineers, running the survey of the Northern Pacific railroad' (Adams, 1903: 337). Adams utilized expressions by which

perceptions about one's culture are being excluded or 'othered'—Thompson argued that, to an extent, such narratives represent heroism for the civilized community as they tamed the wilderness of the West (Thompson, 2011: 145).

The creation of such stereotypes, reinforced by myth, can be identified as evidence of a symbolic discourse at work. In colonial terms, the creation of discourses was tied up with the acquisition of knowledge about subjugated peoples as a means of dominating them. Fundamentally, such control was born out of anxiety on the part of the colonizers, who could not adequately understand their surroundings and the indigenous occupants. The narrative that was created, such as the lazy native stereotype, was fixed on the colonizers' need to explain the other and self-other relationship with the colonized other in colonial terms. Anxiety, or perhaps more accurately, colonial anxiety, can be located at the point of intersection between the creation of knowledge as authority and the breakdown of that symbolic authority (Thakur, 2012: 242-243). The failure of a stereotype to be accurate or the continuous challenging of a discourse each time the other is encountered are good examples of this. As Bhambra (2007: 11) has noted, this also has consequences for the present day, as how we understand the past helps to shape future social policies. The presentation of settler Americans as modern and the indigenous population as not is at the heart of the problem, with modernity and civilization being contrasted against tradition and supposed barbarianism (Mignolo, 2011: 152).

Through the example of civilization in the *Log*, the narrative can be interrogated from two perspectives: first, that of the topography, and second, that of its inhabitants. The passage quoted below speaks of the wild and inhospitable climate that travelers in the West faced. The account of dried-out streams and the fissures they made in the earth suggests that the frontier was something to be feared and left alone. However, American activity in the region, particularly in the colonial sense, poses a problem here. There was clearly a desire to dominate the landscape for economic reasons, such as trailing, or for doctrinal issues related to Paul's (2014: 312-314) arguments on the myth of a pastoral heritage belonging to the American people.

I think that when the Almighty made this country on the North side of the Brazos...the Creator must have grown careless or else made it out of odds and ends. There's just a hundred and one of these dry arroyos that you can't see until you are right onto them, They wouldn't bother a man on horseback, but with a loaded wagon it's different. (Adams, 1903: 109)

The next quote also leans into the alleged worthlessness of the land, yet it also glorifies the cowboys' attempts at mastering the landscape. The narrator claims that cowboys largely ignored the aesthetics of scenery along the way, though they observed elements related to their role (Adams, 1903: 123). This returns to the mythic representations of the cowboy as an American hero who was concerned with daring feats of action more so than the mundane reality of his

work (Atherton, 1961: 7-9). The presentation of a dangerous obstacle, such as the dried-up arroyos, and the cowboys' resolve to conquer them fed into this.

I've made this drive before without a drop of water on the way, and wouldn't dread it now, if there was a certainty of water at the other end. I reckon there's nothing to do but tackle her; but isn't this a hell of a country? I've ridden fifty miles today and never saw a soul. (Adams, 1903: 58)

The descriptions of adverse conditions and hardship on the trail in the two quotes above are also of interest in terms of the colonial-migratory process of wagon trains to the frontier in the mid-late eighteenth century. Traveling west across the plains after outfitting at one of the jumping-off towns along the Missouri River, emigrants left their homes in the East with the intention of permanently settling in the West (Hartman, 1924: 2-3). Published travelers' journals, such as those of Ludlow (1859), Raymond Herndon (1902), Thissell (1903), and Porter (1910) demonstrate their encounters with topographical dangers throughout their journeys. The key point here, however, is linking the land itself to the colonial-migrational process. These emigrants traveled west with the specific aims of settlement, the construction of new communities, and the creation of wealth. This was part of the much larger process of internal colonization undertaken by the United States in the nineteenth century (Bender, 2006: 51-54).

These emigrants, and indeed their descendants, likely formed a part of the mythical cadre of Western heroes—the cowboys—that was chronicled and represented by writers such as Adams. Representations like these stand in stark contrast to the commentaries of indigenous peoples of the time, with perceptions of indigeneity likely being a product of stories inherited from colonists and colonialism (Healy, 2008: 4-5). The curious position of migration within the context of colonial processes is also something that needs consideration in this respect. Even though migration and colonization often go hand in hand within certain studies, Mayblin and Turner (2021: 1-3) have pointed out that references to colonialism are rare in scholarship on migration. This, they contend, is a serious omission, and it obviously does not sit easily when discussed in the context of the American West, particularly in examples of sanctioned ignorance, whereby indigenous histories are intentionally disregarded (*ibid.*). This may be discussed in terms of emigrants crossing the plains and attempting to colonize the frontier or through the displacement of indigenous peoples, whether nomadic or otherwise, as a result of the transformation of the frontier.

Adams' descriptions did not just draw attention to the topographical elements of the frontier; however, the descriptions given of peoples and communities are equally important. As can be seen in the below quote, Adams' narrative of a frontier settlement is one of a dynamic melting pot with a vast array of identities. The settlement in question was the fictional town of Frenchman's Ford, likely based on the location of Terry's Crossing between current-day Bighorn and Custer, Montana (Carter, 1981: 372-373). Such diversity also ties in with White's

(1993: 3-4) representation of the West, with the area being seen as a fluid and dynamic state characterized by the mixing of many peoples. Adams' description, however, appears more inclined to draw a comparison between Native Americans and the so-called civilizing element of the engineers surveying for the Northern Pacific Railroad. This can be seen as both the reinforcing of a discourse surrounding the lack of civilization on the part of indigenous peoples as well as an attempt to portray the coming of the railroads as a civilizing element in transforming the frontier.

Despite Adams' desire for historical accuracy in his novelization, it must be acknowledged that there are inconsistencies in his fiction. Adams himself had never been further than Dodge City, Kansas, on the trail, so it was only natural that he lacked first-hand knowledge of the countryside beyond (Carter, 1981: 369). Although a lack of imagination in the telling may be to blame, the paucity of people and signs of habitation on the trail are also intriguing. This lack of narrative regarding the surroundings is something that has also been commented upon by Carter (*ibid.*: 375), with him suggesting that this would have added depth to the novel.

For native coloring, there were typical specimens of Northern Indians, grunting their jargon amid the babel of other tongues; and groups of squaws wandered through the irregular streets in gaudy blankets and red calico. The only civilising element to be seen was the camp of engineers, running the survey of the Northern Pacific railroad. (Adams, 1903: 334-335)

The key point to be articulated here is that the frontier and its moulding were fundamentally a process that impacted people. Towards the end of the novel, after the circle-dot cowboys arrived at the Blackfoot reservation, readers are given a clearer view of the distinct separation between the cowboys, as pseudo-colonial agents, and the indigenous people. Although Adams had never been on the trail north of Dodge City, his novelization has provided some very powerful signifiers of the relationship between colonizers and colonized in literary terms. The first of these returns to the racial aspect of his characters, with the narrator, Bob Blades, and John Officer engaging in a debate as to the gender of a young Blackfoot. Of this, several feminine qualities were listed by the narrator, and Blades went so far as to proclaim that the youth was his 'squaw' (Adams, 1903: 374-375). Whereas this term was commonly used in older literature such as the *Log*, it is today considered a racial and ethnic slur that is no longer acceptable. The Blackfoot in question ultimately transpired to be male, and the scenario was told as an amusing anecdote. The second example presented was that of a priest who had been a resident of the Blackfoot reservation for over 20 years and was attempting to convert the tribe to Christianity (*ibid.*: 376-377). The narrator praises the priest for his zeal and devotion, though the pressurized conversion of an indigenous people was a common tactic used by colonial powers in Africa, Asia, and South America as a factor of the colonial-imperial process (Copland, 2006: 1025-1026).

CONCLUSION

In discussing Adams' *The Log of a Cowboy* in terms of the mythic narrative and colonial connotations surrounding the frontier, this study has drawn attention to many of the problems facing Western literature of this type. First and foremost, it must be contended that this literary genre relies heavily on assumed stereotypes such as the masculinity and heroic stature of the cowboys, the seeming inevitability that he will overcome every hurdle in his way, and his designation as an emblem of American identity. So too, in tandem with this, is the placement of Native Americans into a marginalized sub-bracket of people who just so happen to occupy the same geographic space. Native Americans are often portrayed as others or aliens in their own land, and it has seemingly fallen to the cowboy, as the denizen of the American identity in the West, to be constantly compared against them in Western literature and film. This has particularly been viewed as part of a defined colonial stereotype linked to the process of othering.

This othering does, of course, have a darker meaning when it is considered that the American internal colonization of the continent in the nineteenth century removed and marginalized thousands of indigenous peoples. As Mayblin and Turner (2021: 14-15) have highlighted, scholars of migration tend to bypass race as a concept due to its association with histories of racial science. When such knowledge is discussed, it is almost always seen as something consigned to the past (*ibid.*). The past colonial migration and settlement of indigenous lands and stereotypical attitudes towards indigenous people do, however, continue to impact people's lives today. This study has seen ordinary actions in the frontier space through the lens of pseudo-colonial behavior, for example, the trailing of the circle-dot cattle from Texas to the Blackfoot reservation in Montana. The cowboys, via their passive action, underpinned the reservation system and enabled it to continue. So too, in the wider context of the frontier, the continued transformation of the Western space facilitated American settlement and the growth of American institutions. The engineers surveying for the Northern Pacific Railroad are also a good example of this.

Finally, in critical terms, it must be concluded that while Adams set out to produce a work that was authentic to the way of life on the trail, he has allowed himself to become another speaker for Western stereotypes. Whereas he was keen to demonstrate the ordinary trail work of the cowboy, he could not prevent himself from pandering to certain expected stereotypes. The chapter in *Dodge City* and his numerous stereotypical othering descriptions of indigenous peoples are a key part of this. The construction of stereotypical discourses and the glorifying of trail life mean, it is argued, that seemingly innocuous literary works such as the *Log* can be included amongst discussions of coloniality in the wider field of American Studies.

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TEXT ANALYSED

Adams, A. (1903) *The Log of a Cowboy: a narrative of the old trail days*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

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