# “Be a Man” – Representations of Masculinity in Annie Proulx’s Short Story Collection *Short Range*

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**Abstract**

This study analyzes representations of masculinity in three short stories by the American author Annie Proulx. The short stories analyzed are “The Half-Skinned Steer”, “People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water”, and “Pair a Spurs”, all published in the author’s 1999 collection *Short Range*. Proulx’s writing style is described as “postmodern western”, and she criticizes many aspects of masculinity by writing her characters in an exaggerated, satirized manner. This study analyzes the ways in which the character representations in the short stories are used to criticize attributes of masculinity.

The analysis of gender in the stories was done from a viewpoint of American Western masculinity focusing on late 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century masculinity, especially cowboy masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. It was found that American Western masculinity places emphasis on independence and individuality, physicality and a separation between hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities. These qualities are promoted by public figures, such as President Roosevelt, and through institutions such as Boy Scouts. Masculinity was seen as essential to the well-being of American people, which is why it was promoted.

The analysis revealed similar findings regarding masculinity in the short stories. The characters in the stories that represent hegemonic masculinity are generally highly independent and take pride in their individuality, even when over-dependence on individuality causes them significant harm. Physicality in terms of both skill and strength is also appreciated, and it is considered a measure of masculinity. Finally, non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities are often met with pity or contempt, and one’s conformity to hegemonic masculinity is also considered a measure of their value as a person. The analysis

could be further expanded in the future by including other short stories in the same collection or adopting a different point of view.

*Keywords*: Annie Proulx, masculinity, representation, cowboy masculinity, western genre, hegemonic masculinity, physicality, individuality

**Abstrakti**

Tämä tutkielma analysoi maskuliinisuuden representaatioita Annie Proulxin kolmessa novellissa. Analysoitavat novellit ovat “The Half-Skinned Steer”, “People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water”, ja “Pair a Spurs”, ja ne on julkaistu kirjailijan vuonna 1999 ilmestyneessä kokoelmassa *Short Range* (suom. LYHYT KANTAMA: kertomuksia Wyomingista, suom. Marja Alopaeus). Kirjailijan tyyliä kuvataan ”postmoderneiksi lännenkertomuksiksi”, ja hän kritisoi maskuliinisia piirteitä kirjoittamalla hahmonsa satiirisen kärjistetysti.

Representaatioita novelleissa tutkittiin länsiamerikkalaisen maskuliinisuuden näkökulmasta, keskittyen 1800-luvun lopun ja 1900-luvun alun maskuliinisuuteen, mukaan lukien hegemoninen maskuliinisuus ja cowboy-maskuliinisuus. Tutkimuksessa tuli esille, että länsiamerikkalainen maskuliinisuus korostaa itsenäisyyttä ja yksilöllisyyttä, fyysisyyttä ja eroa hegemonisen maskuliinisuuden ja ei-hegemonisten maskuliinisuuksien ja feminiinisyyksien välillä. Näitä piirteitä kannustavat sekä julkiset hahmot, kuten presidentti Roosevelt, että instituutiot kuten yhdysvaltalainen partioliike Boy Scouts of America. Maskuliinisuutta pidettiin oleellisena amerikkalaiselle elämäntavalle ja hyvinvoinnille, minkä vuoksi siihen kannustettiin.

Novellien maskuliinisuuden välillä löytyi yhtäläisyyksiä. Hegemonista maskuliinisuutta edustavat hahmot ovat tyypillisesti hyvin itsenäisiä ja ylpeitä yksilöllisyydestään, jopa silloin kun liika itsenäisyys aiheuttaa heille vakavia ongelmia. Fyysisyyttä pidetään korkeassa arvossa, ja sitä pidetään maskuliinisuuden mittarina. Lisäksi ei-hegemonisia maskuliinisuuksia ja feminiinisyyksiä halveksutaan tai säälitään usein, ja hegemoniseen maskuliinisuuteen sopeutumista pidetään arvokkaana piirteenä. Analyysia voitaisiin laajentaa tutkimalla useampia novelleja samasta kokoelmasta tai laajentamalla analyysin näkökulmaa.

*Avainsanat*: Annie Proulx, maskuliinisuus, representaatio, hegemoninen maskuliinisuus, cowboymaskuliinisuus, western-genre, hegemoninen maskuliinisuus, fyysisyys, yksilöllisyys

**Contents**

## 1. Introduction

This thesis analyses representations of masculinity in three short stories by the US author Annie Proulx. *Close Range: Wyoming Stories* is a 1999 short story collection consisting of 11 short stories, all of which take place in the United States in the western state of Wyoming, mostly during the mid–1900s. While on the surface the stories offer a slice-of-life look into rural ranching life, Proulx's characters are purposefully exaggerated to the point of absurdity to present a critique of traditional masculinity. The rough rural environment imposes certain expectations of masculinity on the male characters, who attempt to meet them in their own ways. In addition to exploring the major facets of masculinity in the stories, the stories' setting in rural Wyoming during the early to mid-twentieth century will be analyzed in relation to masculinity, as many of the theories are largely tied to a certain sphere of masculinity in time and space. This thesis will begin with an introduction to the theories used in analyzing the short stories, continuing with analysis and ending with a conclusion from the findings.

Masculinity has been discussed at length in the media recently, as gender norms are undergoing a global revolution. Masculine roles, stereotypes and myths are being analyzed, reinforced and reconstructed, and online communities of masculinity and antifeminism such as "The Manosphere" are growing rapidly. The Manosphere covers a wide range of men, ranging from men's right activists to so-called Pick Up Artists and Incels, men who understand themselves through involuntary celibacy, or their inability to find sexual partners (Høiland 10). Much of the discussion in such communities is centered around manhood and manliness, and what it means to be masculine. Representation matters a great deal in this kind of discussion; movies, video games, literature and other cultural products are now more accessible than

ever, and fictional models of manhood are imitated and analyzed closely. In her stories, Annie Proulx criticizes masculine expectations and representations by greatly emphasizing qualities traditionally viewed as masculine in her characters. In this analysis, "representation" is understood as the way Proulx writes her characters, namely what is highlighted in their values and actions. This satirical style of overemphasis highlights the problems with traditional masculinity and makes the reader question the truth behind qualities such as stoicism, physicality and conforming to hegemony.

Annie Proulx's works have been studied before, also from a masculinity studies point of view. Most of the studies have, however, focus on the author's best known short story "Brokeback Mountain" and its 2005 film adaptation, including journal articles such as "Brokeback Mountain: Masculinity and Manhood" (2008) by James R. Keller and Anne G. Jones and "Annie Proulx's Imaginative Leap: Constructing Gay Masculinity in 'Brokeback Mountain'" (2012) by Kylo-Patrick R. Hart. Keller and Jones suggest that the film adaptation of the short story "allows itself to assert the legitimacy of romantic love between men by endorsing traditional narratives of manhood and masculinity" (21), while Hart suggests that the short story perpetuates heterosexism and homophobia by "positioning its two queer protagonists as enemies of the patriarchal social order" (209). However, there are no published studies focusing on the thematic of this thesis, representation.

The stories analyzed in this thesis have also not been studied extensively from the point of view of masculinity. There are a few published articles dedicated to the analysis of one of the stories, "The Half-Skinned Steer", but no published articles analyzing the two other short stories specifically. "The Half-Skinned Steer" has been analyzed from such points of view as revenge and oral history, for example in Ellen Boyd's article "Oral History and Revenge in

Annie Proulx's 'The Half-Skinned Steer'" (2011). Boyd suggests that both positive and negative behaviors may be transmitted through family history.

### 1.1 Introduction to the Short Stories

"The Half-Skinned Steer" tells the story of Mero, an old man making the decision to drive a long way alone in his car to Wyoming to attend his brother's funeral. On the way, he reminisces about his youth and considers about his values. Mero's speech and inner thoughts are mixed in the text to the point where it is unclear where one ends and the other begins, which offers insight into Mero's motivations and personal issues. For Mero, making the trip to his brother's funeral is a point of pride and personal achievement. Despite the length of the journey and his brother's death due to old age and slowed reflexes, Mero sets out to prove that he is still just as physically capable as in his youth. Throughout the journey, problems start to pile up, but he pushes through them with stubbornness and anger. He becomes increasingly impulsive and likely dies of exposure near the end of the short story, although the ending is left unclear. Much of the stubbornness of the old man and the troubles he has had in his life stem from his notions about masculinity.

"People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" describes two highly different families in rural Wyoming. The first family, the Dunmires, consists of a divorced father Isaac "Ice" Dunmire and his nine sons whom he has raised in rough (although not abusive) conditions, instilling in them his outlook on life. Isaac's wife left him after growing tired of her role in the rough ranch life, and Isaac's bitter misogyny and need for self-sufficiency can be seen in the entire family. The other family, the Tinsleys, is an aging couple with a daughter and a son. The father, Horm Tinsley, is described as a soft man (at least compared to the Dunmires), while his wife is

nervous and overprotective. The coddling of Mrs. Tinsley drives away their son, Rasmussen "Ras" Tinsley, who vanishes for five years before coming back home horribly mangled in an automobile accident. Ras begins to heal slowly on a physical level, but he is mentally irreparably damaged. Ras still has fractions of his personality left, namely his adventurous spirit and sexual desires, which starts to cause concerns first to his family and then to the community at large. He approaches female members of the community by first attempting to speak with limited success and later exposing his penis to them. The local law enforcement warns the Tinsleys that he could end up in trouble for his behavior, and the Tinsleys also threaten Ras's father. At the end of the story, the Tinsleys follow up on their threat and cut Ras's genitals off with a rusty knife, causing a lethal infection. A major theme of the story is the exaggerated, yet accepted masculinity of the Dunmire family and the "weaker" masculinity of Horm Tinsley and his injured son Ras.

Finally, "Pair a Spurs", the longest of the stories, describes the events of the rural town of Signal. The main location in the story is the Coffeepot Ranch, which is barely scraping by with meat and tour ranching. The Coffeepot's owner, Car Scrope, is an old man suffering from old injuries and growing dementia. Car's past is explored in flashbacks, and his decline from a fit and capable young man to an unclean drunk is made apparent. Car starts becoming aggressively sexual first towards his fellow rancher Inez, and then his foreman Mrs. Freeze. Mrs. Freeze, who has earned the respect of the community despite her sex, due to her skills in the masculine ranching business, leaves the job due to Car's behavior and looks for a job at the newly minted Galaxy Ranch owned by a Texan actor. The lives of the side characters of the story are explored as well, including the maker of the titular decorative spurs and Car Scrope's old friend John Wrench, who was the cause behind Car's divorce. The story branches in

several directions, but the themes of sexuality, sexism, and hegemonic masculinity are present throughout the story.

### 1.2. The Author

The short stories' representations of gender should not be taken at face value. In *A Jury of Her Peers*, Showalter describes Proulx as an author who "more than any other American woman writer, has claimed male territory as her own" (584). This claiming of territory and ease of writing from either male or female perspective comes from Proulx's own experiences, as the author describes:

> *I always wanted a brother and liked the things that men did; when I was growing up women didn't go skiing or hiking, or have adventurous canoe trips, or any of that sort of thing. . . . If you live in a woman's world and that's all there is, the other side of the equation looks pretty interesting . . . I find male characters interesting. Because much of my writing is set in an earlier period, they do things that women could not appropriately do.* (Quoted in Showalter 581–582, italics and second omission in the original text)

Showalter describes Proulx's genre as "postmodern Western" (586). Proulx's stories are written during the 1990's and 2000's from a post-historical perspective; the author does not write about a contemporary world. Instead, she is fully aware of the historical period and how things have changed since then. According to Showalter,

> Proulx's understanding of the West and the Western genre is radically antiheroic, as she explained in *The Guardian* in 2005: "The heroic myth of the American West is much more powerful than its historical past. To this day, the great false beliefs about the cowboys

> prevail: that they were – and are – brave, generous, unselfish men; that the west was 'won' by noble white American pioneers and staunch American soldiers fighting the red Indian foe; that the frontier justice was rough but fair . . ." (586–587)

Due to this critical, post-historical perspective of Proulx's short stories, it is necessary to understand several points of view into masculinity when analyzing the stories. As the stories take place in a certain environment and time period, namely rural Wyoming in the twentieth century, the masculinity of the time and place must be taken into account. This includes both the expectations set by hegemonic masculinity and how people conformed to them. Finally, the point of view of modern gender studies is also essential in the analysis of the stories to both analyze the change in masculinity over time and to understand Proulx's modern point of view. These points of view will be utilized when analyzing how Proulx's representations conform to the realities and ideals of their time and place and how they diverge from them.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Due to the vastness of the theme of masculinity, this thesis focuses on only a few specific attributes of the theme. The three most important masculine attributes analyzed in this thesis are independence and individuality, physicality, and hegemonic masculinity's separation from "others", i.e., femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities. These themes were chosen due to their influence on the plots and characters of the short stories. This section starts with explaining the difficulty of defining masculinity in exact terms and describing some facets of masculinity that need to be taken into consideration when analyzing masculine themes. The following sections explain some of the most influential notions regarding masculinity that affect American Western masculinity and thus the representations of masculinity in the stories. The theory section will then continue to analyze the three most important facets of masculinity in the analysis of the stories, after which the theories will be applied to the analysis of the short stories.

Masculinity, according to scholars like John H. Arnold and Sean Brady, is difficult or even impossible to define in exact terms. When talking about the difficulties of writing a history of masculinity, Arnold and Brady describe masculine identity as

> often figured relationally and/or comparatively, as frequently between men as between men and women. . . . Whilst certain elements of male-female relations have arguably remained broadly comparable over historical time . . . the social practices and institutions through which men come into contact with, and are encouraged to regard themselves in relation to, other men have taken extremely different historical forms. (3)

Arnold and Brady further expand on this relationality by bringing up the fact that gender does not exist in a vacuum:

> A key shared development in gender studies of all kinds in the last decade or so has been the recognition that gender rarely, if ever, stands alone in the formation of human subjectivity; rather, gender is one set of cultural codes which usually enmesh with other important aspects, such as notions of race or the hierarchies of class. (4)

Finally, the authors bring up the multifaceted nature of masculinity throughout history, when talking about the different views in their edited volume:

> as several (though not all) of the authors here suggest, we may in fact be studying different phenomena, arising from different systems of power and gender, rather than anything which tidily coheres to one core of 'masculinity'. (Arnold and Brady, 2)

These issues in attempting to define the "essence" of masculinity – relationality, enmeshing with other aspects of human subjectivity and ties to historical context – make it necessary to define a certain framework when analyzing masculinity.

In this thesis, the historical framework of masculinity most relevant to the short stories' context is analyzed, namely the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American Western masculinity. The analysis focuses on the topics of independence and individuality, physicality, and separation from "others". The historical attitudes and views on these topics are analyzed and the short stories' representations of masculinity are compared to them. With the historical setting of the stories and the post-historical and postmodern writing style of the author, it must also be recognized that the stories critique masculine stereotypes and attitudes regarding masculinity. Due to this, the theory section first analyzes the historical

perspective for the stories, while the analysis section delves further into how the author subverts and satirizes the historical setting in regard to masculinity. This analysis also addresses stereotypes and myths about masculinity, such as the cowboy myth.

### 2.1. Masculine Concepts and Masculinity in Literature

Despite the complexity of the topic, the study of masculinity both in general and in literature in particular has produced several commonly accepted concepts, which can be used in the analysis of the characters' behavior in the short stories. The most central concept for this paper is *hegemonic masculinity*, a model of socially respected form of masculinity. Carrigan, Connell and Lee define hegemonic masculinity as

> "a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance". In a given culture, even if hegemonic masculinity may not be so common but "may only correspond to the actual characters of a small number of men", nonetheless "large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining the hegemonic model". (Quoted in Reeser 20–21)

In practical use "hegemonic masculinity is more than an 'ideal', it is assumptive, widely held, and has the quality of appearing 'natural'" (Clark and Nagel 112). These definitions describe hegemonic masculinity as an idea of an achievable model of behavior, which can nevertheless be used to describe only a minority of men despite appearing "natural". Therefore, it does not describe what masculinity *is*, but rather what it *should be*. Carrigan et al. also point out that

> "Hegemony" . . . always refers to a historical situation, a set of circumstances in which power is won and held. The construction of hegemony is not a matter of pushing and pulling between ready-formed groupings but is partly a matter of the formation of those groupings. (Quoted in Reeser 21)

Essentially, hegemonic masculinity refers to what is accepted, promoted, and viewed as a natural form of masculinity at a given time. Failing to adhere to this model of masculinity carries the risk of being branded as "unmanly", while those that most closely resemble the image of hegemonic masculinity are often respected and considered masculine role models.

Models and concepts of masculinity, both hegemonic and otherwise, are both represented in and sometimes formed in literature. According to Reeser,

> Literature and masculinity go hand in hand. As a kind of conscious or unconscious fantasy or projection of other worlds, literature can reveal aspects of masculinity that might not come out or be visible in daily life or in other types of cultural artifacts. (11)

In addition to revealing aspects of masculinity, whether considered similar to reality or ideals held by the author, literature can be used to promote hegemony and construct it as well as to criticize it. Literature played an essential part in the formation of masculine ideals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is discussed in depth in the following chapter.

Due to the historical nature of hegemonic masculinity, a certain timeframe of masculinity must be established for the literary analysis. Proulx's short stories, previously described as postmodern Westerns, draw inspiration from and criticize the so-called cowboy masculinity, a model of masculinity highly linked to the American westward expansion in the nineteenth century. The origins and core values of cowboy masculinity are described in the

following section. Since Proulx is critical of the romanticized Western genre, a form of the idealized cowboy masculinity presented in typical Westerns holds a hegemonic position in the short stories, although presented in an exaggerated and critical light. Even though the short stories take place long after the end of American westward expansion and open range ranching, the myths associated with Western heroes have a clear influence on the stories' characters.

### 2.2. The Short Stories' Sphere of Masculinity

Arnold and Brady explain that gender and more specifically masculinity is tied to its context culturally and historically (2–4). Although culturally tied concepts such as gender cannot be defined in exact terms and the difference between different versions of the same concept is often blurry, some general observations can be made and used for study. In this study, American Western masculinity is analyzed to better understand how Proulx approaches the topic and criticizes it.

American Western masculinity developed in relation to Victorian masculinity along with the European settling of North America, especially at the frontier along with the westward expansion toward the current-day California. There are several key differences between the two masculinities in what is considered "manly". According to Ball, "through most of the nineteenth century, the respected man was self-made, sexually restrained, strong-willed, and moral – all of which added up to 'strong character'" (99). This restraint is due to the belief that men were thought to be innately passionate, aggressive, and licentious, and constant suppression of these "animal urges" was needed to protect society from men (Ball 98). This

suppression was an act of manhood, and manifested in moderation in all things, control of emotions and a certain aura of civilization and coolness. However, as Ball writes,

> By the 1880s and 1890s Americans – men in particular – began adding a new dimension of manhood: masculinity, or the physical man. They became obsessed with bodies and passions, believing that men should be ambitious, combative, tough, aggressive, and competitive. Physical strength was equated with 'strength of character' (99).

This shift to a new ideal of a masculine man was very much deliberately initiated and supported by both popular culture and governing institutions. According to McCall, there was a need for a late-nineteenth-century masculine hero, due to the feeling of overcivilization in men induced by industrialization and the growth of urban leisure (4). This need was met by the mythification of male characters, both fictional and real. Some of the new rugged, valorous heroes of the Western frontier were General George Armstrong Custer and Theodore Roosevelt, the latter of which built some of his masculine myth himself and helped form the new ideal for manhood at the turn of the century (McCall 1–4). Some of the traits these mythical men possess become part of the hegemonic masculinity of the time, resulting in those traits being perceived as "natural" and something to strive for.

This emerging hegemonic masculinity was supported by the mythification of the frontier, but also by attempting to make the childhood of boys in urban environments more rugged, and thus more masculinizing. One example of this attempt is the Boy Scouts founded in 1902, originally by the name of Woodcraft Indians (Clark and Nagel 119). According to Shari Huhndorf, the founder of Boy Scouts, Ernest Thompson Seton, firmly believed that "experience in nature would endow the boys with health, moral character, and, perhaps most

important, manliness . . . Playing Indian would help boys mature properly and teach them to be men" (qtd. in Clark and Nagel 119). This included the support of independence, physicality and aggression: "American men as a whole believed that unless boys turned away from their mothers, they would never grow up. . . . Parents should encourage boys to be wild and aggressive" (Moore 44). While this kind of attitude was prevalent in the urbanized cities of the East Coast, it was even more pronounced in the frontier:

> Growing up in the individualistic West, the games most boys played emphasized aggression and individual achievement more than teamwork, and rewarded those who were willing to risk more. As young children, boys were often left alone to watch family livestock or went out to hunt by themselves, and depended on their nerve and wits to face any threat, real or imagined. (Moore 45)

The emphasis on physicality, aggression and individuality was naturally influenced by the environment the children grew up in, as the ability to work independently and fend for oneself was valued due to the relatively rougher conditions on the frontier. Nevertheless, the idea of growing boys into masculine men in accordance to the hegemonic masculinity of the time was a growing trend throughout the United States, both on the frontier and on more urbanized areas. These ideas of developing manhood were supported by both middle-class childrearing books and symbolic figures of hegemonic masculinity "such as Theodore Roosevelt who advised that 'the American boy should be able to hold his own in any circumstances'" (Moore 44, 115).

The setting of the short stories is one of the reasons to analyze the short stories in the context of American Western masculinity. In this analysis, the state of Wyoming as it is presented in the stories is seen as a stereotype of the US West. Wyoming is part of the former

Western frontier, which is a highly romanticized space in American Western hegemonic masculinity. According to Richard White, "For more than a century the American West has been the most strongly imagined section of the United States" (qtd. in McCall 5). Much of the glamor of frontier is tied to the cowboy myth, which can also be seen in the short stories. According to Garceau, this myth emerged at the same time as the profession itself was disappearing due to the fading of open-range herding (152). Despite the disappearance of the actual profession, the mythical cowboy popularized in dime novels, bestsellers and traveling Wild West shows "became a cultural icon who symbolized honor, physical prowess, and rugged individualism" (Garceau 152). According to Moore, "For middle-class men outside the West, who worried they had become over-civilized, the cowboy became a symbol of masculinity at this time precisely *because* of his 'primitive' masculinity" (13). The mythological, hypermasculine cowboy was the answer to growing worries of a loss of masculinity that "could put the whole nation at risk. . . . The solution to these problems seemed to be what [president] Roosevelt termed the Strenuous Life. Boys should be encouraged to break away from overprotective mothers and cultivate aggression" (Moore 20). Roosevelt held cattlemen and cowboys as prime examples of American Western hegemonic masculinity, claiming that

> They have shown the qualities of daring, endurance, and far-sightedness of eager desire for victory and stubborn refusal to accept defeat, which go to *make up the essential manliness* of the American character. (qtd. in Moore 205, emphasis added)

The decision to compare the author's representations of masculinity to American Western masculinity specifically results from the themes and attitudes prevalent in the stories, in addition to the author's critical, postmodern writing style. The short stories' characters and societies are influenced by the idealization of the frontier and the cowboy

myth, and Proulx's satirized representations criticize the qualities associated with American Western masculinity described in the following sections. American Western hegemonic masculinity encourages independence and individuality, physicality, and separation from non-hegemonic masculinities and femininity. The following sections analyze these qualities further.

### 2.3. Independence and Individualism

In American Western hegemonic masculinity, the ability to fend for oneself as well as to provide for one's family are essential for manhood. These qualities take many forms, ranging from solitary survival in harsh elements to financial success. Moore describes two differing ideals of individualism in the cattle industry of the frontier:

> Cowboys saw their masculinity in terms of their skills on the job, their control over their working conditions, and their ability to make independent decisions. . . . Cattlemen, however . . . saw their masculinity in terms of their ability to provide for their families while building civilization on the frontier. (21)

In this context, cattlemen were ranch owners who cowboys worked for, and thus were wealthier and belonged to a higher social class. Nevertheless, both ideals of individuality influence American Western hegemonic masculinity, as seen in the analysis section of this thesis. Much of this has to do with the liberal American ideology, which celebrated the idea of a self-made, self-sufficient, property-owning man (Leong 136). This section outlines the ways in which American Western masculinity encourages and expects independence and individuality with historical examples.

Incidentally, the emergence of an independent, nature-facing American Western man was partly due to the Victorian moral code. According to Garceau, during the open-range cattle herding from the 1860s through the 1880s, unmarried men were hired to drive the cattle over long distances. In Garceau's view, this was due to their freedom from family life, acceptance of lower wages compared to married men, and the possibility of bunking in cheap, single-sex housing (149). Garceau further explains the importance of the latter point, as the Victorian moral code would have required any potential female workers to sleep in a separate space, which would have proved either too expensive or too impractical on the job (149). These traits combined formed the cowboy profession into an all-male nomadic subculture. (149) This status on the fringes of civilization led to the cowboys being perceived as social outcasts by both themselves and the Victorian society (Garceau 153–154). Garceau continues to explain that the separation from more permanent societies caused the subculture to adopt a new ideal for a man's worth – his skill and ability to fend for himself on the range instead of his social ranking or family background. Despite the separation from other societies, the cowboy subculture was nevertheless largely based on human companionship and brotherhood – very different from the cowboy myth of stoic individualism spread by John Wayne and other legends of the Western genre. Ideals of brotherhood and companionship were essential for both practical and emotional purposes. For example, while herding cattle for long periods of time, cowboys developed a habit of forming sleeping partners, "bunkies", for purposes of both sharing warmth in cold nights as well as riding the night guard together. These bunkies would sleep close to one another to warm each other and generally spent a majority of the time on the range together, forming close bonds. (154)

When cowboys were elevated to a mythical masculine status, however, their sentimentality became an issue. According to Moore,

> By the turn of the century, sentimentality was under attack in terms of proper masculine behavior. Concerned that society had become over-feminized, middle-class men scorned any sign of gentleness or emotions that might leave them vulnerable, and created boyhood activities designed to teach boys to suppress those emotions (125).

Moore further explains that Western stories, such as those in dime novels, became extremely popular specifically due to their masculine nature:

> Young boys who grew up reading dime novels with Western heroes also credited men in the West with a kind of supermasculinity. . . . Literary scholar Jane Tompkins has argued that the emphasis on masculinity in the Western itself is what made them so popular, as they reflected a backlash to the rise of the New Era woman, active in public affairs and the workplace and dominating reform activities. The late nineteenth century seemed over-feminized to many, and the Western was the perfect antidote. (205)

In addition to the theory presented by historian Frederick Jackson Turner that it was the disappearing frontier that had made America strong (Moore 205), people turned to romanticizing those who had worked the frontier. Cowboy masculinities were emulated, whether true or imagined, and the cowboy became a mythical figure of hegemonic masculinity.

One way to demonstrate or regain one's self-reliance and self-sufficiency in American Western masculinity is risk-taking. Moore describes how cowboys and miners approached risk and saw it as a measure of manhood:

> Despite these dangers, cowboys expected all men to take the risks necessary to their jobs as they came along. . . . Mining, like cattle work, involved certain risks, but the risks workers took in the corporate mines were a way of controlling their own lives. . . . For them, the manly part was not the risk so much as being able to choose to take it and to accept the consequences of their actions. (78–79)

The risks associated with cattle work and mining made the professions more masculine, and thus were a way to keep one's masculinity in a field that was becoming increasingly more corporate, such as mining and cattle industry. Due to the risks, injuries were common and many cowboys retired before the age of 40 (Moore 12–13). This further promoted the image of the cowboy as "a miscreant – if sentimental – boy who could not adapt to modern times" even as an opposing image of "a manly hero, fulfilling America's destiny of taming the continent" emerged at the same time (Moore 13).

Far from the range, masculine values were melding together with national ideologies when concerning family life at roughly the same time period. According to Leong, the images of virtuous, Anglo-American masculine men were brought up time and again, especially at occasions where they could be used to justify racial policies, as in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, denying the entry of Chinese laborer immigration for ten years (131). The Act was supported by claims that Chinese immigrants were unable to adapt to American core cultural values, especially regarding labor, societal moral values, and family structure (Leong 131–132). Leong further explains that "the House Committee on Education and Labor issued in 1878 a special report addressing the question of Chinese immigration", providing "three reasons why the Chinese male would be an undesirable citizen":

> The Chinese laborer was inferior to his Anglo-European counterpart because the American laborer 'shall possess courage, self-respect and independence. To do this he must have a home.' Exclusionists implied that Chinese workers depressed wages to the point where property ownership became impossible. Second, the Chinese evidenced peculiar moral habits in 'their treatment of women' by profiting from their sexual servitude. In other words, by organizing prostitution, Chinese men reneged on their duty as providers. Chinese women faced lives full of 'privation, contempt and degradation from the cradle to the tomb.' Third, Chinese men failed to establish nuclear family households. Chinese males distinguished themselves from other immigrants because '[t]hey bring with them neither wives nor families, nor do they intermarry with the resident population.... Mentally, morally, physically, socially and politically *they have remained a distinct and antagonistic race*. ' (133, emphasis original)

All these claims were directed toward men and reflected the hegemonic views on how American masculinity should manifest in a society. In the way the Committee denounced the perceived immorality and lack of masculinity in the Chinese workers, it laid out clear rules on how American men should behave and portray themselves. Apart from the direct demand for independence linked with property ownership, these "rules" also require American men to act as providers for the seemingly helpless women and to establish nuclear households.

American Western masculinity places great emphasis on men being able to fend for themselves. This sort of independence is context-dependent, as it can take different forms from solitary survival in the wilderness to providing for a nuclear family as the main breadwinner. The emphasis for these values was born from mythification of certain characteristics and the desire to support other values for practical purposes. These purposes

ranged from the need for independent men to drive cattle and push the Western frontier forward to the desire to exclude groups of people on the basis that they did not conform to the expectations of society. Independence and individuality were presented as both natural and desirable in Western men and supported by popular culture and official institutions.

### 2.4. Physicality

A major part of hegemonic masculinity from Victorian through Western American masculinities has been physicality, although there have been different ways to interpret it. As explained previously, in Victorian masculinity aggression was supposed to be an innate part of being a man, although undesirable and preferably suppressed. The shift to American Western masculinity, on the other hand, also perceived aggression and toughness as something natural but advocated for embracing it. This perceived naturalness of certain masculine traits, whether in a good or a bad way, has persisted into modern gender ideology as well. This section begins with outlining the present-day view of the relationship between masculinity and physicality and continues with analyzing physicality in the context of American Western masculinity. I aim to explain how physicality was viewed in American Western masculinity with examples, starting from physical drives and urges, continuing with how the male body was seen as an asset on the frontier and was thus emphasized, and concludes by analyzing how some physical work was nevertheless seen as unmanly.

According to Connell,

> Arguments that masculinity should change often come to grief, not on counter-arguments reform, but on the belief that men *cannot* change, so it is futile or even

> dangerous to try. Mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life. . . . True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action (e.g. men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action (e.g. men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority). (45, emphasis original)

These supposed innate biological drives have been used to justify male hierarchy and masculine traits in both popular use and the attempts to explain human society by evolution in sociobiology. According to sociobiological theorists,

> men's bodies are the bearers of a natural masculinity produced by the evolutionary pressures that have borne down upon the human stock. We inherit with our masculine genes tendencies to aggression, family life, competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, promiscuity and forming men's clubs. (Connell 46)

While I do not agree with these claims, they have been essential in the forming of hegemonic masculinities such as American Western masculinity. The view of masculine aggressiveness as natural was at least partially influenced by the mythification of the frontier life in dime novels – after all, stories without (often violent) conflict were somewhat hard to sell in mass produced literature. Thus, the image of a justifiably aggressive (such as one who strikes back against violent criminals) male protagonist became an example of prime masculinity and promoted aggressiveness. In addition, as explained earlier, some of the American Western hegemonic masculinity was built around character myths around historical figures like Custer

and Roosevelt, both recognized for their skill in warfare. Equating military skill and bravery with manliness further helped perpetuate the idea of aggressiveness as a masculine trait. Understanding how claims like this have been explained and justified through history is crucial in the analysis of how Proulx sees these stereotypes and criticizes them in her writing.

The promotion of aggression was also seen as an opposing force to softness, which was considered a threat to hegemonic masculinity, as argued by Roosevelt: “the least touch of flabbiness, of unhealthy softness . . . [it] would have meant ruin for this nation” (qtd. in Moore 20). As described in section 2.2., parents were advised to encourage wildness and aggressiveness in boys. Aggression and physicality were seen as masculine traits and promoted in favor of gentleness and emotionality in boys:

> While [fathers] taught both of them obedience, honesty and thrift, they stressed patience, kindness, and affection for girls; and courage, industry, loyalty, and perseverance for boys. They also discouraged their sons from crying or showing fear as they grew older and instilled in them the importance of maintaining their honor, even to the point of fighting. (Moore 45)

While kindness and affection were seen as positive traits, they were such only in feminine contexts. Emotionality and softness was frowned upon in boys, and considered unmasculine or even dangerous.

There is some justification beyond popular culture and character myths in how some of these ideas of masculinity formed in the context of American Western hegemonic masculinity. As mentioned earlier, both Victorian and American Western masculinities thought of physical strength, aggression and certain “untamedness” as innate to men. According to Ball,

tendencies of aggression were seen as an asset in the American West, at least when it served a social cause and was tamed sufficiently when returning to civilization (105–106). In Ball's view, the wild frontier was met with a "fight fire with fire" attitude, and Anglo-Saxon ambition and aggression were key tools in subduing the beasts and men of the wilderness – according to the public narrative, anyway (106). On the frontier, men were allowed to let their free, savage nature run its course to benefit society at large before the return to organized society, but of course, only white aggressors were welcome back in society to apply their skills in other fields, as Hispanic and Native American men were deemed too impervious to civilization and culture (Ball 105–106). In line with the sociobiological theories described by Connell, men were expected to be aggressive and ambitious in business and politics to achieve their goals, but the more savage side was to be tamed by either female influence or lawful use of force (Ball 106). Similar to the claims of Chinese unmanliness described in the previous section, hegemonic masculinity justified the exclusion of groups of people on the basis of nonconformity to hegemony, although in this case the same traits that were encouraged in one group of people were used to persecute another.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the importance of the physical male body became significantly more pronounced, and obsession over bodybuilding and strength emerged (Ball 99). According to Peck, in industries such as mining "Determining which forms of risk were morally acceptable and manly had become crucial to middle-class men's ongoing project of self-definition in the nineteenth century" (73). In other words, risking one's biggest work asset and source of masculinity, body, portrayed the masculine qualities of competitiveness and confidence. In the medical field, pseudosciences linking physical proportions, virility, morality, virtue, and manliness caught wind. According to Ball, in addition

to the separation from Victorian social mores, much of this had to do with eugenics and the attempt to prove the supposed racial superiority of Anglos over other groups of people (99–100). However, in this study the emphasis is more on the importance of physical strength and prowess over supposed racial differences, as there is little discussion about race in the short stories.

While in some areas of society male body is or has been an actual asset – such as in heavy industry especially in pre-modern times (Connell 55) and the expansion of the frontier – most of the time the *perceived* differences between masculine and feminine bodies have been used to justify certain divisions in society, instead of actual biological reasons. There is no consistency between different requirements for the use of male body, either; during World War II, service in the field and working on home front war industry were seen as unequal, seemingly making the uniform, rather than the body, to be the requirement for wartime manhood (Basso 186–187). In this example, two kinds of physical work – one where the threat of death of physical harm was present and one where it was not – were seen as unequal, despite both utilizing the male body. The difference was which of the works conformed best to hegemonic masculinity and fulfilled most of its requirements. In this case, the bravery and duty of the soldier were more important than the worker's physical skill and strength on the home front.

Another instance where the maleness of the masculine body came into question was sexuality. In the cowboy culture, "their involvement with the women both symbolized their masculinity and . . . was a marker of their virility" (Moore 156). As most of the men were not wealthy or respectable enough, or simply did not have time for relationships with "respectable women", most of their relationships were with prostitutes. Compared to the

ranch owners, or cattlemen, the cowboys were also “far more at ease with women of lower social status than they were with the ranchers’ wives and daughters” (Moore 156). The men were more comfortable interacting with the prostitutes as they felt the women were closer to them in terms of social class, but the prostitutes also “occupied a middle ground: they were women but did not merit the respect they gave other women” (Moore 160). The cowboys felt that involvement with women was necessary for them to demonstrate their masculinity (in addition to their physical desires), but also considered the women as not respectable. The same interaction of money for sex that the cowboys felt as beneficial as a demonstration of their manhood was also seen as degrading to the prostitutes’ womanhood. The cowboys “did not see them as ideal women . . . as the ideal women lived in the private sphere of home” whereas “prostitutes operated in the public sphere” (Moore 158). As such, the women who engaged in sex with the men were seen as non-ideal or even non-respectable, while the sex itself was seen as respectable for the men.

Certain gender roles seemed to be set in stone, especially regarding gendered work. Garceau explains that in the twilight years of open-range cattle driving and the beginning of permanent ranching, women began entering the enterprise, although only from the fringes at first (150). The first steps of ranch work divided the labor into masculine “outside work” and feminine “inside work” – in practice, physical and household work (Garceau 150). However, these roles blurred as the time went on, and women regularly started participating in physical work such as herding sheep, baling hay, and driving plows, which was justified by viewing women participating in “‘outside work’ as a form of service to family, a contribution to the success of the ranch” (Garceau 150). However, the all-male subculture of cowboy work continued in the strict gendered separation of cattle work, or cowpunching (Garceau 151).

While women herded sheep, trained horses, and drove oxen, the herding and branding of cattle was so strictly masculine that even the rare women who worked in the field were accepted only when they were not considered women anymore:

> Indeed, the few women who worked as cowhands were not accepted as women. They were incorporated into cowcamp only as quasi-men, indistinguishable from the 'fellers.' . . . Work with cattle had become so associated with masculinity that the few women who rode herd found themselves reclassified as males – cow'boy', 'fellow,' 'boys,' or 'fellers'". (Garceau 151–152)

Just as working as cowboys made the few female cowboys be seen as men, some work was seen as too unmasculine for men. According to Moore, "As many cows as there were around them, few men would actually milk a cow unless they had no other choice, as they considered milking to be women's work" (147). This gendered division of labor was so ingrained in men that some chose to rather live without certain farming products such as eggs, milk, or butter when there were not women around, rather than to do the collecting, milking or butter churning themselves (Moore 147).

Victorian and American Western masculinities had similar views on how the male body affected masculine behavior, but their approach to how this influence should be handled was different. While Victorian masculinity called for the suppression of masculine urges which were seen as barbaric, American Western masculinity encouraged the seemingly natural aggression, bravery and physical strength when it was put to good use. These innate values apart from pure strength were also seen as assets in fields such as business and politics. The emphasis on bodies as assets caused taking calculated bodily risks to be seen as a sign of manliness. Due to this, more dangerous jobs were seen as more masculine, especially ones

where aggression and bravery could be utilized, such as in the military. Certain kinds of jobs were also seen as innately masculine or feminine, which caused women working masculine jobs to be seen as men while men avoided doing feminine jobs entirely. The connection between the male body and masculinity was also influenced by pseudoscientific theories connecting the supposed moral superiority of Anglos to their superior bodies. These theories and values supported by hegemonic masculinity made the American Western masculine man strong, brave, and justifiably aggressive but also able to curb his aggressiveness in a civilized context.

### 2.5. Masculinity and its Others

For “true” hegemonic masculinity (or the idea of it, as it rarely actualizes in practice) to exist, there needs to be a way to distinguish it from femininity and “wrong” masculinities. As explained previously by Arnold and Brady, masculinity is often figured relationally to other masculinities and femininities (3). In addition to a relational separation, the separation of everything not considered hegemonic masculinity manifests in practice as well. On occasion, this happens due to outside forces, such as the Victorian moral code leading to the all-male cowboy culture, but more often this separation occurs internally. In addition to the separation between the masculine and the feminine, different spheres of masculinities are often separated, such as rural and urban masculinities. This section begins with analyzing hegemonic masculinity and its separation from non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities as it is viewed in contemporary gender studies, and continues with how such separation was seen in the context of American Western masculinity.

The difference between "correct", i.e., hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities is how well they conform to visible and behavioral markers of hegemonic masculinity. Saco talks about *masculinity as signs*, an approach that

> assumes that film, television, and other media help to constitute gender difference, rather than simply reflect or represent that difference. Consequently, researchers in this area sometimes speak in terms of the *(re)presentations of gender*. (25, emphasis original)

According to this approach, "gender differences are symbolic categories for ascribing subjectivities onto human beings. . . . These signs (e.g., style of clothing, mannerisms, and so on) are coded as either feminine or masculine, and they help to mark a human being as a gendered subject" (Saco 25). In other words, certain qualities are considered masculine due to how media and popular culture approach them. Failure to conform to these given qualities is seen as unmasculine, or "wrong" kind of masculine. Conforming to these symbolic categories is a constant struggle to maintain an appearance of masculinity, despite "true" masculinity being impossible to attain – as Denski and Sholle put it: "Since the reality of gender is created through sustained social performances, the suggestion is that the idea of a true or essential masculinity or femininity is an illusion" (47).

Masculine and feminine spheres of influence in the American West were commonly thought to be distinct and naturally separated, such as "outside work" and "inside work" discussed earlier, but sometimes this separation was enforced, too. The reasoning behind the foundation of the Boy Scouts organization was to masculinize growing boys into men with the deliberate influence of an imagined wilderness. The separation of boys from their mothers and sisters also had another added benefit; limiting the influence women had on boys. It was

feared that extended contact with the opposite sex in urban environments would feminize the boys, so the Boy Scouts movement helped with the hegemonic masculinization by both reinforcing masculine traits and eliminating the influence of feminine ones (Connell 195). E. T. Seton, the man behind the Boy Scouts in America, explicitly stated that the goal of his organization was to "combat the system that has turned such a large proportion of our robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood into a lot of flat-chested cigarette smokers, with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality" (Clark and Nagel 119).

Despite this attempt to limit female influence, separating men and women altogether was too much. According to Johnson, men within male-majority societies felt like they were lacking a vital ingredient in making a society feel like one (45). Although a community of male workers could live and work together for extended periods of time and form their own settlements, the feeling of "the social" was perceived as a womanly construction (45). This notion of women being the civilizing force in society and the ones that helped men transform from savage beasts to civilized members of society is not limited to all-male societies, as it was also used to oppose the Chinese immigration by claiming that the immigrants were not able to adapt to this American core value (Leong 134).

The cowboy culture placed great emphasis on different masculinities, and not everyone was accepted in a group of cowboys. Hazing new cowboys "was not just for fun but was necessary to see if the new man could do the job" (Moore 65). The cowboys worked hard to determine whether new men actually had the potential to become proper cowboys, or if they were determined to remain "tenderfeet". *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a tenderfoot as "an inexperienced beginner" or "a newcomer . . . especially one not hardened to frontier or outdoor life" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tenderfoot). The cowboys

commonly tested the newcomers' skills in areas such as horseback riding, roping and navigation in unfamiliar terrain (Moore 65), but also in more intangible qualities. Some examples include pulling jokes on the tenderfoot and watching their reaction: "When we pulled a shenanigan everybody laughed like it was a joke, but back of that laughing and carrying on every mother's son was watching the tenderfoot" (Moore 65). The cowboys were fond of pulling pranks on each other and the tenderfeet (Moore 130–132), partially to find out whether the tenderfoot was a good fit for the group and could handle a joke (Moore 65). The situation was different with newcomers that did not try to adapt to the environment, who were called "dudes" to separate them from other tenderfeet. According to Moore,

> A dude was usually a tourist or sojourner in the West from out East or abroad and did not plan to settle permanently. He did not bring his family and he did not try to adapt to Western ways, assuming his own to be superior (just as Westerners considered their ways superior). Westerners in general tended to have a hostile attitude toward foreigners and Easterners, who they lumped together. . . . Westerners believed that if such "effete weaklings" dared to come out West with the real men, they deserved whatever they got. (131)

Dudes and tenderfeet represent non-hegemonic masculinities on the frontier, and thus faced opposition. Their failure to conform to hegemony was a matter of culture, skill and attitude, but not necessarily of origin, as a tenderfoot could prove himself equal to other cowboys.

In this thesis, a decision has been made to analyze Annie Proulx's short stories through the lens of American Western masculinity. The three major themes analyzed are independence and individuality, physicality, and separation from "other". Much of the American Western masculinity is deliberately constructed, such as in the cases of the cowboy

myth and Boy Scouts. This is due to hegemonic masculinity, the institutionalized and organizationally driven idea of a “true” masculinity, which often describes what masculinity should be like rather than what it actually is. Many of the attributes linked with American Western masculinity were constructed by hegemonic masculinity to either drive emerging masculinities into a certain direction, or to highlight the perceived lack of masculinity an undesired group of people had.

## 3. Analysis

In this section, the representations of masculinity in the three short stories selected are analyzed. The analysis of the stories will be organized by the themes discussed in the theory section rather than by analyzing the stories one after another. This is due to the stories being significantly different in length. In addition, this helps to keep the analysis consistent, as all themes can be found in all stories, but not in equal amount. A story-based approach, instead of a theme-based one, would likely make the analysis too complicated or confusing. The themes analyzed in the stories are independence and individuality, physicality, and separation from other. Some topics analyzed under these themes include traits associated with American Western masculinity, such as emphasis on skill and strength, disregard for non-hegemonic masculinities and need for independence. Due to the nature of the short stories, the sections will have different emphases; some topics will be addressed at length while others will be briefly mentioned, but the major themes will be analyzed as thoroughly as possible.

### 3.1. Independence and Individuality

The themes of independence and individuality are strongly present in the short stories, ranging from individuals to the social level. Some of this is due to many of the stories' characters working in either farming or ranching and thus depending mostly on themselves, but masculinity plays a significant role as well. The most important topic analyzed under the title of independence and individuality is the need to get by without relying on help from others both financially and physically. It should be noted that this sense of individuality is different from the separation between hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic or

"weaker" masculinities and femininities, which will be discussed further in the section 3.3. Some overlap is bound to occur due to both separations having their roots in notions of masculinity, but an attempt will be made to separate the analyses. This section of the analysis is divided into three sections, one for each short story, and progresses by first providing examples of the theme in each story and then analyzing the significance of said examples in the context of American Western masculinity. In this section, I will argue that the characters in the stories are generally hesitant to ask for help, even in situations that threaten their life. While cooperation is appreciated between people working toward the same goal, the men are generally expected to not ask for help in individual tasks. Financial self-sufficiency is also appreciated to the extent that many of the characters would much rather live in poverty than accept financial assistance.

"The Half-Skinned Steer" uses the theme of independence and individuality as the main driving force as well as the biggest conflict of the story, since a stubborn sense (and need) of self-sufficiency drives the protagonist into one questionable decision after another. In "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" the themes can be seen both in the masculine Dunmire family and Ras Tinsley, who clings to his self-sufficiency even after his horrible accident. "Pair a Spurs", the longest one of the stories, has the themes sprinkled throughout the story in many different forms, ranging from individual stubbornness to a communal sense of separation from the rest of the world.

### 3.1.1. "The Half-Skinned Steer": The Angry Stubbornness of an Old Man

The protagonist of "The Half-Skinned Steer", Mero, is an old man who receives the news that his brother Rollo has passed away and decides to make the journey to his funeral by car.

Although the exact distance between Mero's home and his brother's ranch in Wyoming is not known, it is long enough to warrant a surprise in his late brother's daughter-in-law:

> [Mero on the phone with the woman] He intended to drive. Of course he knew how far it was. Had a damn fine car, Cadillac, always drove Cadillacs, Gislaved tires, interstate highways, excellent driver, never had an accident in his life knock on wood, four days, he would be there by Saturday afternoon. He heard the amazement in her voice, knew she was plotting his age, figuring he had to be eighty-tree, a year or so older than Rollo, figuring he must be dotting around on a cane too, drooling the tiny days away, she was probably touching her own faded hair. He flexed his muscular arms, bent his knees, thought he could dodge an emu. He would see his brother dropped in a red Wyoming hole. ("Half-Skinned" 21)

This kind of overconfident sense of self-reliance continues throughout the story, despite the events on the journey wearing him out and highlighting his old age and failing body. This is very much in line with the quote by President Roosevelt in 2.2. (Moore 205), praising the cowboys' daring, endurance, and stubborn refusal to accept defeat. The journey seems to only bolster Mero's sense of independence, however unwarranted. Most of the time, he explains his reckless actions to himself with a certain sense of earning his lot in the world through his years of experience; he has made it this far with hard work, so he is allowed some impulsiveness. This is especially clear in situations where his ego takes a blow, such as when he gets into a traffic accident and buys a new car to continue the journey: "He could do that if he liked, buy cars like packs of cigarettes and smoke them up. . . . Damn, he'd buy another for the return trip. He could do what he wanted" ("Half-Skinned" 27). In the end, the way Mero

responds to misfortunes by becoming more confident to the point of irrationality is what seals his fate. Towards the end of his journey, the last section of the road before his brother's ranch is cut off by bad weather, but this is not enough to deter him: "The wind's blowing pretty hard. They're saying it could maybe snow. In the mountains. Her voice sounded doubtful. I'll keep an eye on it, he said" ("Half-Skinned" 29). In 2.3., an important part of cowboy masculinity was described as one's ability to control their working conditions and making independent decisions (Moore 21). These qualities are important for Mero, too. He has made the journey so far in his own terms for the most part, and wants to keep doing so despite hardships.

Mero's stubbornness to continue the journey and make it in time for the funeral causes him to make several crucial mistakes. He appears to be a level-headed and considering person in better circumstances, but the misfortunes of the journey have clouded his rationality:

> He dozed half an hour in the wind-rocked car, woke shivering and cramped. He wanted to lie down. He thought perhaps he could put a flat rock under the goddamn tire. Never say die, he said, feeling around the passenger-side floor for the flashlight in his emergency bag, then remembering the wrecked car towed away, the flares and car phone and AAA card and flashlight and matches and candle and Power Bars and bottle of water still in it, and probably now in the damn tow-driver's damn wife's car. ("Half-Skinned" 34)

The way Mero handles his situation by becoming ever-increasingly more stubborn and resorting to more radical measures rather than slowing down to think, is to him first and foremost a matter of masculinity. It appears that Mero's act of leaving his family ranch in the

hands of his brother (and later foreign investors) weighs on him and causes him to question his independence. The call from his late brother's daughter-in-law causes him to vent the frustrations that have piled up in him over the years, as his actions on the journey appear to conflict with his typical, routine-oriented lifestyle.

On a surface level, Mero represents ideals of American Western masculinity regarding independence: pushing on without asking or accepting help, relying on one's skill and strength, and refusing to accept defeat. The risks he takes with choosing to go on the long journey alone, as well as pushing on despite the dangerous weather, are also ways of taking control of his own life and proving his masculinity, as described in 2.3. The author criticizes this kind of approach in her writing by highlighting Mero's poor decision-making stemming from his need to prove his masculinity. Mero is no longer physically capable or skilled enough to push forward on his journey and too stubborn to consider stopping for weather or asking for help. While the obstacles on the journey highlight the problems with his approach, he leans on his masculine stubbornness and individuality twice as hard, leading to his likely death.

### 3.1.2. "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water": Extreme Loyalty to Family and Need for Physical Independence

"People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" starts with the description of Isaac "Ice" Dunmire, a Texan man moving into Laramie, Wyoming in 1908. The Victorian puritan ideas leading to cattle herders consisting of young single men can be seen in the situation Isaac finds himself in: "Although he had a wife, Naomi, and five sons back in Burnet County, for the sake of a job punching cows he swore to the manager of the Six Pigpen Ranch that he was single" ("People"

98). After founding the Rocking Box ranch, having his wife and children move in, and growing his family with more children, Ice finds himself a single father due to his wife divorcing him for another man. The society of the story encourages and expects autonomy, in line with the romanticization of the frontier as described in section 2.3. Ice Dunmire founds his own ranch, symbolically taking part in the taming of the mythical frontier, which earns him the respect of the society.

The roughness of the ranch life drives Ice to raise the boys as helping hands first and children second, at best:

> Boys were money in the bank in that country and Ice brought them up to fill his labor needs. They got ropes for Christmas, a handshake each birthday and damn a cake. When they were still young buttons they could sleep out alone on the plain, knees raftered up in the rain, tarp drawn over their heads listening to the water trickle past their ears. (“People” 99)

Ice grows the boys to appreciate both cowboy and cattleman masculinities, as described in the beginning of section 2.3. by Moore (21). Skill in work is expected of them and they are taught to be independent, although the success of the ranch is always more important than their personal preferences. This way of growing up appears to rub on the boys, as the solitary life keeps them from reaching out too far from the ranch. Out of the nine boys, only three find other means of occupation than working on the ranch, and only two of them move away permanently. It appears that the boys’ upbringing in a masculine, physicality-first environment has caused them to view relationships as unimportant, or at least as less important than work, family and self-sufficiency: “Pet and Kemmy married and set up off the Rocking Box but the others stayed at home and single, finding ceaseless work and an occasional group visit to

a Laramie whorehouse enough "("People" 101). To the boys, family comes first in every aspect in their life; they even visit the brothel as a group, although it is unclear whether this is due to convenience in transportation and scheduling. The Laramie society clearly values skills and individuality, as the Dunmires are revered for their experience in ranching: "By the droughty depression of the 1930s the Dunmires were in everything in that happened, their opinions based in deep experience . . . and if Jaxon whistled 'Shuffle Off to Buffalo', in a month everybody was whistling that tune" ("People" 101). Horm Tinsley is equally pitied for his lack of skill in stock business, but his social and artistic skills still make him a respected member of the society.

The short story also brings up the need for individual independence, especially in situations where one's physical ability is compromised. Horm's son Rasmussen "Ras" Tinsley is an adventurous young man who leaves his home at the age of 16 and returns home years later mute and damaged both mentally and physically. Much of Ras's struggles with the physical aspects of masculinity will be covered later in this thesis. Despite his disabilities, or possibly due to them, Ras feels a need to be on the move: "He couldn't keep dropping everything to take Ras for a ride. Every day now the boy was writing the same message: I NED GIT OTE A WILE" ("People" 107). Horm ends up buying Ras back the boy's old horse, Bucky. Ras is able to ride the horse independently and ends up losing himself to his newfound freedom:

> Within a month Ras was out all day and all night, then away for two or three days, god knows where, elusive, slipping behind rocks, galloping long miles on the dry, dusty grass, sleeping in willows and nests of weeds, a half-wild man with no talk and who knew what thoughts. ("People" 108)

The independence Ras regains seems to be the only thing that matters to him; After Horm confiscates his saddle due to the boy getting into trouble, Ras begins riding bareback. The freedom of movement and independence seems to be the only way for Ras to express his masculinity (apart from his sexual misadventures, which will be discussed later), and his father seems to agree: "'Why don't you get your goddamn windmill out a my yard?' said Horm Tinsley. 'He was hurt but he's a man like anybody else.' . . . A firm man would have taken the horse from him. But Horm Tinsley hesitated" ("People" 112–113). Ras asserts his masculinity by first taking the risk of leaving his home at a young age, and later by making whatever independent decisions he can and choosing his environment and activities. Horm supports his son's attempts at regaining his masculinity in the beginning, as he also needs to see the man still left in Ras's disabled body. In the end, Horm's firm belief that his newfound independence does good for the boy is what causes Ras's likely death.

Proulx criticizes the masculine need for independence and individuality in different ways in the two families of the story. The Dunmires are an example of exaggerated supermasculinity, with the boys growing up as bronco-busting cowboys with little regard for their own safety: "Jaxon, the oldest, was a top bronc buster but torn up so badly inside by the age of twenty-eight his underwear were often stained with blood" ("People" 100). The family's masculine lifestyle is exaggerated to the point of ridiculousness, and their lives are described as needlessly rough. The Tinsleys, on the other hand, represent a need to prove one's masculinity in opposing circumstances, similar to Mero in "The Half-Skinned Steer". Ras first moves away from to pursue independent adventures and ends up in a car accident that disables him both mentally and physically. As he heals and has a chance to act independently again, he clings to it and does everything in his power to keep making independent decisions

and thus prove his masculinity. His father is sympathetic to Ras, but the uncontrolled independence combined with Ras's limited understanding of circumstances lead to him being mutilated by the Dunmires. While Ras is unable to understand the full extent of his actions and their consequences, Horm decides to overlook the risks in favor of seeing his son as a man again.

### 3.1.3. "Pair a Spurs": Need to Prove Oneself in the Masculine World

The opening paragraph of "Pair a Spurs" summarizes the attitudes of the society in the story: "It showed a difference of philosophies, the outsiders ignorant that the state's unwritten motto, *take care a your own damn self*, extended to fauna and livestock and to them" ("Pair" 149, emphasis original). While most of the characters living in and around the town of Signal have at least polite relations with each other, the state's unofficial motto matters above all. Some of the ranchers co-operate in the tourism business or help each other in small matters, but in terms of financial wellbeing, nobody is in a good enough position to assist others monetarily. The unwritten motto is also much in line with the values introduced in 2.3., although more hostile than simple encouragement for independence and self-sufficiency. The motto reminds of the anti-immigration laws targeting Chinese people in the late nineteenth century, focusing on how self-sufficiency and independence are something a masculine man must achieve, rather than to just strive for.

The hard life of a rancher does not steer many people away from the profession in the story, however. On the contrary, it seems like a matter of pride to some people, as many of the characters will rather suffer the hardships and insecurity of the lifestyle than switch careers. This is partly due to them growing up in the ranching life:

> Scrope, forty years old, had lived on the Coffeepot all his life and suffered homesickness when he went to the feed store in Signal. He'd acquired a morbid passion for the ranch as a child when he believed he could hear its grass mocking him. . . . Later [his parents] lied to him about such inconsequentialities as the names of weeds, the freshness of the butter on the saucer, how much school a ranch boy needed – not much, his father said, then complained years later that Car had not become a banker or insurance man. ("Pair" 151)

Car Scrope, one of the main characters of the story, spends his whole life on the Coffeepot ranch and wants nothing else in his life, even when the ranch starts to deteriorate and crumble, along with his health. Both him and his parents have an appreciation for the independent ranch life to the extent that they forego education in favor of the lifestyle.

Out of all three stories, "Pair a Spurs" has the most overt themes of cowboy myth. Texan actor Frank Fane buys the Box Hammerhandle ranch to get closer to the cowboy life: "The Muddyman place was renamed Galaxy Ranch. Frank Fane, the new owner, played a Jupiterean warlord in a science fiction television series but preferred the western theme in private life" ("Pair" 171). Frank Fane and his Texan crew seem to think of ranching as a much more masculine profession than the Wyoming residents, and a way to prove one's manliness. Since Texas was the birthplace of the modern cattle industry as well as the birthplace of the cowboy (Moore 1), it makes sense that the Texans have more romantic notions about the lifestyle than the Wyoming residents, especially considering that they have less experience in it. The masculine concerns are brought up in a discussion between Fane's foreman the experienced Mrs. Freeze: "Haul sounded doubtful. 'Well, I don't know. Never had a woman work for me.' 'You ain't spent much time in Wyomin. Half the hands is women nowadays and not paid near

as good as the men'" ("Pair" 178). The foreman, Haul Smith, ends up drowning in a flooding river due to his need to prove himself as a cowboy, at least according to Mrs. Freeze: "'There's Texas sense for you. He didn't need a cross water but he tried it anyway'" ("Pair" 183).

While the Wyoming residents keep up the ranching lifestyle out of stubbornness and a desire to keep to their decisions in face of hardships, the Texans have more romantic notions about the cowboy myth. This can be seen as an attempt of reclaiming lost masculinity, similarly to the late nineteenth century sense of overcivilization and the development of masculine myths. The Texans want to return to their perceived roots as open range cowboys, and reenact traditions connected with the lifestyle: "I'm losin two a the boys, goin on one a them damn historic cattle drive things they got worked up, drive longhorns through the traffic and sell rawhide hair ribbons" ("Pair" 178). Proulx criticizes the characters' need for independence at all costs, as Car Scrope becomes a demented husk of himself while still clinging to his ranch, even as others sell theirs. The Texans are portrayed as romantic fools at best, as they have no idea how to actually run a ranch and focus on superficial symbols of cowboy masculinity, resulting in the death of Haul Smith.

### 3.2. Physicality

In many of the stories, the characters place great emphasis on physicality, both in skill as well as pure strength, resilience, and agility. As has been discussed in this thesis in relation to individuality and independence, part of this is due to the environmental factors present in rural lifestyle. A certain level of physical strength and skill is necessary in farming and ranching, but the physicality in the stories extends farther than that, to the level where masculinity and physicality are intertwined; physicality itself is considered masculine, and a

man cannot be seen as masculine without proving his physicality. Apart from physical strength and skill, the theme is analyzed in relation to emotionality and sexuality. The emphasis on physicality over emotionality is prevalent in American Western masculinity, along with the acceptance and even expectancy of physical sexuality. As described in 2.4. by Moore, aggression and physicality to the point of fighting was seen as preferrable to kindness and emotionality (45). Sexual relations were also seen as expected and masculine in men, while the very same relations degraded women and made them less respectable. In the stories, most emotions of masculine characters are somewhat shunned in favor of physicality, and sexual relations are often treated as both expected and disposable. Sexually active woman are also talked about in a degrading manner in multiple occasions.

"The Half-Skinned Steer" portrays Mero's independent masculinity as being partly rooted in his emphasis on physicality. His stubbornness and aggression are also closely linked with physicality, and he appears to have little patience for emotions and softness. In "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" the Dunmire family is described as an extremely physical and resilient group, but also lacking in empathy, while the Tinsley family are almost completely opposite in this matter. Finally, "Pair a Spurs" emphasizes the masculine aspect of physicality with Mrs. Freeze and her problems with fitting in a society as a very physical woman. Car Scrope's failing health is also discussed, as much of his behavior is related to the way he approaches physicality and his old age. Themes of sexuality are also prevalent in the short story.

### 3.2.1. "The Half-Skinned Steer": What Happens When Physicality Fails

“The Half-Skinned Steer” describes Mero as a man who has lived through his life relying on his physical ability to the extent that he sees it as an unchanging fact. Interestingly, he does not see his physicality as an innate fact similarly to the common view in American Western masculinity, as described by Connell in 2.4. (45). Instead, he takes pride in his healthy lifestyle of vegetarian food and regular exercise: Mero imagines Rollo as a drooling old man reliant on a walking cane, clearly opposite to his own old yet fit body.

Mero places much of his trust on his physicality and ability to survive even as an elderly man. His decision to embark on the long journey to his brother’s funeral is affected by his perception of his physical wellbeing. Mero demonstrates a few times that his assuredness in his abilities is not unfounded, but the years have taken their toll:

> He drove slowly and steadily in a low gear; he had not forgotten how to drive a winter mountain. But the wind was up again, rocking and slapping the car, blotting out all but whipping snow and he was sweating with the anxiety of keeping to the road, dizzy with the altitude. (“Half-Skinned” 32)

Nevertheless, he does not let the realities of the situation slow him down and becomes increasingly reckless and physical with his problem-solving. This is partly due to his situation becoming more desperate, as his rational thinking skills start to blur. For example, he fails to fully grasp the situation as he locks himself out of his car in a snowstorm, resorting to physicality at the expense of rationality:

> He picked up a big, two-handed rock and smashed it on the driver’s-side window, slipped his arm in through the hole, into the delicious warmth of the car . . . and had he not kept limber with exercise and nut cutlets and leafy green vegetables

> he never could have reached the keys. His fingers grazed and then grasped the keys and he had them. *This is how they sort the men out of the boys*, he said aloud. As his fingers closed on the keys he glanced at the passenger door. The lock button stood high. ("Half-Skinned" 36, emphasis added)

The way Mero pushes forward through problems with physicality leaves room for only one emotion: anger. The first time this happens is when he crashes his car in a traffic circle: "His first thought was to blame Iowa and those who lived in it" ("Half-Skinned" 27). Mero is not hurt badly by the accident, but the incident seems to spark in him a sort of stubborn defiance that flares into anger with every mishap that follows. He is becoming aware of the severity of his situation, but this does not help with his mood: "He felt himself slip back, the calm of eighty-three years sheeted off him like water, replaced by a young man's scalding anger at a fool world and the fools in it. What a damn hard time it had been to hit the road" ("Half-Skinned" 29).

In the end, Mero's approach to treat every piling problem with physicality or violence leads to his car stuck in a ditch and him walking through the blizzard with sardonic hope of a safe haven in the weather: "He dismissed the ten-mile distance to the Banner place: it might not be that far, or maybe they had pulled the ranch closer to the main road. A truck might come by. Shoes slipping, coat buttoned awry, he might find the mythical Grand Hotel in the sagebrush" ("Half-Skinned" 37). The ending of the story is left unclear but judging by the fact that Mero starts wondering in a blizzard while dehydrated, hungry and exhausted, it is likely that his strength fails him and he dies. The contrast to the beginning of the story is massive, as he is initially described as a thoughtful, balanced person. It appears that his need to prove

his strength and manliness leads to him relying on such qualities to the point where he abandons his best skills and perishes as the result.

Mero demonstrates aggression, perseverance and unyielding strength in his actions, all qualities that are encouraged in American Western masculinity. In Proulx's writing, however, these qualities are only detrimental to him. As he pushes on, relying on aggressiveness instead of rationality, his bad decisions begin to pile up. The author makes it explicit that Mero sees his shortcomings as lack of masculinity, and his solution is always rooted in proving his manliness, as seen in the quote where he breaks the window of his unlocked car.

### 3.2.2. "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water": Exaggerated Physicality Meets Broken Physicality

The description of the Dunmire boys' upbringing summarizes the attitudes common to the whole family: "They grew into bone-seasoned, tireless workers accustomed to discomfort, took their pleasure in drink, cigarettes, getting work done" ("People" 99). The family holds physical work in high regard but seem to lack empathy or emotional skills. Common to the short stories analyzed in this thesis, the family's attitudes are affected by the situation they find themselves in, as the Rocking Box ranch is barely scraping by even with the effort of the whole family combined. Their attitudes are not completely explained by their environment, however, since Horm Tinsley is in a similar situation but is a kind and compassionate man. In this section, the attributes and attitudes of the two families will be contrasted.

The two families of the story represent two ends of a spectrum of aggression and softness, which were described as opposing forces by President Roosevelt as quoted by

Moore (20). The Dunmire boys' physical prowess and resilience is explicitly stated as extraordinary, even in the rural community where strength and resilience are requirements for the lifestyle:

> Their endurance of pain was legendary. When a section of narrow mountain trail broke away under Marion's horse, the horse falling with him onto rocks below, the animal's back broken and Marion's left leg, he shot the horse, splinted his own leg with some yucca stalks and his wild rag, whittled a crutch from the limb he shot off a scrub cedar, and in three days hopped twenty miles to the Shiverses' place, asked for a drink of water, swallowed it, pivoted on the cedar crutch, and began to hop toward the home ranch, another seven miles east, before George Shivers cajoled him into a wagon. Shivers saw then what he missed before – Marion had carried his heavy stock saddle the distance. ("People" 99–100)

Marion pushes through the pain with the kind of Anglo-Saxon aggression and physicality that was admired when put to good use, such as during the settlement of the frontier. Contrary to the description of such beneficial aggression as described in 2.4., however, the Dunmires do not tone down their aggressiveness when interacting with "civilized" society. Instead, they are described as aggressive protectors of the society, their skill and aggression held in high regard: "the Dunmires were in everything that happened, their opinions based on deep experience . . . they ran off hobos and gypsies . . . and they ran that country because there were eight of them and Ice and they were of one mind" ("People" 101).

The Tinsley family, on the other hand, are called "a different kind" ("People" 101). Mr. Tinsley "was tolerated and even liked for his kindly manner and skill playing the banjo and the

fiddle . . . though most regarded him with contemptuous pity for his loose control of home affairs and his coddling of a crazy wife" ("People" 102). While kindness and non-physical skills are respected in the society, Mr. Tinsley is still shunned for his home life; the family is not completely under his control, and he is seen as too soft on his wife. This is also seen in the way Horm is unable to stop Ras from going on horse rides on Bucky, even as he realizes the danger of unlimited freedom combined with his son's disabilities. In the end, Horm Tinsley fails in protecting his son from the Dunmires, as they castrate Ras with a dirty knife. The Dunmire family keeps acting like they always have, removing unwanted elements of society with violence and aggression at the expense of softer, less manly people.

Physical prowess, aggression, and skill are linked closely with masculinity in the story. This becomes apparent in the description of the Dunmire boys' upbringing: "They were brass-nutted boys, sinewy and tall, nothing they like better than to kick the frost out of a horse in the early morning. 'Sink them shitting spurs into his lungs, boy!' screamed Ice at a kid on a snorty bronc. 'Be a man'" ("People" 99). While the skill of riding a bucking horse is respected, it must be done in a masculine, aggressive way, too. Another side of the physically demanding work is the utilitarian diet the family eats: "They ate without talk, champing meat. There were no salads or vegetables beyond potatoes or sometimes cabbage" ("People" 110). The diet consisting of mostly meat is an indicator of masculine lifestyle taken to an extreme. As described by Garceau and Moore in 2.4., cattle work was seen as the most masculine work imaginable, to the extent that women that did cattle work were seen as men, too (Garceau 151–152, Moore 147). On the other hand, certain types of work such as milking were seen as too feminine for men, and many men would rather go without milk or eggs than milk a cow or keep chickens. The Dunmires focus on the masculine cattle work to the extent that their diet

becomes extremely one-sided. On the other hand, Horm Tinsley fails to achieve the masculine status of a rancher, as his "failure as a stockman was recognized" ("People" 102). Instead, he focuses on gentler, less masculine farm work: "I don't do no ranchin. Pretty well out a the sheep business, never did run cattle much. I just do some truck gardenin, bees" ("People" 111). Nevertheless, he understands the meaning of physicality for his son's sense of masculinity, and buys his old horse back: "He thought the boy could ride. It would do him good to ride the plain. It would do them all good" ("People" 107).

Most of the Dunmire boys have a materialistic view toward sexual relations, as we saw in 3.1.2. This is likely due to their father's attitude toward sex as a means to an end or one-sided pleasure, as described at the beginning of the story: "The five boys slept in one [bed] and in the other Ice quickly begot on Naomi another and another kid as fast as the woman could stand to make them. . . . By 1913, ridden hard and put away dirty, looking for relief, she went off with a cook-pan tinker and left Ice the nine boys" ("People" 99). Most of the brothers view sex as a transaction and have no problems paying for it, apart from Pet and Kemmy, who are married. The eldest brother, Jaxon, has a different but equally nonattached solution to his physical needs:

> Jaxon did not go on these excursions, claiming he found plenty of what he needed on his travels to remote ranches. "Some a them women can't hardly wait until I get out a the truck," he said. "They'll put their hand right on you soon's you open the door. Like our ma, I guess," he sneered. ("People" 101)

On the basis of Jaxon's comment it seems as if their father, Ice, has described their mother as a cheater, likely due to him being angry at her for her leaving him for another man. This bitter memory of Naomi has seemingly left most of the boys with a questionable attitude toward

the opposite sex, with a possible exception of the married Pet and Kemmy. The boys are in line with cowboy masculinity, as described by Moore (156). They see sexuality as natural and desirable for themselves but critique the same women they have sex with for being too open with their sexuality. They also think of their mother as an unrespectable woman, comparing her divorce with the Laramie prostitutes. This is in line with cowboy masculinity as described by Moore in 2.4. (158). The boys' mother exits the domestic sphere and is too liberal with her sexuality, and thus deserves no respect.

Ras also looks for a way to express his masculinity through sexuality. It is unclear how much the boy had had contact with women before his accident, but he certainly finds them interesting now:

> Hanson's girls were out hanging clothes and suddenly Ras was there on the grey horse, his hat pulled low, saying garbled things, and then as quickly gone. . . . Ras was gone six days and before he returned the sheriff came by in a new black Chevrolet with a star painted white on the side and said Ras had showed himself to a rancher's wife way the hell down in Tie Siding, forty miles away. "He didn't have nothin she hadn't see before, but she didn't preciate the show and neither did her old man."( "People" 109)

While it was unclear before how much of his mental capacity Ras lost in the accident, it seems like his desire to meet with the opposite sex has regressed to pure physical level. His parents feel like Ras's actions are the result of normal, although repressed needs: "'Poor boy, he's got the masculine urges and can't do nothin about it.' There was a silence and she whispered, barely audible, 'You could take him down a Laramie. At night. Them houses'" ("People" 114). While Horm objects to the idea, Mrs. Tinsley interprets Ras's problems as purely physical with

equally simple solutions. This is very much in line with American Western masculinity's view of sexual desire as a healthy and normal attribute for young men, as described by Connell in 2.4. (45) Mrs. Tinsley sees sexual desires as innate to Ras, and thinks of prostitution as an acceptable vent for her son's frustration. In the end, both the Dunmires and Tinsleys arrive to the same conclusion independently; Ras's problems are caused by his masculine body, and the Dunmires solve the problem with violent castration.

The Dunmire family is an extreme example of American Western masculinity, especially in a physical context. Their contempt for feminine work, non-aggression and feminine sexuality are satirized to the extent that they are difficult to be seen as realistic characters. While Proulx criticizes the Dunmires for their extreme masculinity, the Tinsleys are seen in a sympathetic light, victimized by circumstances rather than their failures as people. The author does not take as clear stand when regarding physicality and sexuality, however; the characters seem to think that sexual desires are innate to masculine bodies, but the problems that arise from this notion are caused by the characters' other qualities, rather than sexuality itself.

### 3.2.3. "Pair a Spurs": (Too) Free Sexuality, Failing Health, and Life as a Masculine Woman

While physical masculinity and a strong body to go with it are expected of men in the rural Wyoming communities of the short stories, the opposite is true for women. If a woman wants the same treatment as a man, she needs to turn herself into a man. A woman who is capable of the same work as men is respected as an equal. The most prominent example of this is Mrs. Freeze:

> For twenty years the Coffeepot's foreman had been a woman, Mrs. Freeze, a crusty old whipcord who looked like a man, dressed like a man, talked like a man and swore like a man, but carried a bosom shelf, an irritation to her as it got in the way of her roping. The old man had hired her a few months before he crossed the divide and at first local talk was that he'd lost his mind. ("Pair" 153)

With time, Mrs. Freeze manages to solidify her position as a member of the masculine community, despite her sex. This is due to her skills in ranching and strength and resilience to match: "Haul said, 'She's a piece a work, ain't she?' 'Top hand. Kept Car Scrope's Pot cookin for years.' 'Tough as they come and good as a man'" ("Pair" 173). With the Wyoming dialect it is unclear whether the speaker means that Mrs. Freeze is *equal to* a man, or *good at being* a man, although the other comments about her in the story explain that people see her as a woman with equal skills and the same rights as men. This is in line with cowboy masculinity as described by Garceau in 2.4. when talking about female cowboys (151–152). In addition, the cowboy culture as described by Moore valued skill above all else, including race and economic background, meaning that almost anyone could prove themselves as a cowboy (71).

While Mrs. Freeze is an example of success in a masculine world through physical strength and skill, her employer Car Scrope is an example of failing physicality and masculinity due to old age, bad habits, and a drunk driving accident. Car has been fit and strong in his younger days, but seems to waste himself away with his self-destructive habits:

> His features, a chiseled small mouth, water-colored eyes, had a pinched look, but the muscled shoulders and deep chest advertised a masculine strength that had, over the years, attracted not a few women. His marriage, brief and childless, fell apart in half an hour. Then he looked at the moon through a bottle every night,

> watched pornographic videos, ate, in addition to large quantities of beef and pork, junk food from plastic sacks . . . (“Pair” 153)

As the story progresses, Car begins to suffer from dementia and his mental faculties start to fail. He becomes a prisoner of his own habits, and his age combined with the stress from his failing ranch and unsolved fights with people close to him lead him to ruin. When Car is introduced in the story, his wife has already divorced him, which seems to be the biggest reason behind his condition: “Car Scrope might not have had a hot meal in the two years since Jeri left. . . . Inez hardly knew where to look there were so many things wrong with the room and the people in it . . . She thought Car Scrope was on his way downhill” (“Pair” 164–165). As Car loses his skill at his job and his body begins to fail, he also starts losing his masculinity. At the end of the story, he is reduced to a shell of his former self:

> “He don’t bother nobody. Well, in a way he does. I mean, you’re right, he is crazy, but it ain’t wild or nothin. He just sets down by the creek all day long eatin tater chips.” . . . “What the hell does he do down there?” “Nothin. I told you. Don’t do no work. It wasn’t for me and Cody Joe the ranch’d go down the hole. He just sets there and stares at the water. Sometimes he dabbles his hand in it. Stuck his head down in it the other day.” (“Pair” 184)

As Car’s skills and strength weaken and thus threaten his masculinity, he turns to other physical means to regain it; sexuality and aggression. Car starts to make advances first toward his married neighbor, Inez, and after her death in an accident he turns his attention to his foreman, Mrs. Freeze. He is hardly subtle about his feelings, and approaches Inez aggressively:

> As soon as she was out of sight Scrope seized Inez's hand, pressed it against what Jeri had called a dead sardine that night . . . "You set a match to me," he said now to Inez. "Let's go do it." "For god's sake, Car. You out a your mind?" Her neck and cheeks flamed, she wrestled her hand loose. . . . "Come on, come on," he said, pulling her toward an open door. The rank animal was out of him and in the open. "Get ahold a yourself." "*You* get ahold," and he was rubbing her flat buttocks, pressing against her, the breath whistling in his nose. "Come on." ("Pair" 166)

His advances toward her continue in the same manner, and his way of approaching Mrs. Freeze with the same intentions is identical. The way his sexuality bursts out when his mental health starts to fail might be due to the conditions that led to the position he is introduced in; a divorced, porn-addicted, duty-neglecting old man. His wife, Jeri, divorced him after Car found her in bed with his old friend, John Wrench. Car and John had had a life of free physical sexuality together, which likely shaped their view toward intimate relations:

> In younger days they had traded dozens of girls, fresh-used and still swimming with the other's spermy juice – old steadies ready for the discard heap, new girls, Wrench's sister Kaylee – sometimes back and forth and back again, easy trades with no rancor. But Wrench, never married, missed the difference between those girls and a wife. ("Pair" 156)

The misogynistic way Car describes the women he and John had sex with explains much about his worldview. He sees sex as natural, but he also accepts female sexuality to an extent. When his wife's cheating is revealed, he is not angry at her due to his own actions: "Look, he wanted to say but could not, I done it a few times on the side too. Where would that get him?"

("Pair" 160). Car is a special case in the story, however, as he suffers from constant headaches and nausea due to his old car accident. His first incident of hypersexuality starts with a ferocious headache and irrational excitement combined with a "hot and strange feeling" ("Pair" 164–165) His bouts of hypersexuality are also episodic without consistency, further indicating that he is not fully in control of himself.

During Car's bursts of aggression, on the other hand, his actions are clearer and there is some consistency in them compared to his hypersexuality. He is angry about his wife divorcing him and is ready to kill both her and John Wrench:

> "You don't come back to me and turn this damn divorce thing around I'm goin a have to shoot you." . . . He drank some more, took his father's shotgun out of the cabinet, drove to Signal's only apartment building where her car was parked at the side, shot up the windows and tires of the vehicle he'd paid on for two years. . . . For the first time he wanted to kill them both, to kill something, if only himself. (155–156)

As Car's aggression cannot find its target, it turns inward. His anger is also possessive and impulsive, opposite to the ideal of American Western masculinity, where men's natural aggression is kept in control in civilized contexts. As Ball adds in 2.4., the individual was expected to either keep himself in control or have his aggression tamed by outside forces (106). Later, he threatens Mrs. Freeze with the shotgun when she rejects his advances, attempting one last time to regain his masculinity through sexuality and aggression: "'You are not sayin no to me about nothin. Not today, not tomorrow, not next week –'" The shovel shot forward as though a javelin, struck Scrope's shoulder and the shotgun fell clattering ("Pair"

179). Car's final failed attempt at masculinity causes him to give up, and the last time he is seen in the story is the description at the beginning of this section.

The perceived masculine nature of ranching makes Car Scrope try to hold onto his manliness with everything he has, while Mrs. Freeze represents herself in a masculine manner to be taken seriously. Car's attempts at keeping hold of his job, sexuality, and aggression all fail, causing him to see himself as a failed man. Proulx criticizes American Western masculinity's views on physicality by addressing the society's difficulty at accepting Mrs. Freeze as a working woman, and highlighting Car Scrope's desperation in attempting to hold onto his masculinity. Instead of accepting his age and its consequences, in addition to his injuries from the car accident, Car attempts to return to the strength and sexuality of his youth, because they are all he has to support his masculinity.

### 3.3. Masculinity and its Others

The short stories often describe an ill-defined divide between the worlds of masculinity and femininity. This becomes apparent in many ways, ranging from unequal attitudes toward women and men for the same actions to men being favored and put to the front in society in general. The men are also not equal, and there are both overt and covert indicators of what the characters consider "correct" manliness, i.e., what kind of masculinity is hegemonic in the stories. The stories mostly follow male characters, and the plot of the stories is mostly dictated by the male characters' actions. There are multiple important female characters, however, and their point of view often offers important insight into the values and attitudes of their respective societies. Proulx highlights and exaggerates these divisions of masculinities and femininities to criticize stereotypes of American Western masculinity.

Out of the three short stories, “The Half-Skinned Steer” mostly takes place in the main character’s memories and imagination, and thus has only a few character interactions that directly reflect conflicts between different masculinities. In addition to this, the story takes place during a long car journey, and there is no look at a single society and its views on hegemonic masculinity and how other masculinities and femininities are seen. Instead, the story offers deeper insight into how Mero views his own masculinity and other masculinities, and his general attitudes toward gender. “People in Hell” describes a very male-centered society, with the all-male Dunmire family representing the peak of hegemonic masculinity. There exists a clear separation between feminine and masculine worlds in the society in general, and the misogynistic Dunmires consider weaker masculinities as pitiable at best. As the longest of the stories, “Pair a Spurs” also has the widest variety of separations between hegemonic masculinity, non-hegemonic masculinities, and femininities. Generally speaking, the story’s society is able to view women as equals, but only if they prove themselves as capable as men. There are competing masculinities without clear hegemony, and the competition between masculinities is often performative.

### 3.3.1. “The Half-Skinned Steer”: Natural Signs of Masculinity

Compared to the other two stories where most of the narrative is told through the characters’ actions without a deeper discussion of their motivations, “The Half-Skinned Steer” is much more psychological. The short story offers a look into Mero’s thoughts, as much of the narration takes place in his mind, rather than describing his actions. In addition to this, about half of the story in “The Half-Skinned Steer” is told in flashbacks as Mero looks back to the life

he has lived. These flashbacks are laced with emotion and offer a much clearer look into the protagonist's attitudes and values than the segments told in the present day.

Throughout the story, Mero demonstrates a very physical approach to relationships and manhood. In his mind, a physical man is a proper man and therefore deserves a feminine partner – or several. Mero states clearly his view on masculine roles and goals when he reminisces leaving his home and entering adulthood:

> For years he believed he had left without hard reason and suffered for it. But he'd learned from television nature programs that it had been time for him to find his own territory and his own woman. How many women were out there! He had married three or four of them and sampled plenty. ("Half-Skinned" 31)

Mero views his masculinity as innate and natural and believes that a part of it is proving his masculinity through sexuality. In section 2.5. Saco described signs that constitute and indicate gender differences (25). To Mero, these signs include sexual conquests, and to him the quantity of them indicates the extent of his masculinity. His nature-centered approach also justifies his attitudes toward women, as Mero sees them as biologically unequal.

Mero's approach to women as signs of his masculinity causes him to objectify them and see them as more prices than people. The protagonist often returns in his memories to an evening with his father and the latter's girlfriend, whose name Mero cannot remember. The woman is described in an unflattering light: "If you admired horses you'd go for her with her arched neck and horsy buttocks, so high and haunch you'd want to clap her on the rear. . . . Mero expected her to neigh" ("Half-Skinned" 22–23). Despite his equine description of the woman, Mero nevertheless describes having a sexual dream about her. The experience

causes a sort of sexual awakening in him, which is a driving force behind his decision to find his own life: Mero "wanted a woman of his own without scrounging the old man's leftovers" ("Half-Skinned" 23). This is further evidence of his view of women as something to acquire, but not respect. On the other hand, the fact that he has married multiple times shows that he still sees women as something needed for appearances of civility, which is in line with the view of women as a civilizing force, as described by Johnson (45).

Despite the need to marry for appearances, if nothing else, Mero is unable to hold a marriage for very long. This is due to his inability to talk to women as equals, as demonstrated by his memories of his marriages: "You don't know what it was like, he told his ex-wives until they said they did know, he'd pounded it into their ears two hundred times" ("Half-Skinned" 29). As the conversation at the beginning of the story with his late brother's daughter-in-law demonstrates, Mero is determined to "get the upper hand" in any conversation with women and prove that he is more experienced, skilled and simply better than them in some way. By keeping himself as the voice of authority in his family, he limits the female influence to keep his masculinity intact. As described by Connell, in American Western masculinity women's influence was seen as a threat to masculinity, especially in growing boys (195). Even though Mero has no sons to worry about in this regard, it is essential to his own masculinity to keep himself as the leader in his relationships.

Apart from limiting female influence, Mero's thinking of women unable to understand "what it was like" in linked to his upbringing at the family ranch. His father was unable to make keep ranch profitable and took up a job delivering mail to make ends meet, but "Mero and Rollo saw the mail route as a defection from the work of the ranch, work that fell on them" (19). Mero and Rollo hoped that "sooner or later the old man would move to Ten Sleep with

his woman and his bottle and they could, as had their grandmother Olive when Jacob Corn disappointed her, pull the place taut" ("Half-Skinned" 19–20). Mero and Rollo see their father as unable to fit to their idea of proper masculinity, as he cannot keep up the ranch and has to resort to other means. The brothers view themselves as better fitting into masculine signs as they see them, thus representing hegemonic masculinity. As his masculinity develops in this environment, Mero views his father as non-hegemonically masculine and weak in contrast to himself, similar to a tenderfoot unable to adapt to his environment in cowboy culture. His insistence of his wives not understanding "what it was like" refers to his youth and shows his worldview where women are unable to even understand what it is like to be (hegemonically) masculine, let alone reach the same level.

Mero is unable to see women and most men as equal to him and attempts to limit feminine influence in his life because of it. This is due to his youth and his views of natural masculinity, leading Mero to consider himself as hegemonically masculine. Proulx portrays Mero's attitude in a satirical light, ridiculing his view of hegemonic masculinity as strength and sexual conquest. In the story, Mero's views on masculinity lead to overconfidence in his abilities and his eventual death, further highlighting the meaninglessness of masculine signs and adherence to them. As much of the story takes place in the protagonist's mind, his views are made explicit and the disparity between them and reality is made clear.

### 3.3.2. "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water": Hide Your Women from Weak Masculinities

The Dunmire family mainly represents hegemonic masculinity in "People in Hell". As shown in previous sections of this thesis, the family separates themselves from non-hegemonic

masculinities and femininities through disrespect and contempt, which is mixed with desire in the case of the opposite sex. This is explicitly stated to be due to their challenging lifestyle and "earning" their position at the top of masculine hierarchy: "But there builds up in men who work livestock in big territory a kind of contempt for those who do not" ("People" 101). The family conforms best to masculine signs as described by Saco, such as endurance, skill, and aggression (62). Due to the family representing masculine signs better than others, they represent the hegemony in the story's society.

The Dunmires are explicitly stated to hold contempt toward people who do not accept their ways and hegemony: "There was a somber arrogance about them, a rigidity of attitude that said that theirs was the only way" ("People" 101). This is similar to the cowboys' attitudes toward the tenderfeet and the dudes, as described by Moore – since the Dunmires consider their lifestyle the "correct" one, they do not respect those who do not conform to it (Moore 131). This extends to Ras Tinsley after his accident since they no longer consider him a man, as put by Jax Dunmire:

> Thought it might be that crazy half-wit got the women all terrorized wavin his deedle-dee at them. You hear about that? Who knows when he's goin a get a little girl down and do her harm? There's some around who'd as soon cut him and make sure he don't breed no more half-wits, calm him down some. ("People" 112)

While the family sees sexuality as natural, Ras's lack of control over it makes him less of a man. The Dunmires' solution to this is to castrate him, hoping that the lack of masculine genitalia would suppress his undesirable urges. Since the male body is seen as the root cause of masculine sexual aggression in American Western masculinity as described by Connell, the family decides to remove Ras's genitals to suppress his bodily urges (Connell 45).

The family's attitudes are also seen in the way they talk about Ras Tinsley's unfortunate habits: "'Goddamn Tinsley kid that come back rode into Shawver's yard and jacked off in front a the girl. Matter a time until he discovers it's more fun a put it up the old snatch'" ("People" 110, spelling original). The driving force behind the comment is, on the surface, the want to protect women. Nevertheless, the comment talks about women in a degrading manner, speaking of the disdain the family has for women. In the same chapter, her children are mentioned to have a disdainful memory of her likely due their father talking ill of her, as described in 3.2.2. (101). This is due to Ice's bitterness over Naomi leaving the family, but also due to his desire to limit feminine influence on the boys. As Connell suggests, part of American Western masculinity is to ensure the masculine upbringing of boys by limiting their mothers' influence (195). In the story, this further extends to separating women and men in other areas, too. This is represented as  a simple fact: the Tinsley's daughter is described as "neglected as daughters are" ("People" 104), and Horm speaks to his wife about Ras's situation "not sparing her feminine sensibilities" (113). These quotes describe the girls and women in the story's society to be seen as sensitive and in need of protection, but also neglected and put aside in favor of boys and men.

Proulx criticizes the cowboy myth as presented in dime novels and Western movies, described by Moore as "a defender of women and civilization" (210) in addition to the masculine toughness as praised by Roosevelt and others. On the surface, the Dunmires claim to protect girls and women, but still see them in an objectifying light. To the family, the protection is all about proving their masculinity. In addition, the story presents the neglect of girls and women in favor of men in the Western genre as a natural fact, highlighting the fact with the nonchalance it is addressed with.

### 3.3.3. “Pair a Spurs”: No Place for Women in a Men’s World

The story in “Pair a Spurs” describes the society more than in the other short stories, and the story is less about conflict between masculinities. Instead, the divide between masculine and feminine spheres of influence on a societal level is much more visible than in the other short stories. Women have a hard time fitting in jobs that are considered masculine, and the men are generally treated with more respect and are considered more reliable.

The foreman of the Coffeepot ranch, Mrs. Freeze, has been described earlier in 3.2.2. to have had to assume the role of a man in order to be respected by the masculine ranching culture. She is the only named female character mentioned in the story to have been able to hold onto her place in a job or hobby considered masculine; Sonia Batts and Inez Muddyman have had to give up on theirs, and Jeri Scrope’s working life is also described only in the context of domestic duties. Inez “had been a good barrel racer and roper as a girl, made a few points and a little cash on the weekend circuit but hung that up when she married Muddyman” (“Pair” 154). Giving up on her masculine hobbies, Inez joins her husband on the Box Hammerhandle ranch to run the business together. The division of work does not seem to be based on masculinity and femininity, though, and she is the one who acts as the rail guide to the guests of the ranch, “dudes” (“Pair” 154). Sonia, on the other hand, had attempted a career as car saleswoman “until the salesmen got the better of her with jibes and innuendo” (“Pair” 157). Jeri Scrope’s purpose at the Coffeepot ranch comes up in her absence: “Jeri did not meet them with sandwiches and beer at Johnson’s place on Pass Water Creek” (“Pair” 158). As mentioned in the story, Car has likely not had a hot meal since Jeri left due to relying on her until that point (see “Pair” 164).

The attempts to limit feminine influence are rooted in American Western masculinity's notion of certain spaces as masculine of feminine. As described in 2.5., feminine influence is thought to be the cause of perceived emasculation in boys. Since masculinity is thought to be a core value in American society, as described in by Moore, the spread of the feminine influence is seen as a threat to not only masculinity, but society at large (205). This is why women are commonly ridiculed in the story's society, and Mrs. Freeze is only able to gain the respect of the men by proving that she can fit into the masculine profession, rather than threatening the men with her femininity. These notions of women as undesirable in masculine spaces are prevalent in not only the society of Signal, as the Texan workers take Mrs. Freeze's "weak" femininity as a fact, despite her experience: "'I'll go with you,' said the specialist. 'Might take a man, lift him in the truck if he's down.' Mrs. Freeze said something to herself" ("Pair" 182). The attitudes of the Signal society are even further emphasized when talking about people fitting the role of a tenderfoot, as described by Moore (131). A female politician is "as well known for her wild-eyed rants as for her stupidity" ("Pair" 162), and "local opinion discounted the dudes' identification of a wolf [who attacked them and Inez] as eastern hysteria" ("Pair" 171). While in the cowboy culture a tenderfoot is anyone from an urban environment trying to fit into a frontier society, the society as represented in the short story considers all outsiders as clueless and irrational.

While men in the story prefer to keep the men's world to themselves, they are also eager to protect each other. When Car starts sexually harassing Inez and shows no signs of stopping, Inez asks her husband, Sutton for help:

> "I hate to say this, Sutton, but Car Scrope's been making passes and ugly remarks to me for two weeks. I thought he'd calm down and quit, why I didn't say anything, but he keeps on." ("Pair" 168)

Sutton acts as if he hears nothing, refusing to allow Inez influence his opinion of Car. Instead, he starts talking about attacks on the ranch livestock while Inez keeps trying to get her message across:

> "You hear what I said about Car Scrope? About what he's been tryin a do to me? He's just as rammy as he can be." "I think dogs. The prints are twict the size of a coyote's." ("Pair" 168, spelling original)

Inez continues to try and reach her husband, who keeps talking about an entirely different subject. In her frustration, she remembers that Sutton used to be the occasional third party in Car Scrope and John Wrench's duo. Despite the time since their exploits in early adulthood, the trio is ready to defend each other. Despite Car shooting up John's car and willingness to kill its owner, too, the two meet later to fix their relationship:

> Car told him how much he wished John had been in his truck the frothy night he had ventilated it; John said he wished he had, too . . . and they drank until it was clear that Jeri had caused the trouble and all the sad consequences. ("Pair" 174)

The decades-long friendship is enough to have Car and John reconcile and forgive each other for the unfortunate cheating incident and subsequent murder attempt. The men would rather blame feminine influence for the episode than to accept their own impulsiveness and alcoholism, and bond over their separation from the allegedly weaker gender. While women

are seen as essential to society, their opinions are discounted for unwanted feminine influence, much in line with American Western masculinity as described by Connell (195).

The women in “Pair a Spurs” take a more active role in society than in the other two short stories. Despite proving their skills, they have a hard time fitting into masculine spaces, as the men do not take them seriously and attempt to limit their influence. Proulx criticizes Western stories that follow masculine heroes by highlighting their flaws and the women that are pushed aside, even as they prove themselves as capable and competent. Furthermore, the men’s misogyny increases when talking about outsiders, such as the female lawyers who witnessed the wolf attack on Inez. Women in masculine jobs such as politics and car sales are seen as clueless and ridiculous, while women in domestic settings have trouble getting their voices heard.

## 4. Conclusion

This study has investigated representations of masculinity in three short stories by the American author Annie Proulx. On a surface level, the stories offer a look into Wyoming life in the early twentieth century, but a further analysis reveals that the characters and attitudes in the stories are exaggerated to criticize the problems of American Western masculinity. Annie Proulx's works have been studied before, also from the viewpoint of masculinity, but a study on representation of masculinity had not been presented prior to this study.

The theoretical framework focused on American Western masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including cowboy myths and ideas regarding masculinity promoted by people such as Theodore Roosevelt. The presentation of masculinity in literature was also studied to define terms such as masculinity as signs and hegemonic masculinity, which were essential in the study of representations. This study focused on analyzing three key areas of American Western masculinity: independence and individuality, physicality, and separation from the other. It was found out that American Western masculinity emphasizes skill, resilience, certain sexual liberty in men, and the promotion of hegemonic masculinity, which includes separation from non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities.

Independence and individualism were presented in the stories as a need to prove one's resilience and self-sufficiency in all situations. The main character in "The Half-Skinned Steer" is an aging man who has relied on his body and takes pride in his strength and skill but cannot come to terms with his age and accept help from others. His stubbornness and exaggerated self-reliance cause his death, as he attempts to reach his brother's funeral on

car. “People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water” describes two vastly different families, the Dunmires and the Tinsleys. The former represent extreme independence and needless risk-taking, while the latter cling to the limited independence they have left. The Dunmires’ independent need for control clashes with Ras Tinsley’s need for physical freedom, and Ras ends up castrated by the Dunmires. In “Pair a Spurs”, aging Car Scrope is unable to give up his ranch despite his issues with age and old injuries. The society in the story holds ranching and the cowboy myth in high regard, but often focus on outward appearances of masculinity and push for independence as a way of proving one’s masculinity.

Physicality is closely linked with masculinity in the short stories, and aggression and sexuality are often associated with it. In “The Half-Skinned Steer”, Mero relies on his physical ability his entire life and takes pride in it, but underestimates how much his age has affected him. To Mero, physicality and aggression are signs of his masculinity, and he increasingly relies on them as the journey progresses and he has to face is old age. In the end, favoring physicality and aggression instead of rationality is what causes the mistakes that cost him his life. Mero also sees gender and sexuality in primarily biological terms, thinking of women as something to acquire, rather than respect. The Dunmire family in “People in Hell” are exaggerated in terms of physicality to the extent of ridicule. The Tinsleys, on the other hand, are viewed with pity and contempt due to their failure in terms of skill and physicality. Sexuality is viewed in the story as natural for men but degrading for women, and Ras is punished for his inability to keep his natural urges in check. In the society of “Pair a Spurs” ranching is viewed as extremely masculine, and expectations of strong masculinity are associated with it. Car Scrope’s foreman, Mrs. Freeze, is described as presenting herself in a masculine way to be accepted in the field, while Car struggles with his sense of failing

masculinity that stems from his divorce and age. To regain his lost masculinity, Car becomes increasingly aggressive both physically and sexually, although the latter is described to be influenced by his injuries affecting his mood.

Mero in “The Half-Skinned Steer” believes himself to represent hegemonic masculinity, due to his upbringing on his family’s ranch and his physical prowess. As a result, he looks down on most men, including his own brother, for their lack of masculinity. He also refuses to take women’s opinion into account, attempting to limit feminine influence at all costs. His sense of hegemony leads to overconfidence in his abilities, leading to his doom. “People in Hell” criticizes the way the Dunmire family treats women as both something to protect and second-class citizens. The family both claims to protect girls and women from non-hegemonic and thus unreliable masculinities but they do so only to prove their own manliness. Finally, “Pair of Spurs” portrays problems women have when attempting to fit in masculine spaces, such as the ranching business. Women’s influence is limited wherever possible, and women such as Mrs. Freeze are able to earn the men’s respect only by presenting themselves as men. While women in the society have trouble gaining respect, outsiders fare even worse with their status as “tenderfeet”.

To conclude, the three short stories in *Close Range* offer a varied, yet somewhat unified look into the representation of masculinity in Annie Proulx’s rural Wyoming. While there is much variation on a character level, all of them are affected by similar pressure from the surrounding society to conform to expectations of gender. For men, this means trying to fit in to hegemonic masculinity with all its expectations. These expectations include strong physicality at the expense of emotionality, independence, and separation from feminine and non-hegemonic masculine influences. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be less

physical and more emotional, although these qualities are still met with disdain from men. In addition, they are expected to enter and stay in the domestic sphere, and steer clear of the men's world.

Both conforming and failing to conform to these expectations creates conflict, often due to the competitiveness of masculinity. True communication between genders is also rare. All this combined with the attempt to make a living with farming and ranching in the rough, unkind Wyoming climate and nature is cause for the many conflicts and unhappy endings in the stories. Proulx's short stories tell a cautious tale of sexism and intolerance but emphasize the remoteness of the stories in both physical and chronological sense. As the author concludes in the final paragraph of *People in Hell*: "That was all sixty years ago and more. [...] We are in a new millennium and such desperate things no longer happen. If you believe that you'll believe anything" (114).

The short stories were studied from the perspective of American Western masculinity, which leaves much to be analyzed. For example, the family relations in the stories are touched upon, but could be studied in better detail. Modern viewpoints into the stories are also worth looking into, as this analysis focuses on the historical viewpoint of the Western genre and the myths associated with it. The author's choices warrant further study as well; why does Proulx criticize these masculine qualities in particular, and what is left untouched? The three short stories are also only a small part of the *Close Range* collection, and the same viewpoint could be applied to the rest of the collection too, or Proulx's other works.

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