

# Morgan Kane: A Nordic Western



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# Morgan Kane: A Nordic Western

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Karoline Aksnes

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## Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgåva studerer Morgan Kane i frå ein (trans)kulturell ståstad. Morgan Kane-serien består av 83 bøker som er skrivne av den norske forfattaren Louis Masterson (født Kjell Hallbing, 1934-2004), og omhandlar den fiktive karakteren Morgan Kane sitt liv og lagnad i den Amerikanske Vesten. Denne oppgåva ser på Masterson sine westernbøker som nordiske versjonar av ein sjanger som originalt er tett tilknytt Amerika og den amerikanske kulturen. Som ei nordisk utgåve av ein amerikansk sjanger kryssar Masterson sin bok-serie både kulturelle og nasjonale grenser, og denne oppgåva set fokus på dette transkulturelle aspektet ved Morgan Kane. I dette prosjektet behandlar eg difor Morgan Kane serien som ein transkulturell tekst – det vil seie ein tekst som har nytta internasjonale litterære former og tilpassa dei til lokal kultur, språk, tradisjon og samfunnshøve. Eg ynskjer å illustrere korleis serien har nok til felles med den amerikanske sjanger-tradisjonen til å verta klassifisert som ein western, men at den samstundes har vore både påverka av og tilpassa ein norsk kontekst.

Prosjektet er motivert av ei komande promotering av Masterson sin Morgan Kane i ein internasjonal (og då særskilt amerikansk) kontekst. Sett i lys av den forventede eksponeringa av den norsk-produserte westernhelten i western-sjangeren sitt heimland USA, finn eg det interessant å utforske kva som karakteriserer ein nordisk versjon av ein western.

For å kunne diskutere ulike sider ved Morgan Kane serien sin hybride karakter, nyttar dette prosjektet teori frå ulike forskingsfelt. Akademisk og biografisk materiale om Masterson og Morgan Kane er supplert med teori innan kultur, populærkultur, transkulturasjon, western-sjangeren, mytologi om den Amerikanske Vesten og Nordisk Noir.

Masterson sin Morgan Kane vert rekna som ei av dei fremste populærkulturelle fenomena i Noreg gjennom tidene, og har i så høve påverka norske førestillingar av Amerika. Det er difor interessant at den versjonen som Masterson sine western-bøker teiknar av amerikansk kulturell historie har vore opplevd som annleis enn den versjonen som Masterson sine lesarar var vand med gjennom importert western-underhaldning. Ved å inkorporere aukande grad av sosialrealisme i det som elles ter seg som tradisjonelle western-plot, har Masterson skapt ein særeigen stil som raskt har vorte hans varemerke. Det er verdt å merke seg at Morgan Kane-serien sin stil vart

forma gradvis og i ei form for dialog mellom Masterson og lesarane hans. Vi kan difor seie at Norsk kultur, via Masterson sine lesarar, har spelt ei rolle i utviklinga av den særeigne stilen til Masterson sin nordiske western.

I denne oppgåva ser eg på historia til Morgan Kane-serien og utviklinga til Masterson som populærkulturell forfattar. Eg ser på den transkulturelle konteksten Morgan Kane er skapt i, og syner at Masterson sin nordiske western er del av ein lang tradisjon av europeiske førestillingar om den Amerikanske Vesten. For å identifisere korleis Masterson sin nordiske western skil seg frå den amerikanske samanliknar eg utvalde Morgan Kane bøker opp i mot den amerikanske tradisjonen. Den amerikanske westernen definerer eg ut i frå karakteristiske kjenneteikn innan western-sjangeren, historiske mønster, samt studiar innan mytologien kring den Amerikanske Vesten og tilknytninga denne har til amerikansk nasjonal identitetskjennele. Den typiske amerikanske westernen vert så eksemplifisert gjennom eit representativt døme beståande av utvalde bøker av den amerikanske forfattaren Louis L'Amour. I ei komparativ litterær analyse mellom Masterson og L'Amour sine westernar, identifiserer eg særtrekk ved Morgan Kane-serien som skil seg ut frå (og stundom kontrasterer med) den klassiske amerikanske westernen.

Gjennom arbeidet med dette prosjektet har eg oppdaga at dei aspekta ved Morgan Kane-serien som opplevast som annleis samanlikna med den amerikanske tradisjonen, har mykje til felles med sjanger-trekka til den forma for realisme som i dag vert kalla Nordisk Noir. Samanhengen er kanskje ikkje så overraskande med tanke på at den same nordiske konteksten som påverka stilen til Masterson sin Western også er opphavsstaden for den stilen som vert kalla Nordisk Noir. I denne oppgåva føreslår eg difor at dei trekka som Morgan Kane serien har til felles med Nordisk Noir er influerte av deira felles nordiske kontekst. Eg reknar, i så høve, desse aspekta for å vera dei *nordiske* aspekta ved Morgan Kane.

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# 1 Introduction: A Nordic Western in the US

**“Most likely the first time in history that a Western novel goes from Norway to the English-speaking world.”**

Kjell Hallbing/Louis Masterson 1971<sup>1</sup>

When William “Buffalo Bill” Cody toured Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, his Wild West show contributed to an exchange of cultural influences between Europe and the US which went both ways. Not only did Cody’s show impact the European audience’s image of the Wild West, but when Cody returned to the US it was with a show that had been colored by his European experiences. The encounter with a foreign audience made Cody increasingly conscious of his role as a promoter of the values of the Frontier Myth with its appreciation for self-reliance and heroism, its optimistic promise of liberty, individual freedom, mobility, democracy and extraordinary opportunities for riches to those who were adventurous and hardy. Performing outside of the US inspired Cody to further boost the lore about the American West, and to exaggerate the Wild West show’s already distinct prototypes and typifications of frontier history even further. As Richard Slotkin writes, “the appeal of the Wild West could only be enhanced by representing it as a kind of cultural embassy from the New World to the Old – an exhibition of all the exotic American types that had piqued European imaginations since Cooper, if not since Columbus” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 75). And every aspect of Cody’s Wild West troupe was spectacular and exotic. Transported across the Atlantic in a specially equipped steamship, Cody’s party is said to have included 200 people, 180 horses, 18 buffalo, 5 Texas steers, 10 mules, 10 elk, 2 deer, 4 donkeys, and an authentic Deadwood stagecoach. His show offered Pony Express riders, bloodthirsty Indians, exhibitions of roping, riding and shooting, music performed by a cowboy band, and reenactments of famous battles and events from the infamous Western Frontier (Nichols 9–10). When Cody eventually brought his Wild

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<sup>1</sup> My translation. Original quote: “Antagelig den første gang i historien at en Western-bok går fra Norge og til den engelsktalende verden.” The quote is taken from a text Masterson published in the magazine *Western* January 1971 under the title “Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson.” The text is also printed in Holbye (22).

West universe back to the US, it was this exaggerated version which became a cornerstone for the American Western genre.

These days, more than a century after Cody's Wild West tours, popular images of the American West still travel between Europe and the US, and, for the first time, one of these European images of the American West comes from an unlikely nation on the Scandinavian peninsula: Norway. Norwegian author Kjell Hallbing, who is better known by the pseudonym Louis Masterson (1934-2004),<sup>2</sup> wrote during the 1960s and 70s a series of Westerns in Norwegian which features fictional hero Morgan Kane's life and exploits in the American West. With the tagline "Who is Morgan Kane?"<sup>3</sup> translated versions of Masterson's universe are now about to be introduced to an American audience.

Morgan Kane's recent US debut has come about as a result of Norwegian/American Wide Release Entertainment group acquiring screen, licensing, merchandising and eBook publishing rights to all 150 books written by Louis Masterson – including the 83 books about Morgan Kane. Though translated editions of Louis Masterson's books about the Western hero were published across most of Europe, including the UK, during Morgan Kane's heyday in the 1960s and 70s, they did not reach the American market at that time.<sup>4</sup> But today, more than thirty years after the last installment of the series came out in Europe, English translations<sup>5</sup> of selected Morgan Kane titles are distributed through such global platforms as Amazon Kindle, iBookstore, Barnes&Noble Booksellers, and Kobo. Accompanying the eBook release, Wide Release Entertainment is in the production stages of a Hollywood feature-length film adaptation of Morgan Kane with a budget of 20-30 million dollars, produced by award-winning producer Mark Huffam. The film *Morgan Kane: The Legend Begins* (yet to be released) will be based on Masterson's books *El Gringo* (1970) and *El Gringo's Revenge* (*El Gringo's Hevn*, 1970). With four additional film projects and a Morgan Kane video game also planned, Wide Release Entertainment aims to build an

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<sup>2</sup> As Louis Masterson is the pen name that the entire Morgan Kane series was published under, this is also the name that will be used throughout this thesis when referring to the author.

<sup>3</sup> "Who is Morgan Kane" is also the internet address to Wide Release Entertainment's official Morgan Kane website ([whoismorgankane.com](http://whoismorgankane.com)).

<sup>4</sup> During the 1970s, Morgan Kane was translated into eleven languages, among them English, German, Dutch, Spanish, French and Polish, and was published across most of Europe. The English editions were also made available to every country that had formerly been a part of the British Empire. Morgan Kane was, however, banned by the Apartheid government in South Africa in 1975. One possible interpretation of this might be Kane's lack of concern about interracial relationships (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 2*; Holbye 32).

<sup>5</sup> Older English and Spanish translations are currently being proofread, edited and published in a revised chronology. As not all Morgan Kane titles have been published in English edition earlier, some titles will necessarily receive new English translations.

entertainment franchise that will create hype around the newly released eBooks and make Morgan Kane an international brand name.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the amount of exposure Morgan Kane is expected to get in the US, the homeland of the Western, I find it particularly interesting to explore what characterizes this Nordic version of the Western. As a Nordic version of an American genre it crosses both cultural and national borders. In this project, I will therefore treat Morgan Kane as a transcultural hybrid. I will illustrate how the series has enough in common with the original Western genre and its tradition to be recognized as a Western, but, at the same time, that it also is colored by, and adapted to, its Nordic context. In other words, that the Morgan Kane series is an example of the transcultural category of texts which have adapted internationally recognizable literary forms to local circumstances, language and traditions. In order to discuss diverse aspects of Morgan Kane's hybrid character, this project benefits from scholarship within such theoretical fields as that of popular culture, the Western genre and Mythology about the American West, transculturation, and Nordic Noir. Aided by this theoretical framework I approach the question "Who is Morgan Kane?" (and in my case also "*what* is Morgan Kane?") from the perspective that the Morgan Kane series is a *Nordic Western*.

Interestingly, Wide Release Entertainment's Morgan Kane's current international campaign not only reveals the series' non-American origin in its promotion but also makes it a selling point. In this way, it embraces the transcultural history of cross-cultural exchanges of Western lore between Europe and America. In a promotional video, the tagline "Who is Morgan Kane?" is answered as a Western which has sold more than twenty million books across Europe, but which is yet to be discovered in the US. To underscore his hitherto lack of discovery, the character Morgan Kane is shrouded in mystery, and his face is hidden by shadows in official poster images. In this manner, the campaign makes Kane's non-American identity part of the Morgan Kane series' allure.

The impression that Wide Release Entertainment today seems to embrace the Morgan Kane series' non-American origin and considers it to be a selling-point is an interesting reversal from the series' earliest days. Throughout the 1960s, Masterson did not think that a Western written by a Norwegian would be taken seriously; – after all, he said in an interview, "how would we feel about a Greek who wrote about

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<sup>6</sup> Information found on WR's official website accessed 21.09.2016.

Vikings?”<sup>7</sup> Kjell Hallbing therefore took on the American sounding pseudonym of Louis Masterson (which was most likely derived from Louis L’Amour and Bat Masterson) to disguise the fact that the rough gunfighter Morgan Kane was created by a polite Norwegian banker who wrote about the American West from his office desk after hours. The real Hallbing had grown up in Norwegian middle-class suburbia, had an economics degree, and worked at a bank; none of which are particularly associative of the Wild West. What is more, Masterson had no first-hand experience with the American culture he wrote about at the time he started producing Westerns. Thus, to ensure that Morgan Kane was taken seriously as a Western, Masterson operated under the guise of being an American writer until he had published close to forty Morgan Kane books and nurtured a substantial fan-base. As both his confidence and his fan-base grew, Masterson eventually realized that his Norwegian identity could become an asset rather than a hindrance. By this time, solid sales numbers had secured him a contract with British Corgi Books who bought the rights to distribute English translations of the Morgan Kane series. This meant that Morgan Kane had become a Norwegian product which received international success and could be marketed as such. Masterson’s disclosure in 1971 that Morgan Kane is “made in Norway” had major consequences for both the way his books were received, and also, arguably, for Masterson’s creative process.

From a marketing perspective, the “big reveal” was an instant success. The concept of a Norwegian author writing Westerns, and particularly when he had succeeded in his efforts to the extent that Masterson by then had proven to do, made headlines and sent Masterson from total anonymity to national recognition over night (Arnesen, “I Louis Mastersons fotspor” 25). The Morgan Kane series went from being considered simply one of the many (assumed) American Westerns available on the popular market, to an original Norwegian success story. As will be explored in chapter 2, no longer working under the guise of being an American writer of formula Westerns gave Masterson creative freedom to begin experimenting with the Western genre. And by gradually incorporating what he and his contemporary critics referred to as social realism<sup>8</sup> into his otherwise traditional Western plots Masterson created a version of the Western that Norwegian readers and critics experienced as unique and different from the imported Westerns they were accustomed to. As Åsmund Forfang wrote,

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<sup>7</sup> The quote is taken from the article “Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson” which was first printed in the magazine *Western Extra* in January 1971. It can also be found in Nielsen and Hallbing.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Bø, Falbakken, and T. E. Dahl.

Morgan Kane is the only Western hero that I know of who gets his body mutilated by scars. Who grows older and more haggard for each book. Who is ruined by alcohol and violence. Who goes berserk. Who has frail nerves. Who pukes in disgust after having killed a villain. Who is driven by hatred, while also hating himself.<sup>9</sup> (250)

The Morgan Kane series is thus not just renowned for introducing a generation of Norwegians to the history, traditions, and mythology of the American West, but also for its alternative take on the Western. As will be explored in chapter 4, this is particularly evident in the way Masterson's hero-figure differs from the classic Western hero-figure known from the American tradition. Worth noting in this regard is that Kane's characteristic style was shaped *gradually* through a dialogue of sorts between Masterson's experiments with his hero's character and his readers' response to them. For a (trans)cultural study of Morgan Kane, this means that Norwegian culture, via Masterson's readership, has played a part in influencing the style of this Nordic version of the Western.

The Nordic context which Morgan Kane's unique style was created in is also the same context which the style of realism that today goes under the term Nordic Noir originates from. And during my work with this project I have discovered that those aspects of the Morgan Kane series which I have identified as different from the classic Western formula share commonalities with the formula features of Nordic Noir. In this thesis, I thus suggest that those traits which the Morgan Kane series share with Nordic Noir are influences of their shared Nordic context. As such, I consider these features to be the "Nordic" aspects of Morgan Kane.

A challenge in this project is that not much academic work has been done on Masterson's Morgan Kane earlier. Gudleiv Bø included the Morgan Kane series in a Ph.D. dissertation from 1990, which was angled towards popular culture and gender. The popularity of Morgan Kane has also been addressed in Willy Dahl's *Morgan Kane*

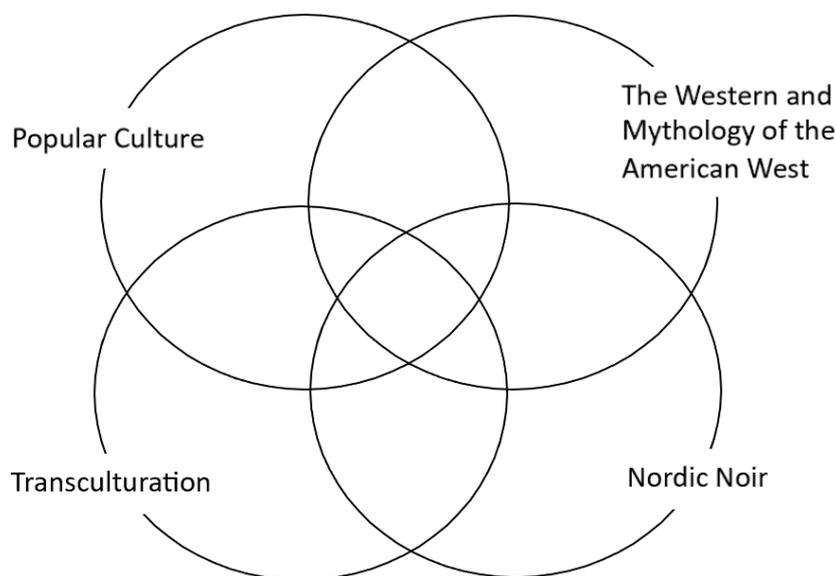
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<sup>9</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Morgan Kane er den einaste westernhelten eg kjenner til som får kroppen vansira av sårmerke. Som blir eldre og meir herja for kvar bok som går. Som går til grunne i alkohol og vald. Som går berserk. Som er ein stakkar inni seg. Som spyr i vemjing etter å ha skote ned ein skurk. Som blir driven fram av hat, og også hatar seg sjølv."

*fra Norge: en studie i litterær suksess* (which would translate as Morgan Kane from Norway: a study in literary success) from 1976. In my own study, I combine academic and biographical material on Morgan Kane with academic sources within the fields of cultural, popular cultural, and transcultural scholarship in order to address various aspects of Morgan Kane's story as a Norwegian Western. In order to identify the unique aspects of Masterson's Nordic Western, this study compares the Morgan Kane series with a representative example of the original American tradition. The American tradition is mapped out with the use of scholarship within the Western genre and within studies of the Mythology of the American West, and exemplified through literary works of American Western writer Louis L'Amour. Finally, this study also uses genre theory about Nordic Noir in order to locate those aspects which are experienced as different from the American tradition to a Nordic context. This thesis will begin by introducing its theoretical foundation along with the story of Masterson's Morgan Kane.

## 2 Theory and the Story of how the Nordic Western came to be

This project treats the Morgan Kane series as a Nordic version of an American-based genre. While investigating the transcultural or hybrid aspects of Morgan Kane, four focus areas of scholarship will receive particular attention:



As illustrated by the model, these areas are anchored in different theoretical fields but also intersect and overlap. As theoretical framework, the following analysis of a Nordic Western benefits from an integrated theoretical paradigm consisting of theoretical insight from these different areas. Through the story of how the Nordic Western Morgan Kane came to be, the following chapter will outline the four areas one by one and illustrate their relevance and role in Morgan Kane's story. For structural purposes transculturation is listed as a separate area, although it can also be seen as the link which binds the other areas together.

The first part of this chapter, “Morgan Kane and Popular Culture,” will address Morgan Kane as popular culture and Masterson’s development as a popular cultural author. Through a survey of the history of production, distribution, and reception of the Morgan Kane series, it will illustrate Morgan Kane’s position in Nordic popular culture and identify factors which are likely to have contributed to this position. These analyses will be based on theoretical perspectives on the concepts of culture and popular culture made by scholars such as John Storey, Theodor Adorno and John Fiske. A central premise of this project is that popular culture is interconnected with the distribution of popular imagery. Based on this notion, Morgan Kane’s position in Nordic popular culture means that the series has played an active role in the production and circulation of popular imagery of the American West. This part will then introduce Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” and Charles Taylor’s ensuing idea of the “social imaginary” to illustrate how Morgan Kane can be read as a reflection of how Masterson’s Norway imagined the American West.

Popular imagery of the American West is also the topic of the second part of this chapter, “The American Western and American Cultural Identity,” which explores the connection between the Western and American cultural identity. Relying on theory from such scholars as Slotkin, Richard White, Jane Tompkins and John G. Cawelti, I look at how mythic stories of the American West – as presented through the Western formula – reflect basic values, beliefs, and concepts which are central to American culture, how they offer a shared system of references and perspectives on how to see the world, and how they provide explanations and rationalizations concerning many of the central characteristics of American national identity. The exploration of the American connection to the Western will provide contextualization for my study of Masterson’s non-American version of the Western.

Masterson’s version of the Western took on a character that was increasingly influenced by, and adapted to, his Nordic context as Masterson’s authorship progressed. The third part of this chapter, “The Making of a Nordic Western,” will explore how Morgan Kane’s hybrid nature results from a transcultural process where cultural forms have moved between the US and Scandinavia and interacted, influenced each other, and produced the new and original form which is the Nordic Western. Based on theory by cultural and transcultural scholars James Lull, Fernando Ortiz, Mark Millington, Diana Taylor, Mary Louise Pratt and Richard A. Rogers, it introduces transculturation as a term and traces its development as a theoretical field. A part of this development has been the adaptation of transculturation theory into a mode of literary studies, as defined by such literary transculturation scholars as Anne

Holden Rønning, Adriana Dagnino, Erik Falk and Joel Kuortti, which is particularly relevant for this study of the Morgan Kane series. A central focus of transcultural studies is the creative interplay between multiple cultural systems, and this section will address the cultural styles which inspired the character and style of Masterson's Morgan Kane.

The (trans)cultural context which Morgan Kane was created in was also the origin of Nordic Noir, and, as later analyses of the Morgan Kane series will illustrate, Morgan Kane shares distinctive features with the style of Nordic Noir. The fourth part of this chapter, titled "Morgan Kane and Nordic Noir," will introduce the genre of Nordic Noir, its historical origins, and its link to Morgan Kane.

## 2.1 Morgan Kane as Popular Culture

**“Today Hallbing stands as one of our nation’s finest authors because he, in addition to being an excellent writer, also knows the essential trick for those with something to tell: how to be read.”**

Norwegian author Gunnar Staalesen (1974) <sup>10</sup>

On average, one out of every three Norwegians has read Louis Masterson’s Morgan Kane.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, total sales of the eighty-three volume Morgan Kane series is estimated at 25 million copies.<sup>12</sup> In Masterson’s heyday, the mid-seventies, between eighty and ninety thousand Morgan Kane books were sold every month through such outlets as kiosks, bookstores and monthly subscriptions (Holbye 28; Dahl 7–8). In a country with less than four million citizens at that time,<sup>13</sup> this implies that Morgan Kane’s presence permeated most areas of Norwegian society. As Finn Arnesen, editor of the Morgan Kane series writes:

[Readers of Morgan Kane] came from all age groups and every layer of society, from manual laborers to doctors, from professional athletes to juveniles still at school. A number of papers were written in high schools across the nation, as well as dissertations at universities. ... At a college in Bærum, a notice went up prohibiting students from bringing Kane novels to class. (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 2 3*)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Staalesen wrote this in *Bergen Arbeiderblad* after reading Masterson’s *Der ørnene dør*. My translation. Original quote: “Hallbing står i dag fram som en av de fremste norske forfatterne, fordi han ikke bare er en utmerket forfatter, men fordi han også kan det nødvendige knepet for den som har noe å fortelle: det å bli lest.” Qtd in Nielsen and Holbye (37).

<sup>11</sup> This number is taken from *Norsk biografisk leksikon* (2009) (“Morgan Kane”).

<sup>12</sup> According to Wide Release’s (WR) official website, accessed 21.09.2016.

<sup>13</sup> According to *Statistisk Sentralbyrå (SSB)* (English version: *Statistics Norway*) the population of Norway was 3 997 525 in 1975 (*Folkemengdens Bevegelse 1735 - 2015 - Folkemengde, Fødte, Døde, Ekteskap, Flyttinger Og Folketilvekst*).

<sup>14</sup> My translation. Original quote: “[Lesere av Morgan Kane] fantes i alle aldersgrupper og alle samfunnslag, fra kroppsarbeidere til leger, fra toppidrettsfolk til skoleungdom. Et utall særoppgaver ble skrevet på videregående skoler over hele landet, også hovedoppgaver på universitetene. ... På en høyere skole i Bærum ble det satt opp et oppslag om forbud mot å ta med Kane-bøker inn i klasserommene i timene.”

Morgan Kane was not only the hero-figure of a series of books but became an icon in contemporary popular culture. An entire industry of merchandize developed around the Morgan Kane brand name, which included graphic novels, posters, belt buckles, t-shirts, jeans and a Morgan Kane deck of cards which was made out to be pierced by bullet holes. Morgan Kane was a catchphrase in contemporary media which came to represent attitudes such as individualism, traditional masculinity and male chauvinism, (attitudes which are also associated with American values). After 1972, the lyrics of the hit song *Balladen om Morgan Kane* (in English this would translate as The Ballad of Morgan Kane) with the catchy chorus line “Morgan Kane var hans navn” (“Morgan Kane was his name”) quite literally set the tone for the way Kane was to be remembered. The song was a Scandinavian cooperation, and, illustrative of the flow of popular culture between the Scandinavian countries, initiated by Swedish artist Benny Borg (1945 -). As a fan of Morgan Kane, Borg wrote a song about the Western hero and shared the demo version with Masterson. Masterson was enthusiastic about the idea of a musical project and contributed with lyrics which outline Kane’s life story along with his most prominent characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Like the Morgan Kane novels, the lyrics of the hit-song mixes aspects associated with traditional Western lore with reflections of a more realistic and melancholic nature. They mention aspects of Kane which are associative of the kind of epic hero-figure one would expect to meet in a Western, such as his skills as a gunslinger, his drifting lifestyle, how Kane’s renown spread across the West so that “many gunslingers wanted to test his reputation,”<sup>16</sup> and women “sought happiness in his arms.” They emphasize the brutality of the West and how Kane from the day he was born was “thrown into the hard reality of the world” where he needed to live by the gun in order to survive. Adding a bitter-sweet tinge, Masterson writes that Kane’s career as a gunslinger is a fate that is not of Kane’s own choosing. That Kane has dreams of an another and more peaceful life but that he from the day he was born was deemed to this life of hardship and of loneliness. Kane’s survival depends on him being ready with his gun at all times, which makes his weapon the only friend Kane has. The song ends on a thoughtful and sad note where Masterson contemplates the difficulty of creating peace from violence. Such a process requires a gunslinger to create his own law, Masterson explains, which he, at some point, will have to answer for; because it is a time-tested truth that “whoever kills,

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<sup>15</sup> The story behind the creation of *Balladen om Morgan Kane* is depicted in Arnesen, “I Louis Masterson’s fotspor” (28-29).

<sup>16</sup> My translations. The original lyrics are in Norwegian.

even in the name of the law, must [eventually] die.” In line with Morgan Kane’s general standing in the early 1970s, the song was an instant success. *Balladen om Morgan Kane* topped the hitlist of NRK’s *Norsktoppen* (NRK, “Tidenes Norsktoppmelodi Kåres”), and spent 19 weeks on Norway’s official record chart, *VG-lista*, where it for seven weeks was Norway’s second most sold single<sup>17</sup> (*VG-Lista - Benny Borg / Balladen Om Morgan Kane*). The following section will address Morgan Kane’s position in Norwegian and Nordic popular culture and, based on the writings of Storey and Fiske, look at the factors which are likely to have played a part in Morgan Kane’s popular cultural success. These factors include the apparatus concerned with the publishing, marketing and distribution of the Morgan Kane series, which scholars such as Adorno and Max Horkheimer have argued the importance of. But, as demonstrated by Fiske, these factors also include textual and intertextual aspects of Masterson’s books which appealed to his readers to such an extent that they incorporated Morgan Kane into their daily cultural production.

From a marketing perspective, the Morgan Kane series gained an ideal starting point when it was supported by central agents within the publishing and marketing organization of Norwegian mass culture from the very beginning. Through the entire Morgan Kane series, Masterson was working with the Norwegian publisher Bladkompaniet, which is the agent that first introduced mass distribution of popular fiction in Norway. The inspiration behind Bladkompaniet’s introduction of the paperback format in Norway is as transnational as the content of their paperbacks. The idea to distribute affordable books in large volumes in the Scandinavian countries was born in Göteborg, Sweden in a meeting between a Swedish, a Norwegian and an English publisher.<sup>18</sup> The business model was modeled after the example set by British Penguin Books, and the format was inspired by the Danish “Centralforlagets POP serie” (Arnesen and Bladkompaniet 81). To be able to offer popular fiction at an affordable price, however, the volume of sales would need to be bigger than what one could expect to achieve from bookstores alone, and Bladkompaniet thus needed to introduce a new means of mass distribution. Their solution was to team up with Norway’s central distribution hub for newspapers and magazines, Bladcentralen, which brought thousands of new outlets for their disposal (81–85).

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<sup>17</sup> For seven weeks in 1973, the only single which sold more than *Balladen om Morgan Kane* was Norwegian singer Wenche Myhre’s *Jeg og du og vi to*.

<sup>18</sup> According to Arnesen and Bladkompaniet, the meeting was between Bladkompaniet’s editor Hauger, Swedish “Detektiv-magasinet’s” editor Fahlneæs, and an unnamed English publisher who possessed intimate knowledge of Penguin Books’ strategy of producing affordable literature in large volumes (81).

In the emerging market of popular fiction, Westerns played a leading role, and the Norwegian interest for Westerns lasted well into the 1970s. Westerns were thus a major priority for Bladkompaniet which published individual titles, book series, and a magazine of short stories within the genre. Initially, most of their Western authors were American, but Bladkompaniet also sought to promote Norwegian authors (101) and had several Norwegians contribute with short stories for the magazine *Western* (1956-82).<sup>19</sup> Bladkompaniet's catalog of westerns turned more transcultural in the 1960s when the Western genre went out of style in the US, and fewer American Westerns were produced. The earlier domination of American authors then shifted to English writers who by this time had begun to write their own stories about the American West. Prolific and popular English voices include J. T. Edson (1928-2014) who published more than fifty Westerns in Norway between the years 1968 and 1983, and Matt Chisholm (a pseudonym for Peter Watts, 1919-83) whose stories featuring Rem McAllister entertained Norwegians between 1966 and 1983. Many of the English-produced novels were published in Norway before they were published in England, and Chisholm wrote own short stories exclusively for *Western* (Arnesen and Bladkompaniet 103, 113). Bladkompaniet also wanted a Norwegian-produced series of Western novels and were looking for potential candidates when they read two manuscripts by then unknown writer Louis Masterson featuring a Texas Ranger named Morgan Kane. At this time Masterson had already published 28 individual novels through various publishers, under different pseudonyms and in different genres.<sup>20</sup> Four of these novels featured Morgan Kane, and with Bladkompaniet he agreed to make the character Morgan Kane a reoccurring hero in a series of books where new installments of the series were to come out on a monthly basis. As Morgan Kane was their first original in-house production of serial novels, Bladkompaniet was willing to spend considerably more resources on its promotion than what was normal for a paperback from an unknown author, Arnesen writes in his memoirs about the Morgan Kane era (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 1*; Holbye 19–20). And through

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<sup>19</sup> Norwegian authors who wrote for *Western* include Johann Waage, Ulf Gleditsch, Per Weisæth, Finn Arnesen and Alf Halvor Kalmoe (Arnesen and Bladkompaniet 94).

<sup>20</sup> Before attaining the Morgan Kane contract with Bladkompaniet he published individual novels through the publishers Nasjonalforlaget, E. Greens forlag, Ingar W. Tveitan, Magasin for alle and Romanforlaget. These novels vary in terms of genre, including war stories, Westerns and thrillers. Later, in 1969-70, he wrote the 14 first novels in the Clay Allison-series as Leo Manning which were published through Williams forlag. In 1971 he started his own production company, Kjell Hallbings forlag, where he published reworked editions of his earliest novel, and short-stories featuring his other heroes: Jesse Rawlins, Metzgar and El Sordo. In 1976 Hallbing published *Solen stod stille over Little Big Horn* through Gyldendal. In 1991 Naturforlaget printed a collection of Masterson's hunting stories featuring Morgan Kane, Jesse Rawlins and Owen Metzgar under the title *På jakt med Kjell Hallbing*.

Bladkompaniet's massive distribution apparatus, Morgan Kane received ample and widespread exposure from the very beginning.

According to such scholarly traditions within studies of popular culture as the Frankfurt School, structuralism, and political economy, the extent of commercial exposure afforded to the Morgan Kane books could in itself be a sufficient explanation for the series' popular success. These traditions see popular culture as a culture that is governed by those capitalist industries which aim to make financial profit from it. This is reflected in the term "culture industry," which was coined by influential figures of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Adorno. In their view, culture has turned into a money-driven industry where cultural entities are looked at as commodities. They see popular culture as analogous to a machinery which distributes standardized goods after a strategic plan (Theodor W. Adorno 99–100). These standardized goods take the form of cultural commodities which people consume and become addicted to the simple pleasures of. As the aims of the culture industry are economic in nature, they produce those products most likely to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. As a consequence, cultural commodities have become homogenous products with little room for diversity or individuality (99). The link between production and consumption leaves the audience's sense of autonomy in their choice of popular culture an illusory notion, Adorno argues in his essay "Culture Industry Reconsidered" (1963). The way cultural products are tailored for mass-consumption, and the way these products "to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption," means that "the culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above" (98). Even though the culture industry would have us believe that the customer is king, Adorno writes, the reality is that the customer is not as much the subject of the culture industry as it is its object (99).

Central in Horkheimer and Adorno's work on popular culture is a concern about the political implications of market interests holding such power over the masses. They warn against how the easy pleasures that the culture industry produces might lull people into becoming passive consumers. Easy access to cultural commodities, they argue, renders people docile and content with just consuming the commodities' simple pleasures rather than to actively engage with them. "The power of the culture industry is such that conformity has replaced consciousness," Adorno writes (104). The way Adorno and Horkheimer see it, the culture industry's constant fulfillment of people's needs of cultural commodities encourages consumers not to question the conformity of standardized mass-production and the ingrained ideology that comes with it. Through

the cultural products people consume, they absorb their images, definitions, and descriptions of reality. That is to say; in addition to their function as entertainment, cultural products also influence the framework which governs our understanding of ourselves and the world around us (Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 132; Rich 15). By creating a culture marked by consumerism, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, the culture industry limits the public's political imagination to economic and political goals that can only be realized within the existing framework of capitalist society (Storey, *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* 101–02). As such, capitalist society manages to keep the consumers content with being consumers, which benefits those who benefit from the capitalist system. The purpose of the culture industry is therefore, according to this perspective, to keep producing consumers, and to do this in a way which makes it seem perfectly natural to the consumers themselves (Rich 16).

Not all scholars of popular culture agree with the view of popular culture as a culture produced by capitalist industries for profit and ideological manipulation, however, and the degree to which mass-production of cultural products actually influence popular culture is an area of much debate. Traditionally, there has been a tendency to place scholarship on popular culture within one of two opposing camps; those traditions which, like Adorno and Horkheimer, consider popular culture to be primarily governed by the *structure* of our capitalist society, and those who see it as motivated by the *agency* of the people (Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 4). As Storey writes, this second dominant tradition within studies of popular culture, connected with scholars from such fields as social history, 'history from below' and some forms of culturalism, rejects the notion of consumers as passive recipients of culture and argues the importance of people's agency even in a commercialized society. Rather than approaching popular culture as something that is being imposed on the people from "above," they treat popular culture as an authentic working-class, folk, or sub-culture which is emerging from below. From this perspective, popular culture is not seen as a culture that is created by a profit-driven industry, but as the real voice of the people (4-5).

Today, however, these two opposing perspectives are often used together in the same study. Most recent work within studies of popular culture acknowledges the effects that commercialization of popular entertainment has on their audiences, while also taking into account active and creative participation of the audience (Haselstein et al. 332–33). In line with contemporary tendencies within studies of popular culture,

my exploration of Morgan Kane's popular success will thus account for the publishing and marketing organization surrounding the books as well as considering Norwegian consumers as active agency-driven agents. It was the introduction of Gramsci's concept of hegemony into the field of cultural studies that brought the two antagonistic perspectives into an active relationship, Storey explains, as it caused popular culture to be studied as one of the principal sites where production and reproduction of hegemony occurs in a capitalist industrial society (Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 3–4). Within the area of Gramscian-inspired cultural studies, popular culture is now treated as a site where social divisions are continuously being both established and, at the same time, contested. Popular culture is thus regarded as a cultural battle-field, an arena of cultural negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interest of subordinate groups regarding cultural power (Haselstein et al. 333; Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 3–5). This means that popular culture becomes a dialectical play between structure and agency since, in order for there to be an ongoing negotiation between the various social forces of society, both the power of the dominant capitalistic systems and the agency of subordinate social groups must be recognized. The (unequal) social structure of our capitalist society is therefore, from a point of view that accounts for hegemony, understood more as a collaborative process than as the imposed, definitively structured order that was suggested by for example Adorno and Horkheimer. A post-Gramscian perspective is thus a “compromise equilibrium”<sup>21</sup> between perspectives that consider popular culture to be a commercial culture that is fully imposed by the Culture Industry, and perspectives that see it as an ‘authentic’ folk movement or working class subculture (Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 4–5). As Storey argues,

Therefore, although a primary interest for cultural studies is the investigation of how people make culture from and with the commodities made available by the capitalist culture industries, working with the concept of hegemony is always to insist that such research should never lose sight of the conditions of existence which both enable and constrain practices of consumption. In every decade in the history of cultural studies the point has been repeatedly made. It is the

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<sup>21</sup> Storey borrows this term from Gramsci's *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1971). See Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* (4).

‘Gramscian insistence’, before (Storey 2001),<sup>22</sup> with and after Gramsci, learned from Marx (Marx 1977),<sup>23</sup> that we make culture and we are made from culture; there is agency and there is structure. It is not enough to celebrate agency; nor is it enough to detail the structure(s) of power; we must always keep in mind the dialectical play between agency and structure, between production and consumption. (Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 5)

The close connection between structure and agency is also illustrated through Fiske’s explanation of the term popular culture. Popular culture, Fiske argues, is not a form of consumption but a form of culture. And as culture it is “the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system” (23). Therefore, Fiske explains, popular culture is not something that can be bought or sold ready-made. A culture is not found within in the material existence of its cultural products but is something people generate from their own encounters with such cultural commodities. The way Fiske sees it, popular culture is created when people use and subvert cultural commodities in order to make their own set of meanings and values with and from them (35). As an example, he illustrates how people will often buy jeans at the store and then rip them in a particular way in order to make a certain statement or to circulate a particular meaning or message. He or she buys the commodity, (the jeans), and then uses the jeans as a cultural resource by altering them in a way that fosters the desired social relations and constructs the desired meanings of both social and individual identity. It is this *construction and circulation of meanings and messages* that is popular culture, not the jeans themselves, Fiske explains (10–11)

However, while people do not buy popular culture, they still buy mass-produced commodities in order to produce popular culture. As Fiske points out, in an industrial society there exists no “authentic” folk culture at the national level that is separated from the industrial system, which means that the only resources available for people to make into their own subculture are the commodities that the financial industry provides (15). People are thus dependent on the repertoire of texts or other cultural resources that are produced by the culture industry for them to use or abuse, accept or reject as they see fit through their ongoing process of producing and circulating cultural meanings (24). This repertoire is industrialized in the sense that it

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<sup>22</sup> Storey has added the reference Storey, J. (2001) *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Harlow: Pearson.

<sup>23</sup> Storey has added the reference Marx, K. (1977) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

is manufactured and distributed by an industry that is motivated by its own economic interests (23). However, in order to become a financial success, the commodity must also capture the interest of the people. Various studies have shown that as much as 75-90 percent of new consumer products fail to make expected sales despite extensive and strategic marketing (Schneider and Hall; Fiske 30–31). This illustrates that regardless of market strategies, the culture industry is not in complete control of which commodities people buy and which cultural uses they put them to, Fiske concludes (30-31).

Following this line of reasoning, Morgan Kane's position as a popular cultural phenomenon was made possible by Bladkompaniet's efforts to get Morgan Kane products out to the masses, but it also depended on people taking enough interest in Morgan Kane to engage actively with the texts. Considering popular culture as a form of culture, and thus "made from the production, circulation and consumption of meanings" (Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* 3), the production and distribution of the books is only the first part of the process where Morgan Kane became a part of Norwegian popular culture. The second part comes from its readers' active engagement with Masterson's books. According to Fiske, some key textual aspects and qualities can make a commodity such as the Morgan Kane series more suitable for cultural production and thus increase its likelihood of becoming part of a society's popular culture. Firstly, a popular text needs to be what Fiske terms "producerly" in that it needs to be sufficiently open to interpretation for the reader to be able to reconstruct its meaning. As noted, it is by a reconstruction of the product's original meaning that popular culture is produced. In order to explain what classifies a producerly text, Fiske refers to Roland Barthes' distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" aspects in a text (103). The difference between these two textual tendencies is apparent in the various reading practices that they invite: A readerly text is easy to read and does not demand much of its reader. With its traditional structure it encourages a passive, disciplined reader who accepts the text's meaning as it is. A writerly text, on the other hand, is recognized by a proliferation of possible meaning and a disregard for traditional norms of narrative structure. It makes demands on the reader, as he or she has to work things out for themselves for the text to make sense. Fiske's ideal text for the production of popular culture lies somewhere between these two opposing categories. Whereas the readerly text is considered to be the most accessible and popular, its pre-determined set of meaning encourages passive mass-consumption more than the active reconstruction of meaning that is at the heart

of Fiske's notion of popular culture. And though the writerly text encourages the consumer to actively reconstruct its meaning, its complexity and high demands on its readers limit its popular appeal. Hence, Fiske's idea of a producerly text is a text which has the openness that Barthes associates with the writerly text, but which does not have the same demands on its reader. A producerly text *invites* the user to rewrite its meaning according to his or her own agenda, but it does not *require* such action in order to make sense; for the sake of appeal it also offers the reader the option of reading it in an easy, straight forward way that accepts the meaning and purpose of the text as it is (103-4). In other words, the seemingly complete texts of popular culture have enough gaps, contradictions and inadequacies, Fiske argues, to enable producerly readings. They have the ability to incite different meanings depending on the context and the moment of reading (126).

That Morgan Kane is both accessible enough to capture the masses of readers and ambivalent enough to incite different readings, is illustrated by Forfang's analysis of Morgan Kane in *Syn og Segn* from 1992.<sup>24</sup> Because Kane is a character who is full of contradictions, different readers can interpret him in fundamentally different ways, Forfang writes. Kane is both a masculine ideal and a warning against following this masculine ideal at the same time, dependent on the reading. As an example, Forfang suggests that one reader can idealize Kane unconditionally, and accept him as a masculine hero. Another might see Kane as a victim, empathize with his sufferings, and feel sorry for him. A third reader might hope that Kane is able to sort his life out and to start the peaceful existence as a hunter or farmer that Kane sometimes dreams of. Whereas a fourth reader might dislike Kane profoundly, but still enjoy the series' exciting and action-filled plots. Masterson's ability to portray such an ambivalent hero-figure is a literary skill, Forfang concludes, which separates Kane from the standard of formulaic heroes and elevates him into a popular cultural symbol (Forfang). As Forfang made this analysis of Kane ten years after the final Morgan Kane novel was published, his observations have the quality and advantage of hindsight and critical distance and are made on the basis of the Morgan Kane series as a whole. The character of Morgan Kane changed throughout the series so that the way Kane's character comes across at the end of the series is quite different from the way the protagonist was introduced in the earliest books, and it is through this process Kane evolved into the character who became a popular cultural icon. As will be further

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<sup>24</sup> Forfang's article, with the title "Morgan Kane – vår stakkars onkel i Amerika?," was printed in *Syn og Segn* 3/1992.

explored in following chapters, Kane is increasingly depicted as a deeply troubled and flawed character with an open and honest recognition of his own weaknesses and shortcomings. He performs heroic deeds that are worthy of a Western hero, but when the action subsides Kane also battles his inner demons, his frail nerves, his own feelings of inadequacy, and his less than amiable personality. Compared to the epic and knightly hero-figures that Norwegian readers were accustomed to from the tradition of Zane Grey-inspired Westerns (that were prevalent in Norway at that time), Kane stood out in his fallibility. And it soon became apparent that as Kane's imperfect nature became a more prominent part of the stories, his popularity rose accordingly. The first real popular boost came with the books *El Gringo* (1970) and *El Gringo's hevn* (1970), (number 38 and 39 in the series,) where Masterson explores the background of Kane's aloof personality through a backward glance into Kane's youth and his path towards becoming a gunfighter (Arnesen, "I Louis Mastersons fotspor" 25). The importance of the unique character of Kane in regard to the series popularity is also evident when the Morgan Kane series is compared to Masterson's other books. Parallel to his books about Morgan Kane, Masterson wrote another series of Westerns which features other hero-figures.<sup>25</sup> Under the label of "The Louis Masterson series" the intention was evidently to capture the interest of the fans of Morgan Kane, but the books where Masterson portrays other heroes than Kane lack similar success (Dahl 9). As will be further addressed in chapter 5, the fallibility of Kane is a trait that he shares with heroes of Nordic Noir, and, as such, it is among Kane's Nordic aspects. As Masterson's other hero-figures are characters who lie closer to those found in traditional American Westerns, it is interesting to note that these heroes did not have the same appeal to the Scandinavian audience as that of the more Nordic Western hero Kane.

However, as the creation of popular culture occurs when cultural resources intersect with people's everyday life, the complexity of a popular text lies as much in its practical uses as in its internal structures. The style and language of the popular text are thus more concerned with functionality than with aesthetic quality (Fiske 129). As Fiske explains, "the densely woven texture of relationships upon which meaning depends is social rather than textual and is constructed not by the author in the text, but by the reader: it occurs at the moment of reading when the social relationships of the reader meet the discursive structure of the text" (122). In order for a text to be used in

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<sup>25</sup> Masterson's other heroes include Metzgar, a more traditional figure in the tradition of J.F Cooper, and the Pinkerton detective Jesse Rawlings (Dahl 9).

the daily creation of popular culture, it must be relevant for that particular contextual moment. In consequence it is, by definition, transient and impermanent; it is created for a short-lived context, and it is specific to it (108, 129). Generally speaking, popular texts are commodities that are not primarily meant to be preserved but to be used. Their main function is to be an agent and a resource in an active process of social circulation of meanings and pleasures, and not to be a cultural object of a certain standard. This differs from cultural products of other genres which are generally considered to be complete, individual objects, striving to be preserved and recognized by such institutions as universities, museums, art galleries or libraries (123–24). From Fiske’s perspective, institutionalized literature and popular culture value different aspects of texts: where cultural institutions value quality, popular culture values relevance; where cultural institutions are concerned with the text itself, popular culture is concerned with what the text can be made to do (121, 151). This includes an ability to work intertextually. As no single commodity can adequately describe the entire set of meanings involved in the constant circulation of popular productivity, the individual text is only one of multiple resources needed to fuel such a process. It can thus only produce meanings when it enters into an intertextual relationship with other agents of popular production. Therefore, its quality is not judged on its individual features as much as on its intertextual suitability, and a popular text is often cheaply and quickly made (123-26).<sup>26</sup>

Masterson’s Morgan Kane series also began as quickly made, low-cost productions. Before 1969, when Masterson still occupied a day-job as a cashier in a bank, he would write his drafts in his office after the bank’s closing time. In Masterson’s most prolific period he would produce one Morgan Kane novel and two short-stories each month (Arnesen, “I Louis Mastersons fotspor” 27). Such emphasis on quantity in the early days of his writing career influenced Masterson’s work habits as well as the style of his texts. Masterson did not spend time reworking his manuscripts, for example, but left this task to his life-long editor, advisor, and friend Arnesen whom he worked closely together with throughout his career. Each new

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<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that all popular texts are of low artistic quality, Fiske reminds us (120-21). Some cultural productions that started out as agents of their contemporary popular culture have later become highly valued as individual works. Probably the most famous example of this is the works of William Shakespeare. In his time, Shakespeare’s works intersected with people’s everyday social interactions, and were thus agents of popular culture. Today, however, the same texts are no longer relevant for our daily production of popular culture. Instead, they are now appreciated in a different way; because they comply with our current norms of what is considered to be of artistic value, they are considered high art today and are treated as such.

project would begin with the two of them sitting down together to discuss ideas and sketch out a rough outline. After Masterson had written these ideas into manuscripts, he left all editing to Arnesen without any desire on Masterson's part to see the result until it was published. He thus relinquished control of the final product, giving Arnesen complete freedom to "refine the language" and "make those small changes that I sometimes felt would make the story better,"<sup>27</sup> Arnesen writes as he recounts the Morgan Kane years (Arnesen, "I Louis Mastersons fotspor" 27). These early books are largely imitations of the classic Western formula which are found in most of the imported popular Westerns which Bladkompaniet and other publishers of popular fiction published at the time, and it was not until Masterson changed his working habits and took a more active role in the research and editing of his own manuscripts that his personal take on the Western genre came to light.

Throughout the years that Masterson produced Morgan Kane, his working methods changed gradually but dramatically. After years of publishing a new Morgan Kane novel each month, Masterson slowed down his writing pace in the mid-1970s. His manuscripts became longer, denser and more complex, and he spent more time editing and reworking his own drafts (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 1*). A consequence of this development was that Masterson also took the time to pursue his personal interest in American history with the aim to incorporate historical events and persons into Kane's own life story. Aspects Masterson considered to be emblematic of the history of the American West are based on the popular version of American cultural history as it is communicated through popular culture and media. Masterson's books can thus, based on Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities," be seen as a reflection of a Norwegian view, or imagination, of American culture. In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson proposes national cultures as imagined political communities in the sense that the members of the nation have imagined their community into being. By arguing that a nation is 'imagined,' Anderson does not mean that a nation is unreal, or that it in any way can be distinguished from a 'true' or unimagined community. Rather, "it is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion," Anderson explains (6). He argues that a national culture is constructed from popular processes through which residents have their nationality in common. A key element in this process is what Anderson refers to as "print-

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<sup>27</sup> Translation mine. The original quote is in Norwegian.

capitalism,” the standardization of books and newspapers whose simultaneous consumption among the members of a national community generates a shared experience and a shared version of events. Anderson argues that print capitalism can make disparate occurrences be bound together as national experiences as people feel that everyone is reading the same thing and has equal access to the same information (35, 46). Anderson’s work has influenced later studies of new or modern “imaginaries,”<sup>28</sup> including the idea of *social imaginaries* as formulated by Charles Taylor. Stating that he has “drawn heavily on the pioneer work of Benedict Anderson,” Taylor explains that he uses the term social imaginaries to describe “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (C. Taylor 92, 106). Taylor uses the word “imaginary,” he explains, because his idea of the social imaginary is not a social theory, but a way that most people in a society imagine their own social existence. And because this social imaginary is shared by many (if not the entire society), it is a collective understanding which leads to common practices and “a widely shared sense of legitimacy,” Taylor explains. Social imaginaries are circulated through images, stories, and legends, and, as will be further addressed in chapter 3, Europe has a long tradition of circulating imaginings of America and what it represents through its popular culture. In Kane’s story, Masterson is imagining America from a Norwegian viewpoint. The Morgan Kane books can in this regard be treated as reflections of how Norway imagined America at the time they were created. Due to their position in Norwegian popular culture, their version of American cultural history also influenced the way Norwegians would come to imagine America.

The eighty-three volumes of the Morgan Kane series do not tell Kane’s story chronologically, but together they map out his life from his birth somewhere on the Santa Fe trail in the fall of 1855 until he takes his final bullet (of many) in 1911. Every Morgan Kane novel published by Bladkompaniet starts with this page:

**Born:** Fall of 1855, date unknown, somewhere along the Santa Fe trail.

**Height:** 192 cm.

**Weight:** Approximately 75 kg.

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<sup>28</sup> Other examples include spatial imaginaries, climate imaginaries, sociotechnical imaginaries, and, as is most relevant to this project, social imaginaries (Nerlich and Morris).

**Hair color:** Dark.

**Eyes:** Slate gray.

**Special features:** Star-shaped scar on the back of right hand. Lame ring finger on right hand, fastened with a leather cuff to the middle finger. White stripe of lifeless hair over right temple.

**Personal characteristics:** Draws in 1/5 second. Has a weakness for women and gambling. Nervous, introverted, with psychopathic tendencies.<sup>29</sup>

In the early part of the series, Kane is in his mid-thirties and skillfully chases down villains in his capacity as Texas Ranger or US Marshal. In later books, however, Masterson reveals more of Kane's background and personal story, and, with Masterson's growing interest in history, he makes critical moments in Kane's own story interconnect with what Masterson saw as key events and aspects of the history of the American West.

The first momentous event in Kane's life comes already as an infant when the hazardous journey across the Western plains leads to the death of Kane's entire family and leaves Kane an orphan.<sup>30</sup> Taken in by a religious community, the young Kane is ill at ease at his foster family and leaves them behind at the earliest opportunity. At the age of fourteen, he starts drifting along the Western prairie, a means of living that becomes his life story. With Kane's complete lack of ties, either to a family or to a notion of home, Masterson has created a hero figure who is like "driftwood" in the history of the American West<sup>31</sup> in the sense that he is swept along with the current of historical events, and bears witness to their ripple effects on Western American society.

Wherever Kane drifts, he stumbles upon a conflict, an event, or a way of life that is associated with nineteenth-century American history as Masterson read it through contemporary history books and popular culture. As a teenager, Kane guards a

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<sup>29</sup> My translation. Original text: "**Født:** Høsten 1855, dato ukjent, et sted på Santa Fè-veien. **Høyde:** 192 cm. **Vekt:** Ca. 75 kg. **Hårfarge:** Mørk. **Øyne:** Skifergrå. **Spesielle kjennetegn:** Stjerneformet arr på høyre håndbak. Lam ringfinger på høyre hånd, festet med skinnmansjett til langfingeren. Hvit stripe dødt hår over høyre tinning. **Personlige egenskaper:** Trekker på 1/5 sekund. Svak for kvinner og hasard. Nervøs, innesluttet, med psykopatiske trekk."

<sup>30</sup> Kane's older brother dies of cholera during the journey westward, whereas Kane's Irish immigrant parents are killed in an ambush shortly thereafter. The tragic tale is described in the short story *Jornada de Diablo* and in *Blodsporet til Santa Fe*.

<sup>31</sup> Masterson uses the phrase "et stykke driv-ved i ekspansjonen vestover og krampetrekningene som fulgte" about his own hero-figure in the article "Oss psykopater imellom," which is printed in Nielsen and Holbye (44).

transportation route along the Santa Fe trail, a job which lands him in the middle of skirmishes between white buffalo hunters and local tribes of Native Americans in the Texas Panhandle region. From this position, he is able to follow the escalating conflict between whites and local Native American tribes as it leads to the historical battles of Adobe Walls and Palo Duro Canyon in 1874.<sup>32</sup> From then on, he is involved in numerous activities emblematic of Frontier history: he works as a scout, for example, for general Custer's army during the battle of Little Bighorn;<sup>33</sup> he tries his luck as a prospector in Black Hills, Dakota;<sup>34</sup> as a horse-thief in Billy the Kid's outfit in Tascosa, Texas;<sup>35</sup> and as a desperado hiding from the law in the Sonora mountains of Mexico.<sup>36</sup> Most of his working life, however, is spent in service to the US government either as a scout for the US army, as a Texas Ranger, as US Marshal or, eventually, as Special Agent. His own life story intertwined with that of the Western Frontier, Kane becomes a thing of the past at the end of the century. Deemed obsolete by new levels of civilization and technology which have reached the Western states, the veteran Western hero moves along with the Frontier to its last outposts. This includes a short-lived encounter with the Alaskan Klondike<sup>37</sup> before Kane seeks action south of the US border. The last missions of an aging Morgan Kane cross paths with the activities of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba in 1898, the man-hunt for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid in Argentina and Bolivia, and Pancho Villa's revolutionary army in Mexico.

A significant inspiration for Masterson's increased interest in historical research came with his US trip in June 1973. This trip was Masterson's first encounter with the country he had described in almost a hundred books since the early sixties (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 1*; Arnesen, "I Louis Mastersons fotspor" 34). Along with Arnesen he spent four weeks traveling the Western states, taking care to visit locations he wished to include in upcoming novels. As a consequence, when Masterson a few months later wrote *Blodsporet til Santa Fe* (1973), his seventieth

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<sup>32</sup> Kane's experiences during the so-called Red River war, where the U.S army exercised a military campaign against Native American tribes of Comanche, Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne, and Arapaho native to the Southern Plains, are depicted in *Blodsporet til Santa Fe*, *Comanche* and *Den siste Cheyenne*.

<sup>33</sup> The historical battle at Little Big Horn took place 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1876. It forms the setting of Masterson's novel *Der ørnene dør*.

<sup>34</sup> Masterson, *Der ørnene dør*.

<sup>35</sup> Masterson, *Møte i Tascosa*.

<sup>36</sup> Kane's time as a desperado is depicted through the so-called "El Gringo-books," where *El Gringo* (1970), and *El Gringo's Hevn* (El Gringo's Revenge, 1970) are central.

<sup>37</sup> Kane's time in Alaska is chronicled in the books *Alaska Marshall* (1973), *Yukon's onde ånd* (1973), *Klondike '97* (1973) and *Dommedag i Skagway* (1973).

Kane book, he did so with a new sense of authority and a more affirmative self-confidence, Arnesen writes (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 1*).

*Blodsporet til Santa Fe* represents the turning point in Louis Masterson's writing, which was further supported by the three following books *Comanche!* (1974), *Den siste Cheyenne* (1974), and Masterson's most appreciated work *Der ørnene dør* (1974). These three latter books, also referred to as the "Indian-books," form the basis of chapter 4's analysis of Morgan Kane. As will be further explored there, Masterson's more serious style of writing was accompanied by a renewed interest in Native American voices and perspectives. While working on his follow up novel to *Den siste Cheyenne*, Masterson knew he wanted to depict the battle of Little Big Horn between the seventh cavalry and the Indians, with a young Morgan Kane as a military scout. The first US trip was thus quickly followed by a second, where Masterson used the opportunity to meet with historical scholars as well as with representatives of the Native American community (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 4*). In an interview, Masterson describes his new and more thorough way of performing research:

During my trip to the US in '73, I visited all these places, browsed through archives, talked to Native Americans, and, after demonstrating some patience, got to hear stories which I doubt any white man has heard before, and which definitely not are printed in any history book. This gave me the idea to the novel that is bigger than my other Kane-novels, and which was a hell of a job to finish. It took me almost six months!<sup>38</sup>

The resulting book, *Der ørnene dør*, is indeed Masterson's largest production, both regarding volume and substance, and it became the novel that would finally give Masterson literary recognition. After the release of *Der ørnene dør*, Masterson was offered a membership in Den norske forfatterforening, an association of Norwegian

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<sup>38</sup> Interview printed in Holbye (291-92). My translation. Original quote: "Under min Amerika-reise i '73 besøkte jeg disse stedene, trålet arkiver, kom i snakk med indianere og fikk, etter å ha utvist litt tålmodighet, høre historier som jeg tviler på at noen hvit mann overhodet hadde hørt før, og som iallfall ikke står i historiebøkene. Dette gav meg ideen til boka som er større enn de øvrige Kane-bøkene og som det var en jævlige jobb å få ferdig. Den tok meg nesten et halvt år!"

authors where members are selected by a council on the premise that they have produced literature of a certain value (“Den norske Forfatterforening”). He later ended his membership, however, as a protest against highbrow literary attitudes.<sup>39</sup> Attention from other bastions of Norwegian literature followed suit. Masterson’s *Der ørnene dør* was the first Morgan Kane book that was found appropriate for Norwegian libraries, and which were distributed through *Den Norske Bokklubben*. In 1976, the publishing house *Gyldendal*, which had previously refused Masterson’s manuscripts, published a collection of Masterson’s short-stories under the title *Solen stod stille over Little Bighorn*. As a result of his research trips to the US, Masterson also made international connections. He was accepted into the American association of Western writers, “Western Writers of America,” and participated in congresses held in Olympia, Washington in 1973 and in Fort Worth, Texas the following year (Arnesen and Bladkompaniet 106).

Though Masterson’s growing interest for historical research meant that readers had to wait longer for each new Morgan Kane novel to come out, the demand for Morgan Kane soared (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 1*). From 1973 -1977 each new novel had a first print run of 80 000 copies (Arnesen, “I Louis Mastersons fotspor” 46), and the most popular titles have so far been printed in fifteen editions. The final Morgan Kane novel, *Den siste jakten*, came out in 1982. The publicity from the press and the anticipation from the audience were immense, particularly as Masterson had taken a five-year leave from Kane leading up to this final installment. The publisher ordered 110 000 copies to be printed, most likely the biggest first print run of a single novel in Norway. Within eight weeks, 100 000 copies were snatched up. Three years later, in 1985, a selection of Morgan Kane short-stories that had not previously been printed was published as a collection under the title *Kane’s stjerne*, and with that, the 83 book Morgan Kane series was concluded.

The way that the Morgan Kane series grew in popularity as Masterson incorporated more of his own version of American cultural history suggests that Masterson’s (imagined) American West resonated with the way Norwegians imagined America. However, this does not mean that it resonated equally well with the way Americans have imagined America. The next section will address how Masterson’s Nordic version of the American West can be interpreted as a form of cultural

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<sup>39</sup> Masterson ended his membership in Den norske forfatterforeningen in 1984 (Nielsen and Holbye 295).

appropriation of American culture from the perspective that the popular imagery about the American West is interconnected with American cultural identity.

## 2.2 The American Western and American Cultural Identity

**“It takes a foreigner to write [the history of the American West]”**

Kjell Hallbing/Louis Masterson 1975 <sup>40</sup>

By his Nordic readers, Masterson was soon considered an authority in all things related to the “real” history of the American West, that is, how the nineteenth-century American West “really was” outside of the romanticized or fictional universe. In the magazine *Western*, where he printed most of his short-stories, Masterson got his own column called “Kane’s Corner”<sup>41</sup> where he and Arnesen, who was *Western’s* editor, would write short articles on the history of the American West. Their articles provided factual information about characters, events, and famous locations that were frequently treated in Westerns, including (but not limited to) Masterson’s own. Most famous was Kane’s Corner for its questions and answers section where readers had the opportunity to send in their own queries to the famed Louis Masterson. Questions ranged from matters concerning the character Morgan Kane and Masterson’s authorship, such as “What Saloon in Kansas City would Morgan Kane use?” and “You call Jesse Rawlings a bum, what do you mean by that?” to general questions about the American West, such as “what time did Fort Leavenworth gain telephone access – and why?”<sup>42</sup>

When Masterson claims to give his readers a realistic version of American cultural history and asserts his authority regarding what is true and what is false about Western legends, it is a “truth” he has gathered exclusively from reading materials. Masterson and Arnesen educated their readers about a culture that they are outsiders to, and, for a long time, never had encountered.<sup>43</sup> Masterson found this outsider-

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<sup>40</sup> My translation. The quote is taken from an interview that Masterson gave Knut Faldbakken in 1975 for the magazine *Vinduet*. Here Masterson says that he is tempted by the idea of writing a great historical novel about the “Wild West” era; “The Great American Novel, if you like.” Using the British Alistair Cooke’s TV-series about American history as an example, Masterson is convinced that it takes a foreigner’s perspective to write down the history of the American West. The interview is also printed in Holbye (290–95).

<sup>41</sup> Kane’s Corner first appeared in *Western* no 41, 1970, and lasted through 215 editions before its final print in no 31, 1975 (Holbye 320).

<sup>42</sup> Examples taken from Kane’s Corner in a 1970 ed. of *Western*. A copy of the column is printed in Holbye (26).

<sup>43</sup> As noted, Masterson and Arnesen’s first ever trip to the US came in 1973. By then the two of them had educated the public about American Western cultural history in Kane’s Corner for three years and published almost a hundred books about the American West.

position advantageous when writing about the American West, he claims in an interview made in 1975, the period when he was most devoted to historical research of the American West (Holbye 293). The advantages of outsidership in cultural understanding are also articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin who writes that “in order to understand [a foreign culture], it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture” (Bakhtin 7). This is because we cannot fully grasp our own culture as a whole while being members of it ourselves, he explains. It is only in the encounter with foreign culture that we start to ask questions about central norms and principles, and, as such, discover new aspects which we would not have noticed otherwise.

However, when outsiders attempt to portray aspects of cultures other than their own, questions of cultural representation and cultural appropriation arise. Masterson is a foreign author who makes use of cultural elements which can be considered a part of the American cultural tradition. Connections between the tradition of mythic stories of the American West and American cultural identity have been explored and characterized by the so-called Myth and Symbol School of American Studies. Scholars such as Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx laid the ground for a method focusing on how recurring symbols, myths, and motifs in representative American cultural productions can tell us something about the “essence” of American culture. This methodology has been further developed by more recent scholars such as Annette Kolodny and Slotkin. The approach of the Myth and Symbol school is to study imaginative works within a broad sample of American literature, popular culture, art, and politics, and identify frequently applied myths and symbols which connect them. Based on these findings, scholars of the Myth and Symbol school make conclusions about the American national consciousness and character over time. In other words, they look at what is American about America (“Myth and Symbol”).

Smith’s *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* initiated the arrival of the Myth and Symbol School when it first came out in 1950. In his book, Smith surveys how American culture has viewed and imagined the Western Frontier and interprets the effect that these imaginative conceptions have had on American’s behavior. Smith’s study incorporates several disciplines, enlisting such diverse fields as literature, art, history, anthropology, sociology, and economics, with the aim of

reaching conclusions regarding a national character.<sup>44</sup> Smith's methodological approach was taken up by Marx whose book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* remains among the seminal texts of the Myth and Symbol School. Here Marx writes that his book "is not, strictly speaking, a book about literature; it is about the region of culture where literature, general ideas, and certain products of the collective imagination – we may call them 'cultural symbols'<sup>45</sup> – meet" (4). The principle initiated by Smith and Marx that the most dominating beliefs and values that are recurrent through a society's symbolic narratives of mythology can be seen as a reflection of that society's cultural ideology, has been further developed by more recent scholar in the field, Slotkin, whose work forms a central part of the theoretical framework of this study of Morgan Kane. Slotkin explains the term *Ideology*, as "an abstraction of the system of belief, values, and institutional relationships that characterizes a particular culture or society" (Slotkin, "Myth and the Production of History" 70). Ideology can be expressed explicitly through argumentative discourse, such as creeds, sermons or manifestos, where the speaker actively works to persuade its audience. But it can also be voiced in a more subtle manner through symbolic productions like fables and narratives (78). It is within this domain that we find the stories about the American West. The American West has for generations provided a space where values and beliefs that are connected to American cultural history have been acted out in story form, Slotkin writes (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 24). As a distributor of these stories the Western reflects basic values, beliefs, and concepts that have been prominent in American society's popular discourse, and, through its position in American popular culture, communicates them to new generations in a format which encourages these values, beliefs and concepts to become a part of also the next generation's cultural production. The Western is thus both a *product of* popular symbolic imagery and, at the same time, functions as a *distributor of* this imagery to the popular cultural market. The two are interconnected in a mutually dependent relationship as the Western depends on the popularity of the

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<sup>44</sup> In an essay published in 1957 titled "Can American Studies Develop a Method?" Smith argues for a methodological approach which is a "collaboration among men working from within existing academic disciplines but attempting to widen the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry. This implies a sustained effort of the student of literature to take account of sociological, historical and anthropological data and methods, and of the sociologist or the historian to take account of the data and methods of scholarship in the fields of the arts. I am optimistic enough to believe that inquiries which have their starting-points in various academic departments can converge as they are brought to bear upon a single topic, namely, American culture past and present," Smith writes ("Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" 207).

<sup>45</sup> Marx here defines a "cultural symbol" as "an image that conveys a special meaning (thought and feeling) to a larger number of those who share the culture."

symbolic imagery of the American West for its existence, and, at the same time, keeps this imagery alive by distributing it to new generations of audiences.

As symbolic narratives, Westerns do not argue their ideological stance as much as exemplifying it. They tell stories that project idealized examples of good or heroic behavior which serve as models that substantiate their ingrained ideological message (Slotkin, “Myth and the Production of History” 84). As Jane Tompkins writes,

Westerns play, first and last to a Wild West of the psyche. The Images, ideas, and values that become part of an audience’s way of interpreting life come in through the senses and are experienced first as drama. To comprehend how they’ve shaped people’s attitudes and behavior, to understand them in an intellectual and conceptual way, one must begin with their impact on the body and the emotions. (6)

Though the stories that are set in the West are entertaining adventure stories which are appreciated for their escapist qualities, their popular appeal also lies in the way they reflect a number of collective fantasies, fears, and desires that are shared by American society in general. Through their projection of popular imagery about American history they offer American culture a shared system of references, and a shared interpretative tradition regarding the nation’s historical hallmarks, Slotkin explains (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 5–6, 24). The shared interpretation of cultural history provides Americans with a link to each other, a notion of being “natives” of the same culture. At the same time, it also provides a link to earlier creators of American culture and ideology, and thus to a shared tradition of perspectives on how to see the world. As Slotkin states, “when we look beyond the family, ethnic community, or workplace for symbols expressive of our ‘American’ identity, we find the mythologies of the popular culture industry” (10).

It is this interpretative tradition that transcends the stories of the popular Western from general historical narratives into mythology. Slotkin characterizes mythology as “the body of traditional narratives that exemplifies and historicizes ideology” (Slotkin, “Myth and the Production of History” 70, 79). Myths are stories that are drawn from history, he writes, but it is historical narration which is intertwined with ideological discourse. These stories tell a version of their culture’s history that

reflects that culture's ideological tradition, and over time, through generations of acculturation and education, these mythic stories acquire the power to symbolize that ideological tradition as a whole (70, 83). They become so conventionalized that mere references to their most iconic symbols are enough to evoke associations of the mythic tradition's whole spectrum of meaning. As such, a single word or phrase might bring to mind the entire tradition of mythic stories that surrounds it. "For an American," Slotkin writes, "allusions to 'The Frontier,' or to events like 'Pearl Harbor,' 'The Alamo,' or 'Custer's Last Stand' evoke an implicit understanding of the entire historical scenario that belongs to the event and of the complex interpretive tradition that has developed around it" (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 5–6). By the same token, the arch images of the Western genre, "the gunfight, the fistfight, the chase on horseback, the figure of the mounted horseman outlined against the sky, the saloon girl, the lonely landscape itself" have been so culturally pervasive in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, Tompkins writes, that they "carry with them compacted words of meaning and value, codes of conduct, standards of judgment, and habits of perception that shape our sense of the world and govern our behavior without our having the slightest awareness of it" (5-6). As will be addressed in chapter 3, though European Westerns have copied many stylistic aspects of the Western, they do not share the same interpretive tradition as Americans.

The ideology that is communicated in the stories of the Western offers both an explanation and a justification concerning many central characteristics of the American people's national identity. As Richard White describes in *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, the stories of the West are explanations that aim to add some sense of meaning as to why things have turned out the way they have. "In this sense," he writes, "a myth about the West is a story that explains who westerners – and who Americans – are and how they should act" (615). The ideological stories of the West can offer a precedent for what is happening today, and that way tie today's circumstances to something that is familiar and understood (Slotkin, "Myth and the Production of History" 71–72). However, mythic stories can also be used to justify future suggested political and social actions. By portraying a "memory" of comparable issues and problems resolved happily in the past, they suggest that similar successful solutions can help us with the challenges of the present or the future as well (70, 75, 79). The authority of mythic stories is drawn from their interpretive tradition. They tell a version of history that has been told so many times before that the audience accepts it as a "given." As such, the credibility of their themes and topics is not dependent on

objective facts and logical reasoning within individual texts, but rests on the mythic tradition as a whole. Slotkin refers to the mythic story as a “falsification of experience” in the sense that it is “a partial representation” of history that is “masquerading as the whole truth” (74). This version is presented as though its particular interpretation of history were the natural, given state of the world, and as if its ideological implications were the only logical choice for decent and intelligent people (73). In this, Slotkin draws on Barthes’s notion that though mythology is historically contingent, it is taken to be the natural order of things. For Barthes, “myth consists of overturning culture into nature” (Barthes 165) in the sense that myths attempt to make a version of events which is in fact socially or culturally constructed appear to be nothing more than common sense, a “matter of course,” or the general norm.

However, as White explains, the version of history that is culturally constructed has such an impact on our behavior that it influences actual history as well. As people accept the values and lessons from mythic stories, they assimilate them into their daily lives. Consequently, the ideology of mythic stories inadvertently influences their actions, and their actions shape history (616). “The mythic West imagined by Americans has shaped the West of history just as the West of history has helped create the West Americans have imagined. The two cannot be neatly severed,” he writes (615–16).

It was the connection between the Western genre and American cultural history and identity which made Masterson worry about how the public would react to a Norwegian-produced Western series to the extent that he, for the first few years of his writing career, tried to make his books appear as American creations by imitating the traditional universe of Western mythology as he picked it up from popular culture about the American West. From enjoying countless Westerns, both in fiction and in film, Masterson had a clear vision of what the classic West looked like and how things worked there (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 1*; Holbye 19). During this initial period of Masterson’s authorship, worries that straying too far from the classic Western tradition might alienate readers lead him to faithfully follow the genre-pattern known as the Western formula. In his early days of writing, when he produced *Morgan Kane* at night at the end of a full day’s work at the bank, Masterson also relied on the

convenience that the formula features of the classic Western brought. As he said in a later interview: “you get a lot for free.”<sup>46</sup>

What Masterson got for free through the classic Western formula is a premade, standard story pattern in regards to setting, plot, and characters. A literary formula, Cawelti explains, is “a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works” (Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 5). These conventions have, after numerous repetitions, become conventionalized to the point where the reader might expect them to be followed as a rule. The Western tradition has a particularly prominent (and strict) such codex of values, ideas, and ideology. As Cawelti writes,

To create a western involves not only some understanding of how to construct an exciting adventure story, but also how to use certain ... images and symbols such as cowboys, pioneers, outlaws, frontier towns, and saloons along with appropriate cultural themes or myths – such as nature vs. civilization, the code of the West, or law and order vs. outlawry – to support and give significance to the action. (Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 6)

A reader of a formula Western seeks to revisit a familiar world of escapist imagery that he or she has previous experience with. The success of a formula novel thus lies in its ability to allow the reader to re-live earlier Western adventures, and to add just enough originality to intensify the adventure without altering its premises (9-10). In a classic Western the location, the story, the characters, the dialogue and the gestures, and the seemingly incidental activities such as a card game, a bath, or a shave, are all decidedly predictable, Tompkins explains (25). Within an established structure of thematic and formal codes, the same elements occur, and the same maneuvers are performed over and over. One function of this repetitiveness is to offer the reader a feeling of security; in stories where the hero is living a life of great agony and constantly finds himself at the very edge of death, the reader knows from experience that though he is in grave peril, the hero will prevail. Another effect of such a fixed structure of sameness is that it makes the reader so familiar with the territory, so to

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<sup>46</sup> Masterson said this in an interview with Knut Faldbakken in 1975. The interview was originally printed in the magazine *Vinduet*. It can also be found in Faldbakken.

speak, that the West becomes an imaginary world which he or she knows well enough to experience it in an escapist way without continually relating its stories to their own real-world experiences. The Western formula's escapist quality thus encourages the reader to allow themselves to be swept away by its imaginary and mythical universe (Tompkins 25; Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 10–11).

As Masterson gradually developed his own and unique style of writing, he also took his Western series in a direction which in several key aspects differs from that of the Western formula. Though Masterson continued to use the Western formula's action-filled plots and iconic Western stereotypes and settings throughout the Morgan Kane series, his Western series was increasingly adapted to the Nordic context that it was created in and catering to. The next part of this chapter will address Morgan Kane as a product of transculturation.

## 2.3 The making of a Nordic Western – a Transcultural Story

**“Both Morgan Kane and Louis Masterson have changed quite a bit during the ten years that the series has been in production.”<sup>47</sup>**

Kjell Hallbing/ Louis Masterson, 1975

As Masterson tailored his Westerns more to his Nordic audience and context, they take on an increasingly hybrid character. As Norwegian versions of an American tradition, they embody features of both the original genre and the local environment that they were created in.<sup>48</sup> The fusion of cultural forms occurs as cultural elements imported from a foreign context become indigenized into a new one, James Lull explains (155-56). By indigenization, he refers to the process where imported cultural elements take on local features of the new context they are applied in (155-56). In the case of Morgan Kane, genre traits of the American Western have traveled from the cultural center of Anglo-American popular culture to the linguistic and cultural periphery of Scandinavia. Here, their internationally familiar form has served as a prototype which the Norwegian Masterson has adapted to fit with local traditions, conditions, and circumstances of his Norwegian market.

Morgan Kane can thus be treated as a product of a transcultural process, understood as “a process in which cultural forms literally move through time and space where they interact with other cultural forms, influence each other, and produce new forms” (Lull 153). The term “transculturation” was first introduced in Ortiz’ *Contrapunteo Cubana* (1940) in connection with a study of Afro-Cuban culture. In 1947 the book was translated into English by Harriet de Onis and given the title *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Here Ortiz explains that he has chosen the word *transculturation* to more accurately express the complexity involved in the “transmutations of culture” that have taken place in Cuba at this time (Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* 98). Whereas the term *acculturation*, which was regularly used by his contemporaries when discussing the transition from one culture to another, implies only one aspect of cultural change, namely the act of acquiring another culture, his study of Cuban culture required a more complex model. As Ortiz sees it, the process of acquiring something new also “necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture,” that is, a “deculturation” of native cultural elements. By using the term

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<sup>47</sup> My translation. The quote is taken from an interview given in 1975, and can be found in Faldbakken (292).

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Stougaard-Nielsen (2) on regional adaptations of global genres.

“transculturation,” Ortiz was able to express not just the end result, but the *process of transition* from one culture to another, encompassing the different phases of loss (deculturation), gain (acculturation) and the creation of new cultural phenomena. Worth noting is that neither the stage of deculturation nor that of acculturation is absolute but involve the loss or acquisition of individual cultural elements or aspects, not of a complete culture. From this process, where some cultural elements are lost, and some new cultural elements have been gained, a new and original cultural phenomenon develops. Though it has traces of the cultures which it has been created from and influenced by, it is through its unique composition also independent and different from them. By way of explanation, Ortiz likens the new, transcultural product to a human child in the sense that it “always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them” (102-03). Applied to the case of Masterson’s Nordic Western, Masterson’s version of the Western has lost some features of the original Western genre, gained some new aspects inspired by its Nordic context, and become the new and original cultural phenomena of a Nordic Western.

After Ortiz, the concept of transculturation has been developed further and been adapted to an increasingly more interconnected and convoluted global reality. This involves changes in, for example, the way Ortiz’ presented transculturation as a linear process which moves through various phases. Starting with an initial phase of opposition and hostility towards new cultural influences, Ortiz saw the transcultural process as moving through phases of compromise, adjustment, and self-assertion before finally reaching a stage of cultural integration (Ortiz, “Fernando Ortíz on the Phases of Transculturation”). Today’s scholarship on transculturation, however, no longer sees the process of transition as a move from one stage to another, but as constant dynamic two-way interventions. Rather than considering transculturation to be a process which ends in a new, permanent, hybrid society, transculturation studies are now treating the transcultural process as a constant back and forth of impulses influenced by contemporary social and political needs (Holden Rønning 3).

Current focus within transculturation has thus reduced somewhat Ortiz’ original emphasis on the loss of native culture in a postcolonial setting in favor of studies that address the creative interplay that global cross-cultural encounters facilitates (Millington 263). This creative interplay consists of transcultural influences which in a circular manner move freely back and forth between cultural systems in an ever-continuous dynamic process of cultural adaptation and appropriation. With its stress on the dynamic nature of cultural change, transcultural scholarship problematizes the notion that a culture has permanent features. A culture is not seen as a discrete entity

but as relationships and intersections; a living network that is constituted by countless appropriations and influences over the span of history. Consequently, it will never be a permanent entity, but always be in a state of cultural transition or development (D. Taylor 91–93, 101–02; Rogers 491–92).

As no cultural system exists in a vacuum, it will always be subject to cultural influences from outside. For this reason, scholars of transculturation operate by the assumption that no cultural system can be considered “pure” or unaffected by influences from other cultures. Transcultural effects are thus not only felt in colonized or dominated cultures but, (though to a smaller degree), in dominant cultures as well. Albeit not necessarily in equal measure; when cultures that are asymmetrical in power and influence interact, transcultural influences will always affect both of them (or all of them if they are multiple). Thus, within transcultural scholarship, cultures which have traditionally been thought of as marginalized in their encounter with more powerful and dominant cultures, or, in other words, as victims of cultural dominance, are now increasingly considered as also having an impact on the dominant culture (D. Taylor 93).

In the English speaking academic world, one of the most frequently cited scholars in regard to transculturation is Mary Louise Pratt, and her adoption of the term transculturation in an analysis of cultural exchange in a postcolonial context helped popularize the notion of transculturation within the field of postcolonial studies (Kuortti and Falk x; Holden Rønning 3). In her seminal work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Pratt proposes that transcultural processes occur in social spaces, or ‘contact zones,’ where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination” (4). She explains the term transculturation as describing “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant and metropolitan culture” (6). Her definition is thus one of active participation on behalf of the individual within a process of cultural change. “While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture,” she writes, “they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (6). She thus proposes a view on cultural production which is not unlike the way Fiske explains the production of popular culture as active and agency based.<sup>49</sup> The role of agency at the receiving end of cultural transfer is also the topic of Richard A. Rogers’s “From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation,” where he notes

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<sup>49</sup> See e.g. Fiske (23-24).

that in its attention to cultural dominance, the debate concerning cultural imperialism often forgets, (or ignores), the response of the “targeted” culture (482). In his article, he thus argues against the notion known from theories of cultural imperialism which assumes that appropriation of new cultural influences comes about as an automatic result of cultural products being inserted into people’s environment. Being exposed to new cultural impulses is in itself no guarantee for appropriation to occur, he explains, as in order for new cultural material to be appropriated it must be taken up and *used* by members of the receiving culture (476, 482). “Importing USAmerican cultural *products* into other countries is not the same as importing USAmerican *culture* into those countries, ignoring agency, reception, and resistance,” he writes (482). In his differentiation between products and culture, Rogers shares Fiske’s distinction between commodities of mass-culture and actual cultural production.<sup>50</sup> As noted, Fiske illustrates how producers of mass-consumer goods in an industrialized society can provide commodities but not dictate how people choose to implement such products into their everyday culture. Following a similar line of reasoning, Rogers argues that foreign cultural products and influences can form a big presence in people’s environment, but their presence alone does not dictate how members of a receiving culture choose to make use of them. From the range of new cultural products that are made available to them, it is up to the members of the receiving culture to choose what to incorporate into their own daily culture and what to ignore. People do not appropriate foreign cultural forms indiscriminately, Rogers points out, but tend to adopt the forms they need and leave off others (482–83). As will be explored in chapter 3, this is exemplified through European-produced Westerns’ selective appropriation of genre-traits from the American Western.

As the world grows increasingly globalized, the concept of transculturation is becoming highly relevant also within the field of literary studies, and there is growing attention among literary and cultural critics for new ways in which to study and discuss transcultural texts (Kuortti and Falk ix–x, xx; Holden Rønning 1). “Postcolonial studies have provided useful tools for analyzing, among others, New Literatures in English and other languages, as well as throwing new light on an understanding of older texts,” Anne Holden Rønning writes, “but today, with the increase in diaspora studies in literature and cultural studies, new ways of looking at texts are paramount, given the complexity of contemporary literature” (1). What Holden Rønning refers to as the complexity of contemporary literature is also

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<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Fiske (10-11).

addressed by Arianna Dagnino who writes that the current socio-cultural scenario of increasing interconnectedness is fostering a new generation of “transcultural writers” (1–2). She describes these writers as culturally mobile, imaginative artists who “by choice or by life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, live transnational experiences, cultivate bilingual/pluri-lingual proficiency, physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures/geographies/territories, expose themselves to diversity and nurture plural, flexible identities” (1). This new generation, Dagnino argues, addresses issues linked to identity, nationality, rootlessness and dislocation from a point of view that is less and less focused on matters related to migration and/or exile, and more and more concerned with embracing those opportunities which increased diversity and mobility can offer (1–2, 14). They are thus capturing and expressing an emerging “transcultural sensitivity,” which Dagnino describes as “the freedom of every person to live on the border of one’s ‘inborn’ culture or beyond it,”<sup>51</sup> which is adapted to suit the needs of a rapidly globalizing society.

Literary transculturation embraces a wider range of texts than the term postcolonial does, as it is not necessarily connected with topics involving cultural or colonial dominance. Erik Falk and Joel Kuortti explain literary transculturation as “a situated mode of reading that attends to literary meaning which comes out of transactions, struggles, and appropriations of cultures, which emerges from between as well as from within nations, and which, by definition, is not tied exclusively to a colonial historical paradigm” (xx). Dagnino describes transcultural literature, as “a literature able to ‘transcend the borders of a single culture in its choice of topic’,<sup>52</sup> vision and scope, thus contributing to promote a wider global literary perspective” (14). Holden Rønning writes that literary transculturation evolves from “literary processes and genres adapted to a new landscape and way of life” (7), whereas the Nordic Network of Transcultural Literary Studies considers literary transculturation “not as a theory but, ‘a matrix through which a set of critical tools and vocabularies can be refined for the study of texts from a localized world, but institutionalized globally’” (Holden Rønning 1). The way scholars of literary transculturation include texts which are not directly related to postcolonial topics makes their outlook of transculturation more applicable to Masterson’s books which were not created in a colonial or postcolonial context. In Masterson’s case, his transcultural environment

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<sup>51</sup> Dagnino here refers to Mikhail Epstein’s definition of transculturation from Epstein (334).

<sup>52</sup> Dagnino here refers to Anders Pettersson’s definition of transculturation from Pettersson and Lindberg-Wada (1).

was based not on cultural dominance as much as cultural inspiration from American popular culture.

The instant internet access to foreign cultural forms regardless of their physical location, or, (given that they are recordings,) of their time of creation, inspires cultural hybrids that are fusions of an increasingly diverse pool of influences (Lull 153–60). Thus, whereas Ortiz' *Contrapunteo Cubano* focuses on human beings as the bearers of culture and how the movement of people from one geographic location to another facilitates cultural change (Millington 261), the cultural field in a contemporary context has been greatly expanded by the way global digital communication has broken down old limits of geographical distance. A consequence of this is seen in the way current possibilities of internet streaming and downloadable e-books offer new outlets for cultural products from such cultural peripheries as Scandinavia to gain a foothold in major cultural markets like the US. Today's release of Morgan Kane in the US, for example, is based on such downloadable e-books.

However, while today's release of Morgan Kane in the US is based on digital platforms, it is worth noting that Masterson wrote the original editions of Morgan Kane at a time without internet access. As such, his field of creative influences moved in a much slower and more selective cycle than it would have done in our current global information age. For inspiration to his Westerns, Masterson depended on access to translated or subtitled versions of fiction and film. The Norwegian market provided an ample selection of translated Westerns, and, as noted, Masterson has explained that he picked up the most classic Western genre aspects from a childhood watching Western films and reading Western novels.<sup>53</sup> Among his favorite Western authors he lists Americans such as Zane Grey, Alan LeMay, Louis L'Amour, Jack Schaefer and Lewis B. Patten, but as inspiration for his Western hero-figure he also mentions the European produced film Westerns of Sergio Leone, and hero-figures of other genres than the western such as Ian Fleming's British spy-hero James Bond, and the rough and dark hero-figures of the American hard-boiled universe.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that hard-boiled crime, such as novels by American author Mickey Spillane, were published in Norway by Masterson's publisher Bladkompaniet (Arnesen and Bladkompaniet 111–13). The sources Masterson lists as inspirations are thus both American and European and some, like the European Western and the hard-boiled

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<sup>53</sup> Masterson writes about this in the article "Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson" which was first printed in the magazine *Western Extra* in January 1971. It can also be found in Hallbing, "Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson."

<sup>54</sup> Masterson writes that though Kane is a hard man, he is not harder than the police men of the ghettos of American cities who also fight for "the law" with gun in hand (Hallbing).

Noir universe, are (as will be addressed shortly) a mix of both. As such, the culturally hybrid product of a Nordic Western has been influenced by cultural styles which are themselves cultural hybrids.

The notion that cultural hybrids develop from transcultural encounters between forms which themselves are cultural hybrids is central to the transcultural perspective. Its understanding of cultural change as a phenomenon where appropriations of elements occur between multiple cultures so that identification of a single originating culture is problematic, and, what is more, that these multiple cultures are considered cultural hybrids in their own right, distinguishes transculturation theory from other common perspectives on cultural appropriation, Rogers explains (491). Whereas studies of cultural exchange, cultural dominance, and cultural exploitation<sup>55</sup> focus on the encounter between two cultural systems (either as two equal systems that influence each other as in theories of cultural exchange, or as a dominant and a subordinate culture as in studies of cultural dominance and exploitation) scholars of transculturation highlight the hybridity of cultural forms and systems by seeing cultural development as a constant creative interplay between multiple cultures (491).

The dark and hard-boiled universe which inspired the way Masterson shaped his hero was communicated through such a cultural hybrid, the genre of film Noir which Masterson watched in Norwegian cinemas.<sup>56</sup> The transnational and transcultural process of cultural exchange between American and European culture which lies at the heart of film Noir's original aesthetics can be illustrated by the origin of the term itself: *Noir*, a French word that translates as "black" in English, was first used by French critics to describe an American mode or genre, and has later been taken up and applied by the Americans themselves. Whereas the American writers whose fiction was to inspire the subsequent Noir films, such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, at the time characterized their own books as hard-boiled or realist fiction (Hill and Turnbull 4), French translations gained the generic label of *Serie Noir* in Europe due to the genre's dark, or "Noir," mood of cynicism and despondency (McVeigh 72–73). The American hard-boiled genre is particularly dark in its exploration of the rotten core of American society, where we are introduced to dodgy

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<sup>55</sup> R. A. Rogers defines these terms as: "cultural exchange: the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures with roughly equal levels of power;" "cultural dominance: the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed onto the subordinated culture, including appropriations that enact resistance;" "cultural exploitation: the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation" (477).

<sup>56</sup> Masterson talks about his love for the cinema in numerous interviews. See e.g. Nielsen and Holbye (22–24, 44).

and sleazy environments and atmospheres filled with greed, bribery, vice, and malice (72-73). When the end of the Second World War opened the French market for a raft of Hollywood crime-dramas, French film critics perceived a connection between these films and the genre they knew as Noir fiction. The link was particularly evident as a number of the earliest Noir films were directly based on American hard-boiled novels. Famous examples include *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Glass Key* (1942) which were based on novels by Hammett, and *The Big Sleep* (1946) which was based on a novel by Chandler. The label *Noir* was thus used to describe not only a type of fiction but also a style of film (Hill and Turnbull 4). Eventually, the term *Film Noir* traveled to America and became the name of an American-based genre. To summarize the circular movement of cultural elements across American and European borders which caused the term Film Noir, hard-boiled fiction was first exported from the US to France where it received a new term (Noir) which then traveled back to the US where it was used to describe American produced films. These films were also exported to Europe.

Like the term itself, the specific aesthetics that Noir films are recognized by are also a result of a crisscrossing pattern of two-way exchange between Europe and the US. Though based in Hollywood, the film sets of Noir productions were a meeting ground for production crews of multiple nationalities. Industry personnel, including directors, came to Hollywood from Europe and brought with them European influences on aesthetics and themes. These European influences were truly European, Alastair Phillips explains, as filmmakers often moved between various European centers of film before arriving in the US. As an example, Phillips mentions the 1947 Noir film *The Long Night*, an American remake of a French film (*Le Jour se lève*), which was directed by Russian-born Anatole Litvak who operated in Russia, Paris and Berlin before coming to Hollywood, a path that was highly symptomatic for the circulation of film personnel between various nations within Europe and between Europe and America (102). The characteristic features of Noir films grew out of this circulation, where the filmmakers' and film personnel's European experiences brought not only European cultural norms and traditions to Hollywood, but also specialized expertise in the technical arts required to execute them. From Germany, for example, came a cultural tradition of using a dramatically shadowed lighting style to create a sense of psychological disorientation that is otherwise associated with 1920s Weimar cinema, and which now has become a genre trait of Noir films. Along with the cultural inspiration also came the experience and knowledge gained from German film

industry's expertise within the very latest developments in panchromatic film stock and light projectors. Technicians who had previously worked in Germany "knew instinctively how to light a room or nighttime space and make full use of the aesthetic potential of reflective surfaces like water, window panes, fabric, and mirror glass in order to register the psychological tensions on the faces of a film's main protagonists," Phillips writes (101-02). The aesthetics of Film Noir is made up of numerous such examples of filmmakers who subtly and gradually influenced the American film scene with experiences from their various backgrounds. Film Noir is therefore very much an "active site of experiential (and experimental) negotiation between European migrants and the world they found themselves within," he concludes (95, 98).

Another cultural hybrid which has been highly influential for Masterson's own cultural hybrid is the Western universe of Masterson's favorite director<sup>57</sup> Sergio Leone (1929-1989). Leone's Italian Westerns are a highly transcultural endeavor in every aspect, as illustrated in Stian Bromark and Dag Herbjørnsrud's book *Frykten for Amerika* (2003). Here they explain how Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un Pugno di Dollari*, 1964) is essentially a European remake of a Japanese film called *Yojimbo* (1961) by director Akira Kurosawa. Kurosawa was at this time most known for his *Seven Samurai* (1954), a film which was inspired by American William S. Hart's Westerns which Kurosawa enjoyed as a child. At the onset, the inspiration behind Leone's script was thus a result of cultural influences traveling from the US to Japan to Italy and, finally, to Spain (where the films were recorded) (222). Leone then added a soundtrack which was inspired by Mexican burial songs, by Oklahoma-born folk singer Woody Guthrie, and by Italian folk music. As Leone had never been to the US at the time he began making Westerns, the desert landscape that he made the location of his films is one that matched his own vision of the Wild West. He found such a landscape in Spain and used that as location for all his Westerns the following ten years. Soldiers of the Franco regime join in as extras, which means that they participate in a cultural production which has influenced the way Europe (and Masterson) would imagine the West. This is how Hollywood and the rest of the world are interconnected, Bromark and Herbjørnsrud conclude: "an Italian film director is inspired by Japanese films, he visualizes the fabled American West, adds some Mexican rhythm and conquers both the American and the European market"<sup>58</sup> (222).

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<sup>57</sup> In an interview made in January 1971, Masterson reveals that his biggest dream is to see Morgan Kane on the big screen produced by Sergio Leone and starring Clint Eastwood as Morgan Kane (Hallbing 23).

<sup>58</sup> My translation. The original quote is in Norwegian.

It was not without effort that Leone's films conquered the American market, however, as many Americans saw Leone's films as representative of an Italian invasion of their privileged form, William McClain explains. American critics of the 1960s appreciated that the Western had universal appeal, but not that its production could be anything but American (52, 57). Though European Westerns were nothing new,<sup>59</sup> mainstream America was not accustomed to them. The Western had, until now, been a cultural form that was considered privileged to the US. "Perhaps nothing better demonstrates how closely American critics identified the Western with American national culture than the degree of knee-slapping comic absurdity they found in the very thought of an Italian Western with an international cast," McClain writes (57). When Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* eventually did capture the American audience, however, it inspired a change in the character of the American Western. In the 1960s, before Italian Westerns (including, but not limited to Leone) made their impact on the genre, the American Western had become a largely nostalgic and backward-looking form that seemed unable to offer much more than "re-runs of Western stars' finest moments, although now with incumbent creaking and stiffness," Stephen McVeigh writes (162). Italian Westerns, however, brought a new sense of realism to the Western, and reinvigorated the overall appeal of the genre at a time when the old forms and themes no longer seemed to catch the spirit of the contemporary times. The Italian Western is thus another example of cross-cultural exchange between Europe and the US which has had an impact not only on European but also on American culture. Its influence inspired a new generation of American film-makers to reinvent the Western genre in a way that allowed it to be socially, politically and culturally relevant again. They stretched the boundaries of the genre, discarded tired structures and introduced new, more vital ones in their place. This development made the Western a valid medium for a younger generation to use in their commentaries on pressing political issues of the day, not least of which was the war in Vietnam. Moreover, McVeigh points out; the Spaghetti Western also brought the emergence of Clint Eastwood, the man who was to be a continuous force of revisioning of the Western genre (168–69). Clint Eastwood's generation of Western heroes are more hard-boiled and cynical than their predecessors, and as they gradually took over after the aging John Wayne-generation, they caused a general trend of a rougher, more brutal kind of Western. As will be explored in chapter 3, Kane shares certain aspects with European Leone's cynical and violent anti-hero. In other ways (which will be

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<sup>59</sup> The history of European-produced Westerns will be addressed in chapter 3.

studied in chapter 5) the style of Masterson's West and the distinct set of attitudes and characteristics he afforded his hero-figure take a form which is more associative of the Nordic countries, and the style of realism which today is popularly termed Nordic Noir, the subject of the next section.

## 2.4 Morgan Kane and Nordic Noir

Nordic Noir as a genre is yet to receive a universally accepted definition, but Glen Creeber understands it as “a broad umbrella term which describes a particular type of Scandinavian crime fiction, typified by its heady mixture of bleak naturalism, disconsolate locations and morose detectives” (1), whereas Annette Hill and Susan Turnbull write that “the term Nordic Noir is associated with a region (Scandinavia), with a mood (gloomy and bleak), with a look (dark and grim), and with strong characters and a compelling narrative” (1).

In Masterson’s day, Nordic Noir as a genre was not yet established, but the particular style of realism which lies at the core of Nordic Noir literature and drama developed out of the same Scandinavian context where Masterson experimented with his Nordic Western. Creating hybrid forms, both the Nordic Western Morgan Kane and the first generation of Nordic Noir writers absorbed foreign concept, ideas, and genres and merged them with their own regionally based traditions. As Swedish film scholar Olof Hedling writes, Nordic Noir is “an encounter between marginal and regional traditions and American/global popular culture” (4). Like Morgan Kane, the Nordic Noir style has its origin in the late 1960s and began as a Nordic interpretation of European and American cultural influences. Nordic Noir’s characteristic features, which by some scholars are referred to as a formula,<sup>60</sup> came into existence as a hybrid mix of traditional British who-done-it mystery and new impulses from the American hard-boiled genre. The British tradition of crime mysteries has always been highly appreciated in Scandinavia, and before Maj Sjöwall (b. 1935) and Per Wahlöö (1926-75) introduced the godfather of Nordic Noir, Inspector Martin Beck, most Swedish crime heroes resembled the classic British mystery solver. Inspector Beck, on the other hand, was largely modeled after the characters found in the American hard-boiled police procedurals of Ed McBain and thus set the standard of a tougher and more hard-boiled Nordic detective (Hedling 4). Sjöwall and Wahlöö had intimate knowledge of the works of McBain after having translated a number of his stories into Swedish, and this inspiration lies at the heart of their own crime fiction which became the prototype for the characteristics of the particular form of naturalism that is today known as Nordic Noir (4). Rather than simply copying the American hard-boiled formula, the two Swedish authors tailored and adapted it in a way that would work in a

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<sup>60</sup> Glen Creeber, for example, uses the term formula (14).

Scandinavian context. The new and more hard-boiled Nordic universe replaced an urban American setting with Swedish territory, and the hard-boiled genre's depiction of a corrupt capitalist society with social criticism related to the flaws of the Swedish welfare state. These novels about Inspector Beck thus initiated the distinctive criticism of contemporary society and its politics based on the values of social-democratic Scandinavian culture which is emblematic of Nordic Noir (Bergman, *The Well-Adjusted Cops of the New Millennium* 34; Creeber 1).<sup>61</sup>

As will be explored in chapter 5, though set in the American West and not in the Scandinavian welfare state, Masterson has incorporated a mood, look, and theme of social criticism into his depiction of Kane's Western society which is comparable to the style of Nordic Noir. Adding a naturalistic feel, he has exchanged the atmosphere of optimism which is usually found in the Western with the more introverted and melancholic mood associated with Nordic Noir.<sup>62</sup> Nordic Noir is known to give much attention to the inner lives of its troubled characters and is often said to focus as much on explorations of the human psyche as on the plot,<sup>63</sup> and considering that the Morgan Kane series is a serial-Western, it is remarkably contemplative for its kind; it does follow typical Western plots of action-filled adventures but in-between all the action Kane has a habit of retreating into his own mind. And it is in the character of the hero-figure that the Morgan Kane series' link to Nordic Noir is most clearly felt. When compared to the hero-figure of the Western formula (which forms the topic of chapter 4), Masterson's Kane comes across as strikingly passive, fallible, and insecure – aspects which (as we will see in chapter 5) he shares with hero-figures known from Nordic Noir.

As Masterson created the Morgan Kane series at the same time as Sjöwall and Wahlöö devised Inspector Beck,<sup>64</sup> Nordic Noir as a genre was not yet established, and Masterson's Morgan Kane is thus not written within the Nordic Noir genre. But the areas where Masterson experimented with the Western genre and made his Western seem "different," are areas which also correspond with the formula features of Nordic Noir. The Morgan Kane series' similarity with Nordic Noir suggests that the aspects they have in common are products of their mutual Nordic context. I will therefore use

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<sup>61</sup> In Norway, the distinctive social criticism initiated by Sjöwall and Wahlöö was further developed by Gunnar Staalesen (1942 -). Staalesen's reoccurring hero Varg Veum, first introduced in *Bukken til havresekken* (1977), is a former social worker who has turned private eye. Veum operates in the underbelly of Norwegian urban society, and Staalesen's books are known to address such topics as substance abuse, prostitution, child abuse and political corruption.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. Hill and Turnbull (14).

<sup>63</sup> See e.g. Creeber (9).

<sup>64</sup> The ten novels about Beck is published between 1965 and 1975.

as a hypothesis in this project that the aspects which correspond with Nordic Noir are the “Nordic” aspects of Morgan Kane.

### 3 Europe and the American Western

Though the idea of a Norwegian Western was considered a novelty when Masterson introduced Morgan Kane, making one's own use of the lore and popularity associated with the American West is a recipe with long traditions in other European countries. This chapter will look at how the lore of the American West has been exported to Europe so that also the European audience has imagined the American West, and how the European fascination with the West has resulted in the production of European versions of the Western which were read (and watched) alongside those imported from America. These European versions reflect the European imagination of the Wild West, and, through their position in European popular culture, have also had an impact on the way Europeans came to imagine the American West. When Masterson wrote his Morgan Kane series in 20<sup>th</sup> century Norway, the image he held of the American West was influenced by European as well as American stories about the West.

Examples of European-produced Westerns which have been significant in European popular culture from the early days of the Western and up until Masterson's day, include productions of Karl May (1842-1912), Morris (a pseudonym for Maurice de Bevere, 1923-2001), and Leone. May represents the earliest examples of European images of the American West as he wrote adventure stories set in the American West at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His adventure stories were published at the same time as the production of American dime novels slowed down, and May's tales of the West consequently took over the European market for Western pulp fiction. His books are estimated to have reached more than three hundred million readers, making him the most popular writer on the European continent (Nash 10, Nichols 9). Representing European Westerns in the post-World War 2 era, we find Belgian Morris' Lucky Luke series. The humorous comic series *Lucky Luke*'s satirical and parodic version of the American West has been continuously running since its creation in 1946, is estimated to have sold about 280 million books world-wide, and is enjoyed in 30 different languages (DBNL). Though the original creator has passed away, new albums are still produced for an eager audience. The album *Cavalier Seul* (English title: *Lone Riders*, 2012) was, for example, printed in 450,000 copies (Pellegrin 2). Lucky Luke is interesting to study because of the way its reliance on its audience's familiarity with the American Western formula-tradition illustrates the American Western's position in 20<sup>th</sup> century European popular culture. Representing Masterson's contemporary Europe are the Western films of Leone. Leone is also interesting to include as

Masterson listed Leone amongst his key sources of inspiration behind the formation of Kane's character.

This chapter will focus on how – like Masterson – May, Morris and Leone all set their stories in the American West, but, in diverse ways, made alternative versions of the West which were adapted to their own European context. Within their work we find elements and aspects that resemble the traditional American Western, but also aspects that are directly related to their individual European social and political reality. Their Westerns are thus, like Masterson's, examples of the transcultural concept of products that consist of elements gathered from multiple sources and brought together into new hybrid forms. This chapter will begin by mapping out the transcultural territory in which Masterson wrote his Nordic Western.

Though representing different generations, the Europe of May, Morris, Leone, and Masterson was always ripe with mythic stories of the American West. That is to say, since the early days of the American Western, the lore of the Western frontier which has dominated the American cultural market has also been exported, so that the mythic character of the Frontier was introduced to Europe more or less at the same time as to the American audience. James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), for example, was published in England and France the same year that it came out in the US, and Cooper frequently toured Europe at this time to promote his novel (Nichols 5). Also touring Europe (including Masterson's Scandinavia) was the immensely popular so-called "Wild West shows" of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, including that of William Cody (Broughton 19–20). Cody's show was certainly the most famous, but it was neither the first nor the only such Western show to tour Europe.<sup>65</sup> The exotic features of the Wild West which these Western performers accentuated, captured the European imagination to such a degree that they came to influence the European image of America throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mythic stories of the American West have for millions of Europeans been the most common and popular introduction to America, and governed their impression of American culture's presumed character traits. Thus, though the West encompasses but a fraction of the entire American nation, the tales of the West have been prevalent enough in European popular entertainment to have had a considerable impact on the European idea of what constitutes America's most characteristic aspects (Nash 3–4, 16; Nichols 5).

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<sup>65</sup> Examples of other Western shows which toured Europe include Dr. William F. "Doc" Carver, who for a time competed against Cody for the same audience, Gordon W. Lillie, who went by the alias "Pawnee Bill," and the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Wild West Show (Nichols 10–11).

The exoticized version of American characteristics which colored the European impression of America is an example of selected cultural symbols becoming emphasized, highlighted or enhanced in order to promote certain aspects of own cultural identity. Deliberate and strategic demonstrations of cultural symbols are a central part of the transcultural process, Diana Taylor writes in “Transculturating Transculturation” (91). Here she explains how culture has two different facets; one that is predominantly “given” or inherited, and another that is governed by active and political choices. The “first face of culture”<sup>66</sup> consists of a society’s inherited sets of symbols, discourse, and ideology, as theorized and studied by social system scholars like Max Weber and Clifford Geertz. The “second face of culture,” however, is “the conscious politicization of culture, the strategic use of cultural symbols, and the recognition that ‘cultural identity becomes a political resource’ in group action,” Taylor writes (91). The perspective of transculturation involves both these facets; the transcultural process describes and examines the cultural transition of inherited or given cultural systems in the encounter with foreign cultures, and, at the same time, the theory of transculturation has a political aspect as it suggests the society’s own awareness of its own cultural appearance. “The issue in transculturation, then,” she concludes, “is not only one of meaning (what do symbols mean in different contexts). It is also one of political positioning and selection: which forms, symbols, or aspects of cultural identity become highlighted or confrontational, when and why” (91).

The characters and stories from the mythic American West highlighted several aspects and qualities which appealed to Europeans. The Western’s appreciation of chivalry and brute strength, for example, was evocative of European saga-heroes of old, such as Siegfried or Thor, and many European cultures saw the Western heroes as mirror images of their own cultural saga-heroes. The Western thus provided role models with similar characteristics as the medieval knights which had provided role models for previous generations, but the Western heroes were more relevant to daily life of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nash 7, 12), and thus, according to Fiske’s definition of popular culture, more suitable to be used in popular cultural production. Europeans also used stories about the West in their daily production of popular culture as an escape from their contemporary present much the same way as Americans did. The Western’s images appealed to millions of Europeans who experienced a monotonous work routine in Europe’s increasingly technologically oriented industrial societies. The imagined West provided an escape to an imaginary and more attractive world which

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<sup>66</sup> Taylor writes that she borrows this term from David Laitin’s *Hegemony and Culture*.

had few of the problems they faced in their own urban society. Never having seen America or the American West first-hand, millions of Europeans shaped utopian visions of a space with more personal freedom, more social equality and opportunities for social mobility, and an absence of the demands of conformity and the governmental control that they faced in their everyday lives (4–16).

The stories of America took on a particularly personal appeal for those millions of Europeans who, escaping economic, social, and political discontents, became American immigrants. In this regard, Masterson's Norway is particularly well represented. Except for Ireland, no other European country rivals Norway when it comes to the extent of emigration to the US.<sup>67</sup> Spanning a century, 800 000 Norwegians journeyed across the Atlantic to chase the dream of a better life. These adventurers sent letters home to the families, friends and neighbors they had left behind, which further fueled the Norwegian imagination about America. Other factors in Norway's connection to America include Norway's strong western seafaring traditions, Norwegian dependency on the US during and after the second World War (including the US' protection of the exiled Norwegian Royal family during the German occupation and the post-war aid from the Marshall plan), the leading Norwegian party Arbeiderpartiet's strong connection to the US, the NATO alliance, and Norway's position outside of the European Union (Bromark 141).

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the formulation of the imagined West developed in a similar pattern in Europe as it did in the US. The Wild West Shows were followed by dime-novel Westerns and pulp cowboy magazines as the dominant outlet for western escapist literature. Many of these stories featured Cody both in their plots and on their front page. Owen Wister and Zane Grey, the most prominent early creators of the Western formula in literature, were widely translated and read across Europe, and were, for example, best-sellers in Masterson's Norway (Nash 11; Nichols 8). The man who assumed their mantle in the 1950s, Louis L'Amour, was also among the American Western writers which Masterson mentioned specifically among his chief influences.<sup>68</sup> American Western films were also exported and immediately embraced by the European audience.<sup>69</sup> These films were particularly suitable for

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<sup>67</sup> When calculated in percentage of the total population (Bromark 141).

<sup>68</sup> Masterson writes about his international sources of inspiration in the article "Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson" which was first printed in the magazine *Western Extra* in January 1971. It can also be found in Hallbing, "Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson."

<sup>69</sup> Roger L. Nichols writes that "as early as 1910 *The Bioscope*, a British film journal, noted that Westerns had become the public's favorite" (13).

export as they required minimal translation. With their elementary plots and main emphasis on action, only brief subtitles were needed for a non-American audience to follow the plot. Even so, Europeans were also quick to produce their own Western films. Particularly prominent in the development were Denmark's Great Western Film Company, which started producing their own Westerns as early as 1910 (Nichols 12–13; Nash 12). The Nordic interest in the American West did by no means diminish in the years leading up to Masterson's *Morgan Kane*, and Masterson has told of a childhood dominated by stories and images of the American West. As Masterson wrote in his column in the magazine *Western*,

Why Western? I grew up with it. I was 11 years old when the war ended, and Cowboys were our heroes. No astronaut nonsense back then. We scampered in the woods from early morning to late night equipped with homemade "weapons," and were, at least, rewarded with strong legs. We read Zane Grey under the covers at night and bluffed our way into movie theatres.<sup>70</sup>

Whereas Masterson talks of a childhood filled with romantic Westerns in the tradition of Zane Grey (Holbye 9, 22, 24), Morris names 20<sup>th</sup> century Hollywood Westerns as a major inspiration for the *Lucky Luke* series (Pellegrin 11), and the popular image of the American West in May's contemporary Germany was substantially colored by the works of James Fenimore Cooper (Nichols 256). The next part of this chapter will focus on how, in their own European-produced Westerns, May, Morris, Leone, and Masterson all demonstrate a selective use of features and aspects which are adopted from their American influences.

In May's productions, the American West seems to function primarily as an exotic setting for stories that are really about native German themes and principles. In the words of Julian Crandall Hollick, May's stories "retell good old German myths about good versus evil" that have simply been "transported to Arizona and Colorado" (Hollick 18). Worth noting in this regard is that what he uses as a convenient site for an adventure story is a place and a space with particular significance within American cultural and national history. The setting itself, the developing western territory, was

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<sup>70</sup> My translation. Original text: "Hvorfor Western? Jeg vokste opp med det. Jeg var 11 år da krigen sluttet, og cowboyer var våre helter. Ikke noe romfartsvås den gangen. Vi fløy i skauen fra morgen til kveld med selvlagde "våpen," og fikk i hvert fall sterke bein. Vi leste Zane Grey under dyna om kvelden og bløffet oss inn på kino" (article also printed in Nielsen and Holbye 22).

the US' first conception of an entirely American territory, Smith explains in his classic study of the West's role in American history, *Virgin Land* (1950). As Americans moved away from the coast and into the Western interior, they also took a step away from their dependency on the English and European community. The move West was, as such, the first step towards a self-reliant, perhaps even xenophobic, continental nation (*Virgin Land* 27–28, 216–17). The Western territory as a historical location thus holds important connotations regarding the history of the US as a nation.

Equally central to the West's symbolic significance regarding American national identity, however, is the Western territory's function as a mythic *space*. As Tompkins explains,

Not just any space will do. Big sky country is a psychological and spiritual space known by definite physical markers ... The West functions as a symbol of freedom, and of the opportunity for conquest. It seems to offer escape from the conditions of life in modern industrial society: from a mechanized existence, economic dead ends, social entanglements, unhappy personal relations, political injustice. The desire to change places also signals a powerful need for self-transformation. The desert light and the desert space, the crack of saddle leather and the sun beating down, the horses' energy and force – these things promise a translation of the self into something purer and more authentic, more intense, more real. (10)

In the Western, the West offers Americans the promised New World, a new beginning free from old ties and old conventions. The seemingly empty plains are painted as a vacant space, a blank canvas, where thrifty men (and women) have the freedom to write their own story restricted by nothing but wild nature and their own physical limits. Central features of this mythic space originate from a classic pastoral ideal which the Puritans brought from Europe when they first settled on the American continent, and which has later been adapted to the social and political history of the US as an emerging nation. Yet another example of cross-cultural exchanges between Europe and the US, the mythology of the American West is thus an Americanized version of myths that have been deeply rooted in European thought for more than two thousand years (Nash 4). From classical times the idea of a place representing youth,

purity, unlimited possibilities and freedom from current struggles of the homeland has provided Europeans with escapist entertainment through oral traditions, sagas, and epics. It has been known by many names, famous examples being Elysium, Atlantis, Eden and Arcadia (Nash 4–5; Smith, *Virgin Land* 9, 43–43; Marx 40). It has, however, consistently been placed in a westerly location. In ancient Greece, the playwright Euripides wrote of a “western land of flowers,” reserved for those favored by the gods, and the Romans searched westward where they believed to find the “Island of the blessed.” As Christendom flourished in Europe, the mythical West was connected to Eden, a heavenly paradise on earth, and it was the image of Eden which the Puritans who emigrated westward from Europe brought with them to the new American continent and which is a root of today’s mythology about the American West (Nash 5; Kolodny 6). When indigenized to an American context, some fundamental themes and concepts from the original European myths were kept. The desirable prospect of settling new lands that lie far away from centers of civilization, and the notion of rural life as an untainted contrast to the corrupt, vain and disordered existence of urban society, for example, are motifs also found in the writings of the likes of Virgil, Hesiod, Xenophon, Cato, Cicero, Varro and Horace (Marx 97). As are the visions of the West as an escape from the mundane, an antidote to the present ailments of society, and a place where heroes embrace and enforce “the highest and purest standards of manliness and morality” (Nash 7). It is, as such, not surprising that Europeans have recognized some of the mythic American West’s central features from their own cultural mythologies. However, through generations of use as a form of American popular culture where people, as noted by Rogers and Fiske, select the elements that are relevant for their own everyday context and discard those elements which are not, the ancient Western ideal has gained new and local specifics which are adapted to the American experience. As a result, the American West known from the West no longer portrays a universal pastoral ideal, but a space that is interconnected with social and political issues of American society.

It is thus noteworthy that, in spite of using a setting which is interconnected with American cultural identity, May’s version of the American West is more concerned with social and political issues of his contemporary Germany than with the cultural history of America. Tailored to a domestic audience which lived in a newly united German Federation, May’s West substitutes American cultural and national sentiment with a pride in all things German (Cracroft 257). May has, for example, chosen to make his heroes German and his villains American. Where his German hero-

figure is strong, noble, intelligent, and a model for good Christian virtues, May's Yankee stereotype is made out to be overtly drunk, greedy, egocentric and blasphemous (257). May has also added German customs and elements to his American setting, so that even though they are supposed to be in the American West, May's heroes read German newspapers, drink German beer, and sing German songs. "So thoroughly has May transplanted German customs to America that the United States often resembles a German colony," Richard H. Cracroft writes (257).

Though never credited for its literary quality, May's popularity shows that his alternative version of the American West has had strong appeal among European readers. Half a century later, Morris, Leone and Masterson's popular successes demonstrate that also 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe appreciated versions of the American West which were produced for – and interconnected with – a European context. By the time Morris, Leone and Masterson began to produce Westerns,<sup>71</sup> the American Western tradition had become formalized into the distinct formula pattern we associate with the Western formula. And illustrative of the American Western's position in Europe, the European audience was so familiar with the formula that Morris, Leone, and Masterson could base their appeal on bringing something "different" to it.

It is exactly the audience's familiarity with the formulaic aspects of the Western that the French-Belgian creators of *Lucky Luke*<sup>72</sup> base their satire on. The series borrows recognizable formula features from the American tradition and takes poetic liberties with these iconic symbols in order to turn a violent history into lighthearted comedy. The series makes its own use of American cultural history as it paints famous historical characters as stereotypes for comical effect and accentuates the most sensational aspects of the history of US' Westward expansion. The series plays on contrasts between aspects that are authentic and genuine, and elements that are parodic and satirical. At the base of *Lucky Luke*'s parody of the Western is therefore extensive research into the Western genre and the history of the American West (Pellegrin 3). The elements which are made out to be authentic are depicted with considerable attention to details. The American Western setting is, for example, established with such strategies as having the characters read authentic American newspapers from the specific time and place where the plot takes place, and by using language in strategic

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<sup>71</sup> *Lucky Luke* was first created in 1946, Leone made his *A Fistful of Dollars* in (*Per un Pugno di Dollari*) in 1964, and Masterson published his first Morgan Kane novel *Uten Nåde* (*Without Mercy*) in 1966.

<sup>72</sup> Morris collaborated with Frenchman René Goscinny (1926-77) in what is regarded as the series' golden years between 1955 and 1977 (Pellegrin 2).

ways to create an American Western milieu, Miriam Ben-Rafael explains (538). Whereas the stories in Lucky Luke are told in native French, English words and expressions (and sometimes Spanish or Native American languages) are strategically included to authenticate the framing of the stories, and to “add semantic nuances and cultural distinctions, as well as the humorous tones and effects that are vital in this genre,” she writes (545). As the French language used in the story is otherwise free from so-called “franglisization” or modification towards English, it is evident that the occasional use of English serves a distinct purpose (541). One of these functions is to retain the semantic value of English words, names or phrases which are representative of American culture. Words like “cowboy” and “sheriff,” and expressions like “home sweet home,” for example, are not easily translated, Ben-Rafaeli writes, and illustrates this point with the example, “Lucky Luke can only be a *cowboy*, but not a *vacher*; he helps the *sheriff*, but never *l’officier d’administration*, or *le commandant de la police*” (540). English is also used to firmly establish the setting as the American West. To create an American flavor, physical-geographical landscape such as geographical names (whether they are real or fictitious places), signs on shops and institutions, and posters and advertisements which are displayed on public walls or in shop windows are all in English. Characters are given English names, often implicating their trade or their role in the story. Mr. Coffin and Mr. Bones, for example, are undertakers, whereas Gamble is a famous gambler. Highly descriptive nicknames of characters are also in English, such as Big Nose Kate, Crazy Dan, and of course, Lucky Luke (537-41).

As the Lucky Luke series is a parody of the Western, most of the series’ discrepancies from the original Western formula are made for satirical purposes. However, some differences from the American formula also reflect the European reality Lucky Luke was produced in. An example of this is Lucky Luke’s affiliation, or lack thereof, with violent action. In a France recovering from the Second World War, violence in popular entertainment was strictly censored. This meant that stories which depicted the Western gunslinger’s habitual violent ways would not be permitted into the popular market (see Pellegrin 4-5). Consequently, Lucky Luke aka “the man who shoots faster than his own shadow” is depicted as an exceptionally non-violent gunman. Rather than killing his enemies, Lucky Luke typically disarms them by shooting their weapons out of their hands with such skill that no injury occurs. The non-violence tendency in Lucky Luke has later become a signature image, and it has therefore been retained even after the ban on violence in popular entertainment ended

(9, 12). This is interesting considering the symbolic value that the Western genre is known to place on violence. As Slotkin explains in *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), in American mythology violent action has gained a special prominence. With American mythology's numerous tales of violent conflict, the US comes across as a particularly violent nation. But this impression is based on mythic representation more than on political reality, Slotkin writes, and stresses the importance of not confusing the two. Even though the US has experienced much conflict and war, its history is not peculiarly violent compared to other settler states, or to the states of Europe (13). (As a comparison, Norwegian Masterson's cultural history has, for example, tales of the infamously bloody Vikings among its origins.) Hence, "what is distinctively American is not necessarily the amount of violence that characterizes our history," Slotkin writes, "but the mythic significance we have assigned to the kinds of violence we have actually experienced, the forms of symbolic violence we imagine or invent, and the political uses to which we put that symbolism" (13). He points out how, in the mythology of the American West, violence is interconnected with notions of progress and advancement. This is because progress has been connected with the taming of the frontier and the territorial expansion westward, and that every stage of this progress comes as a direct result of some form of violent action. The mythology of the American West has picked up on this aspect. In their stories, a basis for a new civilization to develop is that violent force first is applied to clear the area of savage threats. For this reason, the quintessential American hero of the West is not a settler, a farmer, or a missionary, but a gunslinger (10-12). As a national symbol, White points out, the gunslinger hero signals that Americans have attached values such as freedom and independence "most fully to single males without permanent connections to family or society," who became "violently and dangerously natural, existing beyond the boundaries of civilization, assaulting each other and all others they found outside the bounds." The numerous stories featuring these heroes have created an impression of white male violence as something natural, and a part of the Western's "mythic agenda" has been the domestication of this natural violence, he explains (620).

Lucky Luke's avoidance of violence is thus an anomaly compared to the classic Western hero who is interconnected with the mythology of the American West. Interestingly, Lucky Luke is not the only European Western which differs from the American tradition in its representation of violence. Albeit in diverse ways, the heroes of May, Leone and Masterson's Westerns also demonstrate alternative attitudes towards their own execution of violent force. Like Morris' Lucky Luke, May's

Western hero Shatterhand also prefers to disarm rather than to injure his enemies. In the case of Shatterhand, May's pronounced focus on spreading the message of Christian love and brotherhood throughout Europe has been credited for Shatterhand taking pains to avoid bloodshed. He prefers his "lightning-fast" and "dynamite-packed" fist as a weapon and only uses his gun when he has to (Broughton 47; Cracroft 252). Leone and Masterson, on the other hand, both portray a gun-slinger hero who uses violence excessively in his trade. At this time, more relaxed censorship regimes within the US lead to a general surge of film-violence also in American productions,<sup>73</sup> so Masterson's and Leone's productions stood out from the American trend of Westerns not because of the quantity of violence but because of the way violence is presented through their stories. As William McClain writes, Leone's 'the Man with No Name' from *A Fistful of Dollars* demonstrated a new and different attitude towards violence which brought quite a stir when introduced to the US (52). The major difference between this new Italian hero-figure and the classic American Western hero is that violence in traditional Westerns had always been morally justified. As Cawelti explains, "the popular nineteenth-century vision of America as a redeemer nation, a new peace-loving Christian democracy, innocent of the hatred and violence of the past and with a mission to bring peace, prosperity and democracy to the world was a compelling cultural self-image," but it contrasted with the nation's historical reality of violent conquest and subjugation of Native American and African American people. Thus, in order to preserve this self-image, aggressive actions from American history have been disguised under what Cawelti refers to as "the mask of moral purity and social redemption through violence" (Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* 84). The Western contributes to this by offering a fictional pattern where the hero's use of violence is legitimized as a necessary evil. As the hero's duty is to protect the settlement of good people who bring civilization to the wilderness from any kind of savage threat, his use of violence in this task is depicted as morally acceptable. Strict norms and guidelines are at play, however, to distinguish the hero's acceptable form of violence from the villain's savage and unacceptable form. These norms make out the moral limits that the hero is expected to operate within, and which separate him from the lawless villain. Central to the distinction between good and bad forms of violence is the hero-figure's own attitude, and this is where Leone's hero broke most radically

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<sup>73</sup> Masterson addressed this topic in Hallbing, "Kjell Hallbing intervjuer Louis Masterson." When asked to comment on the amount of violence and sex in Morgan Kane, Masterson referred to a general international tendency of "masculine" forms of popular fiction such as thrillers, crime, spy-fiction, and Westerns, becoming collectively cruder and more graphic in terms of sex and violence. See also (Hovde, *Nostalgi i Slengbuksas Tidsalder: Den Norske Retrobølgen På 70-Tallet, Del 11*; McVeigh 168–69).

with the American Western's established norms. A mark of a "good" hero is that he (or she) dislikes violence for its own sake. Though the hero should not be afraid to use force when it is called for, only the savage villain finds pleasure in it. This is because enjoying violence is among the features that mark the villain's savage nature. For that reason, the good hero is never the one who initiates a fight nor actively seeks it out. Only when the situation requires it, does the reluctant hero respond to the violence that is forced upon him (or her).

Another central distinction between the hero and the villains' use of violence is how the villain uses violence for personal ends, typically connected with revenge or personal glory, whereas the hero uses it to enact justice on behalf of society (Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* 59–60, 84–85; Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 222). The new *Dollars*<sup>74</sup> hero, however, blurred the traditional distinction between the hero's "good" use of force and the villains "bad" (McClain 56, 62). Acted out with apparent indifference, the motivation behind the hero's excessive killing comes across as vague and ambiguous, and he shows no sign that his actions are for the greater good of the Western community. As McClain writes,

The "Man with No Name" was not clearing the wilderness or purifying the civilized world; in fact he "stood" for nothing – his victories and defeats were purely personal. No matter how Leone dressed him up, he was simply not a traditional Western hero, not even a true anti-hero as critics understood them; he was just a man with a talent for killing, and the opportunity to do so." (62)

By depicting a hero who appeared to seek out violence and kill excessively without appropriate moral justification, Leone broke with the ethical norms within Western mythology, and it was compared to the American Western's connection with mythic ideology that his European Western was experienced as radically different. Though newer American-produced Westerns had revised the genre, they still respected that the Western genre is, at heart, a stylization of a particular historical reality, and that this stylization is based on the moral universe of the Frontier Myth, McClain writes (58). Thus, even in revised American Westerns, the authentic, mythic core of the genre still

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<sup>74</sup> Leone's *Dollars trilogy*, refers to Leone's three films which feature Eastwood as the hero-figure 'Man with No Name.' The films are titled *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966).

remains and represents the traditional lineage of the Western. What made Leone's European Western to be considered different from the American was that Leone's films did not draw on that tradition (58-59).

Masterson's depiction of violence in the Morgan Kane series stands out from the Western formula-tradition for a different reason. Whereas the classic Western hero's use of violent force is interconnected with notions of progress towards a more civilized society, Kane's use of violence is depicted as a destructive spiral which the hero comes to think of as a curse. Morgan Kane is a decidedly violent man with more than seven hundred lives on his conscience<sup>75</sup> and with an interest in weapons which borders on obsession. For this reason, Masterson's books were initially criticized for idealizing violence,<sup>76</sup> but as the series progressed Masterson formulated Kane's story more and more explicitly as a cautionary tale where Kane's violent ways have proved to grind away his natural empathy and damage him as a human being. In Masterson's most introspective books we thus meet a hero whose violent actions not only have consequences for others but also impact the hero himself at the human level. This is expressed in, for example, the book *Alaska Marshal* (1973) where we meet a 41-year-old Kane who is at the end of his career as a US Marshal. After years of killing in the name of the law, Kane is described as a "former human" ("dette forhenværende mennesket") who used to know social and ethical nuances back when he was a youth, but who has been drained of them through the years (18-19). Masterson describes the "de-humanization" of his hero as a gradual process which is caused by Kane's continual exposure to brutality and trauma through the life he leads. To illustrate how Kane's character has changed throughout his years in the West, Masterson introduces both a younger and an older version of his hero. The younger version of Kane has not yet become hardened to the brutality of the West and can experience violent encounters as trauma.<sup>77</sup> He can be so scared that he loses control of his own bodily functions, so sickened by the violence that he throws up after having shot down a villain, so hot-headed that he loses his cool, and so impetuous that he makes foolish mistakes. Kane as a more seasoned man, on the other hand, has grown jaded, cynical and world-weary. Broken down by the toil that his life has had on him both physically and mentally, he is aged beyond his years and gradually but inescapably succumbs to

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<sup>75</sup> This number is estimated by Morgan Kane biographer Atle Nielsen who has catalogued the Morgan Kane series in the book *Det store boka om Morgan Kane*. The book was published 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014 on what would have been the late Masterson's eightieth birthday (Haugan).

<sup>76</sup> Critical reception of Morgan Kane is addressed in chapter 4.

<sup>77</sup> This is particularly evident in the books which chronicle Kane's teenage years, where he participates in violent acts for the first time. See *Blodsporet til Santa Fe*, *Comanche*, *Den siste Cheyenne*, and *Der ørnene dør*.

alcohol and violent solutions. At this stage of his life, Kane's cynicism is described as a "hard shell" which every so often cracks open to reveal Kane's natural disposition. In *Alaska Marshal*, for example, Kane's protective cynicism is hard-pressed in the encounter with thousands of suffering people who have dreamed of riches in Alaska's gold-rush, only to find starvation and misfortune waiting for them in Skagway. After days of mute, grim-faced observation of the numerous tragic fates around him, he eventually reaches his limit:

The wailing of a crying child cut through the noise. Morgan Kane threw the Marlin aside. Without being aware of what he was doing, he ripped his fur coat open, ran over to the boy and picked him up. He held him close, tight, as to shut out the sound.

His tears trickled down onto the boy's face where they blended with the boy's own.<sup>78</sup> (*Alaska Marshal* 92)

In moments like these Kane reveals an empathy which signals that Kane might have been a very different character had he existed under other circumstances (Holbye 312).

It is not only the exposure to the brutality and violence of the West that causes Kane's growing cynicism, but also the way Kane tends to feel helplessly unable to control or end it. An example of this is found in *Comanche* where Kane, despite his best efforts, is unable to keep those around him from getting killed. He performs a wild race through dangerous territory in an attempt to get help for his friends who have been attacked by Indians, but though Kane does his part beyond reproach it proves a futile endeavor in the end; his friends were killed before the rescue party had time to reach them (55). In *Der ørnene dør*, Kane's inability to save people is illustrated in an even more graphic manner as Kane comes face to face with injured men on the battlefield. Though the men are screaming in pain and fear, begging Kane to help them, Kane is forced to leave them to their own fate in order to save himself (261). Worse still, Kane is repeatedly unable to save those he loves. In addition to the loss of his family, Kane also experiences having the two women he loves brutally murdered

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<sup>78</sup> My translation. Original text: "Barnegråten skar gjennom larmen. Morgan Kane slengte Marlin'en fra seg. Uten å vite hva han gjorde rev han opp pelsjakken, sprang bort til gutten og løftet ham opp. Han klemte ham inntil seg, hardt, som for å stenge lyden ute. Tårene hans rant ned i ansiktet på gutten og blandet seg med hans egne."

by his enemies.<sup>79</sup> Masterson has depicted a West where not everyone can be saved, and this is among the hard lessons that Kane is taught as a young man:

-Listen, Bond said, -I will only tell you this once. *Believe* it, or you will lose your mind: every man is responsible for himself. No matter what! It is one for all out here, but never all for one. That would leave the land deserted.<sup>80</sup>  
(Masterson, *Comanche* 101)

Here Masterson includes an intertextual quote from Alexandre Dumas' novel *The Three Musketeers* (1844), and the contrast between Dumas' romance and Masterson's own fiction accentuates the darkness of Morgan Kane's environment.

This chapter has illustrated how Masterson's Morgan Kane series is part of a long and significant tradition of European-produced imaginations of the mythical American West. These productions are inspired by the lore of the Wild West as picked up from continuous access to imported American Westerns, but the European producers have been selective in which aspects of the American Western formula to adopt and which to shape according to their own native cultural, political, and social context. The next chapter will explore how Masterson has appropriated and transformed selected aspects of American Western mythology to create the distinct style of his Nordic Western.

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<sup>79</sup> Though infamous for his womanizing, Kane only loves two women throughout his life; the young Mexican girl Pilar who is his first love, and, later, Linda who becomes his wife. The story about Morgan Kane and Pilar is told in *El Gringo* (1970), and the murder of Kane's wife Linda is depicted in *Tilbake til kampen* (1968).

<sup>80</sup> My translation. Original quote: "-Hør nå, sa Bond, -jeg sier det bare en gang. *Tro* det, ellers blir du gal: hver mann har ansvaret for seg selv. Uansett! Det er en for alle her ute, men aldri alle for en. Da ville landet ligge øde."



## **4 Morgan Kane and the American Western: A comparison between Louis Masterson's Morgan Kane and Louis L'Amour's Barnabas Sackett**

The distinct character of the Nordic Western Morgan Kane is best illustrated and/or examined through a comparison with the original American genre. This chapter will therefore explore how Masterson's Morgan Kane series (re)presents the cultural history and the ideological universe which are inherited from Western mythology and interconnected with the American Western genre by comparing the Morgan Kane series to the Western formula tradition. In order to illustrate the American Western tradition, I will use a representative example. Such a classic example of the American genre-tradition can be found in American Western writer Louis L'Amour (1908-88). L'Amour is a particularly appropriate representative of the American Western since he has represented the classic Western tradition throughout his entire career. Even in periods when general interest for traditional Westerns was low and most American producers of Westerns saw the need to experiment with revisionist or alternative Western storytelling, L'Amour has consistently written traditional epic adventures of the West (Etulain 95, 105).<sup>81</sup> L'Amour's "enormous contributions to Western folklore and [American] frontier heritage"<sup>82</sup> were eventually honored by President Ronald Reagan who presented L'Amour with the Congressional Gold Medal in 1982 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1984.

L'Amour has also held a position within American popular culture which is comparable to the position Masterson has held in Norway. L'Amour's novels and short stories about the West have sold nearly 250 million copies, which makes him the most successful Western storyteller of all times (Hart and Leininger; Etulain 105). As noted, Masterson's Nordic version of the Western found its distinct character through a dialogue of sorts between Masterson and his Norwegian readers, where their reactions to his experiments with the genre influenced the way he shaped his version of the Western. In this way, the shape of Masterson's Nordic Western is interconnected with his contemporary Norwegian popular culture. It is thus interesting to compare Masterson's Westerns to a contemporary Western writer of his who has

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<sup>81</sup> Even though the traditional Western was considered outdated in the US during the late 1960s and 1970s, L'Amour's traditional stories were still popular. During the period when general sales of Westerns were low, L'Amour's publisher Bantam Books could still keep all his novels in print and count on sales of at least half a million copies of each new title coming out (Etulain 95, 105).

<sup>82</sup> President Reagan is quoted in Etulain (95).

held a significant position within American popular culture and contributed to both circulate and reinforce the American Western tradition.

A central topic of the following analysis is to compare the way these representatives of a Nordic and an American Western have approached traditional mythology of the American West. Representing the classic American Western, L'Amour's books pass on traditional stories and imagery of the Frontier Myth, and portray a hero-figure which adhere to the classic Western formula. Masterson, on the other hand, based his image and popularity upon providing his readers with an alternative to the romanticized mythic atmosphere found in the imported Westerns which dominated Norwegian popular culture at the time. This chapter will examine how Masterson has used his interest in history to present a version of American cultural history which is less colored by the mythic tradition than the version known through the Western formula, and how he has incorporated a degree of social realism into the characterization of his hero-figure so that Kane at times is more reminiscent of a Nordic than a Western hero.

Perhaps his most serious effort in this regard is found in the three consecutive novels about Morgan Kane's experiences with the so-called "Indian wars" during the 1870s, *Comanche!* (1974), *Den siste Cheyenne* (1974) and *Der ørnene dør* (1974), which are by many considered as the highpoint of Masterson's career as a writer. As noted, of Masterson's great body of work, these are the novels he dedicated most time, effort and resources in the research and production of. These books will be given primary attention in the following analysis of Morgan Kane, not just because of their literary quality, but also because of their focus on American historical events and their attention to how Kane's character diverges from the traditional progressive Western hero-figure. (It is worth noting that these books are among the Morgan Kane titles which have not previously been translated into English. Their upcoming international release will thus warrant new English translations. As will be addressed in chapter five, it will be interesting to see whether the new English translations will be literal translations of the originals or if they will be adapted to their new context within 21<sup>st</sup> century American popular culture.)

*Comanche!*, *Den siste Cheyenne* and *Der ørnene dør* chronicle Kane's teenage years working as a scout for the US Army during their "war" against Native Americans in 1874-76. Here we are introduced to a young version of Kane who is still in the process of discovering his sense of identity and his place in the world. The background of *Comanche!* is the growing tension between native Comanche, led by chief Quanah Parker, and white buffalo hunters who are operating within their

territory. Eighteen-year-old Kane gets a job as an armed guard who is tasked with the protection of one of these groups of hunters as they transport their hides and equipment across Comanche territory towards the white outpost called Adobe Walls. For this reason, Kane finds himself at the center of events as the Comanche, flanked by allied members of Cheyenne and Kiowa tribes, executes the famous attack on Adobe Walls on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1874.

In the following installment, *Den siste Cheyenne*, the conflict between Native American tribes and white buffalo-hunters in the Texas Panhandle area continues and the US army gets called in. The army provides a greatly needed job opportunity for Morgan Kane, who is taken on as a scout under Colonel Mackenzie. Kane's regiment is ordered to stop a group of hostile Indians united under the name "dog soldiers," who is avenging the loss of their territory by attacking white civilians. The army intervention escalates into the battle of Palo Duro Canyon,<sup>83</sup> which a shocked Kane experiences as a massacre rather than a battle.

Consequently, when we next meet Kane in *Der ørnene dør*, he is a disillusioned young man who has left the army in protest. Lack of other job opportunities, however, forces Kane to reunite with his old contacts from the army and join the rest of their campaign to relocate local Comanche, Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne, and Arapaho Native American tribes from the Southern Plains to reservations in Indian Territory. *Der ørnene dør* is a dark story where a reluctant Kane witnesses (quite literally through his position as a scout) the white annexation of Black Hills and the ensuing tragedies at Wounded Knee and Little Big Horn.

At the same time as Masterson interpreted the history of the Indian wars, L'Amour wrote a series of Westerns which also treats historical themes and topics. L'Amour's books about the Sacketts is a series of historical adventures which centers around the fictional Sackett clan. In all, the Sackett series consists of eighteen volumes that each tells an individual story about the settlement of the American Frontier as experienced by a member of the Sackett family line. The timeline of these adventures spans from the early 1600s, when the family patriarch Barnabas Sackett immigrated to America, to the final adventures set in the 1870s. My attention will be on the first two volumes of the Sackett saga, *Sackett's Land* (1974) and *To the Far Blue Mountains* (1976), which tell the story of Barnabas Sackett. Born in England at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Sackett dreams of a journey to the New World. When he is wrongfully outlawed by the Crown of England, the dream of America also becomes a

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<sup>83</sup> The historical event took place on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1874.

quest for freedom. Sackett's journey towards a new life in America is an epic adventure where he must escape foes of the Old World in addition to facing the various dangers of the New World. Even though L'Amour has replaced the formulaic gunslinger with a pioneer, Barnabas Sackett still comes across as a hero-figure who abides by the Western formula's norms and conventions. As Richard Etulain points out, regardless of variations in form and theme, L'Amour's writing is consistently based on the Western formula's tradition of "predictable plots, familiar heroes and heroines, and similar conflicts and conclusions" (104).

The choice of using these five books in the following analysis is based on several reasons: Through these books, Masterson and L'Amour both wrote Westerns which treat specific historical topics from the cultural history of the American West. These books are published at the same time (between 1974 and 1976) and were thus written in a similar historical context, which means that they can be compared in terms of values. Though several of L'Amour's other books also can provide good and appropriate examples, the first Sackett novel is particularly appealing for the reason that it is partially set in Elizabethan England, which means that L'Amour also treats European history. As such, both Masterson and L'Amour interprets cultural history that is foreign to them. L'Amour has taken considerable liberties with English, Irish and Norwegian cultural history by mixing them all together. In *To the Far Blue Mountains*, for example, he places the English king Henry VIII in the seat of dead kings in Valhalla and thus associates the man who held the title of Supreme Head of the Church of England with Nordic heathen mythology (30). He also connects the Irish girl Leila with Celtic mythology (as Sackett discovers that she descends from a line of druids who share "the blood of Nial") but then later refers to her as a Viking woman (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains*, chaps.8-9).

The liberties Masterson has taken with American mythology form the topic of this chapter's first section, "Masterson and L'Amour's (Re)presentation of the History of the American West," which will look at Masterson's treatment of such central areas within American Western mythology as the notion of Manifest Destiny, the representation of Native Americans, and the Western's simplified ethical worldview.

The second part, "Morgan Kane vs. the Progressive American Western Hero," will illustrate how the Nordic Western hero Kane differs from the progressive Western hero-figure known from the American Western by being a character who reacts rather than acts, and is shaped by his environment rather than controlling and dominating it.

The final part, "Morgan Kane vs. the Moralistic American Western Hero," will also address areas which Masterson's hero-figure stands out from the American

tradition, this time in regard to how Kane comes across as a role-model and where he stands on ethical issues.

## 4.1 Masterson's and L'Amour's (re)presentation of the history of the American West

Whereas the Western tradition has a “propensity for showing legend instead of fact” (Broughton 36), Masterson presents a version of historical events where he inserts historical facts in order to somewhat lessen the degree of legend. *Der ørnene dør*, for example, which addresses the Black Hills War,<sup>84</sup> starts by showing an excerpt of the 1868 accord which states that Native American peoples hold the legal rights to the area known by whites as Black Hills and by Native Americans as Paha Sapa. Following this are quotes by central voices on both sides of the conflict: Tatoke Inyanke (Running Antelope) states the symbolic importance of this land among their people<sup>85</sup> saying that “the area which the white people call Black Hills is the center of our land and is where our Gods live. The Sioux people’s ten tribes consider it sacred;”<sup>86</sup> Tatanka Yotanka (Sitting Bull) is quoted to issue a warning where he states that if “the white people” try to take Paha Sapa he will wage war against them; whereas an excerpt from the US Senate commission’s report to the US government after failing to negotiate a purchase of Black Hills in 1875 illustrates their motivation and reasoning for taking over the area by force.<sup>87</sup> Historical documentation is also included in the plot itself to supplement, and comment on, the storyline. Masterson shows, for example, through footnotes how information on official military reports from the time of Crook’s and Custer’s military campaign has been proved false by historical hindsight, and how miscommunication and incorrect assumptions made by both commanders of the US Army and Native American leaders influenced the outcome of the conflict (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 165–66).

Though Masterson’s inclusion of factual information is of a modest scale when studied in isolation, it is nonetheless a reflection of a degree of detachment from the myth-based version of history which is communicated through the classic Western.

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<sup>84</sup> The Black Hills War, or the Great Sioux War of 1876, refers to the series of conflicts between Native American peoples and the government of the United States regarding the US government’s desire to access the rich resources of the Black Hills area. The conflict culminated in the Battle of Little Bighorn, also known as Custer’s Last Stand (“Battle of the Little Bighorn | United States History”).

<sup>85</sup> In addition to being an important hunting ground, the Black Hills was also considered sacred territory by Western Sioux people as well as by several other Native American peoples including the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho (“Black Hills | Facts, History, & Attractions”).

<sup>86</sup> My translation. Original text: “Landet de hvite kaller Black Hills er sentrum i vårt land, og gudenes bolig. Sioux-folkets ti stammer betrakter det som hellig.”

<sup>87</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Masterson has not provided source references.

Masterson has, for example, not applied the Frontier myth's classic rationalization of white expansionism into Native American territory to the same degree as L'Amour's Sackett series does. L'Amour's Sackett is an advocate of the classic notion of Manifest Destiny. He suggests that America needs the likes of him in order to evolve as a land. As he says, "this land waited long for the hard-bellied men to come, waited, snuggled down for destiny" (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 366). He further utilizes classic imagery from the Frontier Myth by presenting the New World as an empty, blank slate<sup>88</sup> where there is free land for the taking (14, 16). Though Sackett is consciously aware that the Europeans' arrival in the New World will eradicate the current way of life for the Native Americans who live there, he does not question the ethics of his actions while seizing their land as his own. "If not us, then somebody else" will come, he reasons, and excuses such actions as part of human nature: "men will go where there is land, it is their nature, as it is with animals, with plants, with all that lives." It is a human drive that "wherever there is open space men will come to occupy it," he claims, and points out that "the Indian himself has moved, pushing out other Indians" (157-58). The resulting eradication of Native American culture is something Sackett sees as a form of natural evolution; "when two peoples come together," he says, "that one which is most efficient will survive, and the other will absorb or vanish... it is the way of life" (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 168).

Even though Masterson's novels about the Indian wars also depict white expansion into Indian territory as a process that cannot be stopped (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 59-60), Masterson's account differs from L'Amour's in the way white expansionism is explained rather than justified. Whereas L'Amour's story is narrated from Sackett's own point of view, which is that of a white settler, Masterson has chosen to describe a variety of different experiences and perspectives, some of which belong to white settlers and others to Native Americans. Masterson's novels are narrated by a third person narrator who takes on a detached and factual tone of didactic explanation when he (or she) describes the bigger picture of the historical reality that goes on around Kane; why things happened the way they did, which developments that have led up to each situation, and how it is experienced and/or interpreted by different sides of the conflict.<sup>89</sup> In this regard, Masterson's approach differs from the general trend of popular Westerns from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like the stories about Barnabas

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<sup>88</sup> See e.g. Tompkins (74-75).

<sup>89</sup> See e.g. *Der ørnene dør* (175-76) where the narrator summarizes the complex situation that led to the battle of Little Bighorn where George Armstrong Custer had his last stand in June 1876.

Sackett, most Western stories center on a pocket of white civilization and are told exclusively from the perspective of its members (Broughton 42; Tompkins 7–10).<sup>90</sup> Tompkins explains how Indians often perform a central function in the plot as villains or as savage threats to white civilization, but that Indian characters have a very limited existence outside of this purpose. Cut in the same generic mold, without personalities as individual characters, their role is mainly to provide an element of local color. “Indians are repressed in Westerns – there but not there – in the same way as women are,” she writes (9). She points out that in her study of seventy-five to eighty different Western films from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she failed to find a single Indian who was presented as a proper character. None of the Indian characters were individuals with a personal history, and none of them were presented with their own point of view, she writes (8-9). In Masterson’s gallery of historical characters, however, Native American leaders, such as Quanah Parker, Isa Tai, and Two Moons, and officers of the US Army, such as General George Armstrong Custer and General George Crook are afforded equal amounts of space and attention. Masterson describes life in Native American communities with the same attention to historical details as he portrays life for other groups or communities that Morgan Kane encounters in the West, and provides factual information about Native American customs such as how they honor their gods, their perspective on war and violence, and their own names of places, dates, events, and historical persons.<sup>91</sup>

By alternating between sections that center on Native American characters and characters connected to the US army, Masterson is able to contrast and compare their different experiences of the conflict. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, the narrator jumps back and forth between white and Native American characters during the same violent encounter (153-67). The narrator’s version of each side’s experience, reasoning, and consequent actions is illustrated in turn. In this regard, Masterson’s Indian-books do not follow the usual pattern of the Western where the reader’s sympathy tends to be monopolized by leading white characters (Broughton 33). In Masterson’s story, his graphic descriptions of war-time horrors include tragedies experienced by both sides of the conflict and both sides are given a back-story that the reader can empathize with.

It is worth noting that as these characters are represented by a Norwegian, they have been constructed by an author who was an outsider to both Anglo-American and

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<sup>90</sup> Broughton’s and Tompkins’ observations are primarily based on 20<sup>th</sup> century Western films.

<sup>91</sup> See e.g. *Der ørnene dør* (160, 269, 274).

Native American culture. They are thus interpretations rather than genuine voices of cultural experiences.

Norwegian Masterson has used a combination of direct quotes and fictional interpretation when taken the liberty of construing famous persons from American history. In addition to their actions, he also interprets their ambitions, their temperament, and their backstory. The third person narrator depicts them in private locations where Kane is not present, such as the characters' own personal quarters, from inside the Indian camp, or from meetings that occur behind closed doors. As a consequence, the reader is left with a more extensive overview of their personal motivations than observations made by Kane alone would be able to provide. And in Masterson's interpretation of the commanders of the US Army, their actions are as much colored by a desire to impress their senior officers in Washington as they are adapted to actual battlefield strategy.<sup>92</sup> In a reversal of the white paternalism that tends to color the Western formula (Broughton 34), Masterson has portrayed most of his white leaders as strikingly incompetent. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, incompetence from the army commander leads him to attack a peaceful Indian camp in the belief that it is a group of hostile warriors (155-59). After realizing his own mistake, the commander's immediate reaction is to cover up the critical error he has made and fabricate an official version of events that "would look better" in the final rapport (158). Masterson's Indian war-council, on the other hand, is filled by chiefs who demonstrate an impressive level of research into military strategy.<sup>93</sup> Masterson has, for example, included Crazy Horse's tactical outmaneuver of General Crook's battalion during the battle of Rosebud Creek in June 1876 (182-85).<sup>94</sup> As a contrast, L'Amour's Sackett gives voice to the kind of white paternalism that is common in the Western's tradition when he assumes that Indians are inferior in matters of strategic warfare.<sup>95</sup> When Sackett faces Indians who fight in a tactical manner, he automatically assumes that a white man must be the brain behind their operation:

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<sup>92</sup> In *Den siste Cheyenne*, for example, Masterson presents career ambitions among the officers of the US army and widespread corruption among Indian agents as contributing factors to the conflict between Native American peoples and the US government in the Texas Panhandle area (59). A more detailed example is provided in *Der ørnene dør* (1974) where Masterson depicts General G. A. Custer's actions leading up to the Battle of Little Bighorn as motivated by ambitions to regain his former standing within the US Army (192, 225, 237-40, 255).

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. *Der ørnene dør* (65-68).

<sup>94</sup> The Battle of the Rosebud, which the Cheyenne refer to as the Battle Where the Girl Saved Her Brother, is a historical event that occurred on June 17, 1876.

<sup>95</sup> It is worth noting that though Sackett's attitude towards Indians might be representative of traditional currents within the Western genre, it is not representative of L'Amour's entire authorship. As Richard Etulain writes, "throughout his career, L'Amour displayed this more humane attitude towards Indians. Although L'Amour's Native Americans might be opponents, they might be tenacious fighters, and they might follow different codes of action and behavior, they were never the brutal redskins of the dime novel Western" (98).

Yet the very fact they had not yet attacked spoke of some preparation, which implied some knowledge of making war and strong positions. This implied there might be a white man among them. (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 189)

In Masterson's story, some of the Native American voices that he interprets take the opportunity to respond to such traditional preconceptions. Quanah Parker, for example, turns the assumption that Indians have learned strategic warfare from white men the other way around by arguing the very opposite point; the most adept strategists among the white army, he claims, are those men who have learned from the Indians:

The pony soldiers make many mistakes; they blow horns, they bring large wagons and hordes of ponies, they whirl up more dust than a storm. Because they are many, they are dangerous. Without good leaders, they are like lost children. Had there been thirty pony soldiers at Adobe Walls, we would have won. But we faced thirty buffalo hunters with *Sha'r-ps*.<sup>96</sup> Many of the hunters work as scouts for the pony soldiers alongside the Osage and the Shawnee. The white scouts have learned from us. They teach the ignorant pony soldiers. Our warriors must never forget that one hunter is equal to ten pony soldiers.<sup>97</sup> (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 24)

Masterson's attention to historical accuracy in regard to Native American experiences and persons does not, however, mean that he has avoided other classic Western stereotypes about Indians: his Indian chiefs wear stereotypical costumes with feathered head-pieces and cloaks of deerskin; they gather around a bonfire where they smoke pipes and talk in a very slow, stilted way; and they demonstrate superstitious

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<sup>96</sup> Sharps rifles.

<sup>97</sup> My translation. Original text: "ponny-soldatene gjør mange feil, de blåser i horn, kjører frem store vogner og flokker med hester, de kaster mer støv enn en storm. Fordi de er mange, er de farlige. Uten gode ledere er de som villfarne barn. Hadde det vært tredve ponnisoldater ved Adobe Walls, ville vi ha seiret. Men vi møtte tredve bøffeljegere med *Sha'r-psa*. Mange av jegerne speider for ponnisoldatene sammen med osagene og shawnee'ene. De hvite speiderne har lært av oss. De lærer de uvitende ponnisoldatene. Våre krigere må aldri glemme at en jeger er jevn god med ti ponnisoldater."

traditions by reading omens into the movements of birds and accepting dreams and hallucinations as divine messages.<sup>98</sup> Masterson has also included formulaic Indian characters such as the medicine man, the wise old chief who considers making peace with the whites in order to protect his people from further bloodshed, and the young, hot-headed warrior who wants to fight till death for the honor of his people (Broughton 41).

Nevertheless, Masterson has not followed the Western's tradition of simplifying the role and/or disposition of his Native American characters to fit within the dichotomy of either "good" or "bad" Indians (Broughton 30–31). Like other figures in Masterson's stories, Native American characters are depicted as products of the Western environment they live in. All characters in Masterson's West are tough characters in a rough world, who still harbor universally recognized human reactions, motivations, and fallibilities. The Indians' attacks on the whites in the area are not written off as simple villainous bloodthirst but described as a reaction to the dire circumstances that white expansionism has left them in. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, Masterson describes the hunger and suffering on an Indian reservation this way:

It had been a long and hard winter. Many had died. The children cried of hunger. The hunters often came back empty handed. The Bison was gone. Deer and antelope withdrew and disappeared. The wild rabbits dug tunnels in the snow and were difficult to find.<sup>99</sup> (15)

Neither are the white men who enter Indian territory to hunt or search for gold categorized as simply bad men. Like the Native Americans, many of them act out of need and desperation. White men Ogden and Evans who Kane encounters within Indian territory, for example, explain their presence there as a result of unemployment and lack of legal options to make a living. A stagnation in the railway industry has left numerous former railway workers unemployed, and the men blame this on the peace agreement between the federal government in Washington and the Sioux which prevents further building of railway tracks across Indian territory. In the minds of Ogden and Evans, the Indians have cost them their jobs, and they have therefore no

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<sup>98</sup> Broughton mentions these stereotypes (37–41).

<sup>99</sup> My translation. Original text: "Det hadde vært en lang og hard vinter. Mange hadde dødd. Barna gråt av sult. Jegerne kom ofte tomhendt tilbake. Bisonen var borte. Hjort og antilope trakk seg unna og forsvant. De ville kaninene grov seg ganger i snøen og var vanskelige å finne."

ethical reservations about stealing the Indians' gold or resources in return. However misplaced their blame may be, it is evident that their anger is caused by a desperate situation (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 24, 102). Similar reasoning explains the general lack of Indian sympathy among the white inhabitants of the local town. While making a stop in Dodge City, Kane absorbs the atmosphere and rumor mill of the town:

No one spoke any longer of the accord from Medicine Lodge which the white hunters had broken, no one spoke of the fact that the Indians now desperately defended the very land which they just a few years back were guaranteed "as long as the rivers flow." People were furious at the stagnation in the job market. Here were hunters, farmers, railway builders, ranchers, cattle workers, and businessmen. The government had given them the green light. Ergo, the government had better come to some arrangement with the Indians as well. Everyone waited for the army to arrive.<sup>100</sup> (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 15)

Some white trespassers on Indian territory are portrayed as not acting out of desperation or malice, but out of simple ignorance. They seem genuinely unaware of how digging for gold in the Indians' holy mountain is damaging to the peace process. As one white prospector tells Kane, "the Indians don't care about gold. We're not doing anything wrong. We do some digging, wash some gravel. We're not chopping down their trees or hunting their game. Why can't they just leave us alone?" (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 82). A general ignorance among white Americans regarding Native Americans permeates every level of Masterson's Western society. In Masterson's representation of the Indian war, he interprets many of the mistakes made by the US Army as direct results of the commanders' biases and prejudices against Native Americans. This is noticed and communicated to Kane by the men in Kane's outfit of scouts, who are depicted as the most informed characters in the story. Consisting of former buffalo hunters who have been hired by the army as local experts of the territory, the scouts are in the rare position of being familiar with every side of the conflict. They know the Western territory, they have some knowledge of Native American customs, and they are familiar with the politics of the white army. The most

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<sup>100</sup> My translation. Original text: "Ingen snakket lenger om avtalen fra Medicine Lodge som de hvite jegerne hadde brutt, ingen snakket om at indianerne nå desperat forsvarte det landet som de for noen år siden ble garantert 'så lenge elvene fløt.' Folk var rasende over stillstanden i arbeidet. Her var jegere, farmere, jernbanebyggere, ranchere, kvegfolk og industrifolk. Regjeringen hadde gitt dem grønt lys. Da fikk også regjeringen komme til en ordning med indianerne. Alle ventet på hæren."

prominent among them is Billy Dixon,<sup>101</sup> who becomes young Kane's foremost mentor and role model through this period of Kane's life; in Kane's mind "Dixon could do *anything*" (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 57). Dixon speaks the natives' language and is the one among them who is most familiar with the culture of the local Indian tribes. He counts a basic understanding of why the Indians act the way they do among the necessary skills of a life on the Western plains, and incorporates this into his tutoring of the young Kane, as this example from *Den siste Cheyenne* illustrates:<sup>102</sup>

-The whites tend to think that the Indians are particularly gruesome because they mutilate their dead enemies, Billy Dixon said. –The truth is that they do it because they believe in a life after this one, and don't want a strong enemy to come back in the same form – that will make him just as dangerous in the next life. That is why they mutilate him. You might call it a form of respect.<sup>103</sup> (38)

A central objective of Dixon's teaching is to make Kane see through common misconceptions and biases by presenting Kane with the bigger picture of the situation they find themselves in. For example, Dixon is the one who explains to Kane how the rumors about gold deposits in the Indians' holy mountain were initially spread by general Custer himself as a ploy to get out of the 1868 accords that granted Indians exclusive rights to the area. By filling the hills with white prospectors, Dixon explains to Kane, conflicts between the whites and Indians will provide the necessary excuse for the army to intervene and to finally drive the Indians out of the territory (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 10–12).

Dixon not only serves as a teacher to Kane, but also to the reader. His way of challenging Kane to see the bigger picture of their historical situation is also a way for Masterson to moderate some of what Slotkin, as noted in chapter 2, refers to as "falsification of experience"<sup>104</sup> (the way mythic stories use a partial representation of history to frame the historical reality in a way which suits their ideological purpose).

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<sup>101</sup> William "Billy" Dixon (1850-1913) is among Masterson's characters which are based on historical persons. Dixon features in a number of Kane's stories, including the Indian-books which portrays his involvement in the Indian wars of the Texas Panhandle region. His legendary rifle shot where he is rumored to have shot Comanche medicine man Isa-tai from 1538 yards is included in Masterson's *Comanche!*

<sup>102</sup> See e.g. *Den siste Cheyenne* (36-39).

<sup>103</sup> My translation. Original text: "De hvite tror ofte at Indianerne er spesielt grusomme fordi de lemlester en død fiende, sa Billy Dixon. – Sannheten er at de gjør det fordi de tror på et liv etter dette, og da må ikke en farlig og sterk fiende oppstå i samme skikkelse – han vil da fortsatt være like farlig i det neste liv. Derfor lemlester de ham. Du kan kanskje kalle det et uttrykk for respekt."

<sup>104</sup> See e.g. Slotkin, "Myth and the Production of History" (74).

As this chapter has shown so far, one of the ways Masterson reflects a degree of detachment from the mythology of the American West is to balance out the traditional lore of the American West with a less singular version of historical events than the one found in Western formula-fiction. However, the way Masterson has interpreted multiple experiences and characters, and, instead of simplifying groups such as Indians or prospectors into simple villains rather explained their reasons for acting the way they do, does not only present an alternative version of the history which are based on Western mythology but also of its inherent ideological system. The Western formula strives to present a world of clear alternatives where a “right” and a “wrong,” and a “hero” and a “villain” are served neatly as oppositions (Tompkins 48) and thus offer the reader an escape from the moral ambiguities they face in real life. But rather than simplifying events, Masterson’s Indian-books offer a version which is fairly complex. In addition to the conflict between Indians and the US Army, Masterson also illustrates conflicting perspectives within the ranks of each faction. By interpreting the motivation of individual historical characters, Masterson shows nuances and incongruities within, as well as between, the opposing camps of whites and Indians. Each Native American leader who joins the united front against the US Army, for example, does so with his own motivation and end-game in mind.<sup>105</sup> What is more, Masterson’s Indian-books also portray a depiction of a war-time reality where the lines between right and wrong and hero and villain are made unusually blurred and complicated for a serial-Western. This central divergence from the Western formula is a feature Masterson shares with the genre of Nordic Noir and can thus be considered among the Morgan Kane series’ Nordic aspects. Whereas the Western provides all the answers, Nordic Noir often provides questions which are left open for the reader to ponder over after the story has ended (as will be further addressed in chapter 5). Masterson demonstrates a similar attitude in his Indian-books, where both Billy Dixon (who is Kane’s teacher) and Kane himself are so ambivalent in their attitudes towards who the real villain is in the conflict over the Western territories that they never take a definite standpoint. Dixon is often highly critical towards his own army and government, but he is also often critical against the Indians. As he says, he neither hates them nor likes them very much:

- [The Indians] must accept that they cannot hold on to half the country as their playground. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t hate them, but I don’t much like them

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<sup>105</sup> See e.g. *Der ørnene dør* (66, 74).

either. They are rooted to the same spot century after century. They need to understand that they must share the land with us. A different matter altogether is the damn way we go about this sharing. But honestly – what else is to be expected when it’s bureaucrats from Washington who are calling the shots? Ambitious officers, corrupt Indian Agents, slack administration and poor control – those are the real reasons behind the Indian wars. And at the end of the day, *we* are the ones who must try to keep a minimum of order here, the few of us who are familiar with both the land and the Indians.<sup>106</sup> (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 59)

Kane is also ambivalent in his attitude towards both the US army and the Indians and finds himself questioning whether the Indians he encounters are villains or victims – or perhaps a mix of both. As he observes the Red River War unfolding, shocking acts of violence and abuse are performed against local Indian tribes, but also performed by them. On the one hand, Kane is made aware of horrific massacres of Indian camps, where white soldiers mutilated, raped and killed Native American women, children, and seniors (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 103). In *Den siste Cheyenne* Kane is also among the participants of an attack on a camp of Cheyenne where he witnesses first hand soldiers who rape civilian Indian women (117-19). At the same time, however, the reason that Kane’s regiment attacked the camp in the first place was to free a group of young white girls who had been taken captive and were held as slaves to the Indian warriors. The girls’ stories of how they were treated somewhat distort Kane’s impression of the Cheyenne as victims. His sympathy for the Indians is tested further when he witnesses a war-time ceremony where a group of Sioux tortures to death three white prisoners. At this Kane reacts strongly with both horror and contempt: “What kind of creatures were these, who even made a show of it, who let children watch?” (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 72).

Kane’s mixed feelings about the Indians often lead him to contemplate their situation. (As will be further explored in chapter 5, Kane’s habit of introverted and melancholic contemplation is another trait which is more common amongst Nordic

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<sup>106</sup> My translation. Original text: “ - [Indianerene] må akseptere at de ikke kan ha halve landet som tumleplass. Misforstå meg ikke, jeg hater dem ikke, men jeg har ikke noe særlig til overs for dem heller. De står på samme flekken hundreår etter hundreår. De må jo forstå at de må dele med oss. En annen ting er jo den fordømte måten vi prøver å få til denne delingen på. Men ærlig talt – kan vi vente annet når det er byråkrater fra Washington som skal løse problemene? Ærgjerrige offiserer, korrupte indianeragenter, slepphendt administrasjon og elendig kontroll – der har du årsaken til indianerkrigene. Og til syvende og sist er det *vi* som må prøve å holde en viss orden her, de ganske få som kjenner landet og indianerne.”

than Western heroes.) In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, Kane takes the time to reflect on the difficult situation of Arikara Indians who have taken up work as scouts for the US Army:

With the last word, the Arikara smiled slowly. Bitterly, Morgan Kane thought and wondered whether the Arikara really hated their job. Their tribe was dissolved, their hunting ground had long been plowed up. Only in the service of white men, as traitors to fellow Indians who still held their ground, were they able to live a somewhat free life.

Maybe this was why Left-Handed-Bear preferred to be called by his English name.<sup>107</sup> (54-55)

His undecided attitude towards the Indians is also evident in his actions, which fluctuate between acts which support and acts which undermine their cause. In *Der ørnene dør*, Kane quits the army in protest of its treatment of Native Americans, only to join the ranks of white prospectors who trespass on Indian territory. When he takes up work with the Army again, he joins a regiment which enters Indian territory with the somewhat contradictory purpose of making sure that no *other* white people will enter the area. To make their presence even more ethically dubious, the regiment also escorts a group of scientists who are there to chart the area's potential of mineral wealth. Though officially labelled as a peaceful mission, Kane gradually realizes that the scientists' presence there might, in fact, be the greatest threat of all to the local Indians; if they returned to Washington with scientific verification of the rumored existence of large mineral-reserves in Black Hills, the whites would surely take over the area, and the natural oasis will be utterly destroyed by industry (56-57).

Kane's inability to take a consistent stand for or against the Indians (and the US army) exemplifies his perhaps most significant difference from the Western formula-hero; his strategic passivity. He is a man who is shaped by his environment rather than one who actively shapes it. Kane is in this way the very opposite of the classic progressive hero of Western tradition. As will form a topic of the next section, a progressive hero like Sackett takes action to civilize the frontier. In comparison, Masterson's Indian-books have a naturalistic feel in the sense that Kane is at the mercy

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<sup>107</sup> My translation. Original text: "Ved det siste ordet smilte arikara'en langsomt. Bitter, tenkte Morgan Kane, og undret seg over om arikara'ene egentlig hatet jobben sin. Deres stammer var oppløst, deres jaktmarker for lengst lagt under plogen. Bare i hvit manns tjeneste, som forrædere ovenfor sine artsfrender som ennå holdt stand, kunne de leve et noenlunde fritt jegerliv. Det var kanskje derfor Left-Handed-Bear foretrakk sitt engelske navn."

of his environment. Unable to control events, he must simply react to that which occurs around him. He is, for example, not a soldier who participates in the Indian wars, but an army scout who observes the conflict from the sideline. His role is to gather intelligence and give advice, and through this role Kane can see when things are about to go wrong but is in no position to intervene. In *Den siste Cheyenne*, Kane's regiment receives orders which Kane and his fellow scouts predict will have a devastating outcome for the peace process. The company commander believes that to "annihilate the [Indian] camps, including every item of weapons, equipment, horses, and supplies" will be an efficient way of clearing an area of Indian presence. The reasoning behind this is that such action will "force the reds to surrender and to voluntarily return to their allotted reservations." Kane's group of civilian scouts immediately see the folly in such an argument, however, and are able to predict a disaster in the making:

-That piece of shit, Sarge said with contempt. ... Did you hear what he said? "Annihilate their supplies!" As if the Indians would just stand and watch their winter supplies go up in flames! If he tries something like that it'll arouse full blown war! The Indians will fight till their last man to protect horses, tents and weapons! How else would they survive winter?"<sup>108</sup> (97)

Unable to influence the commander, however, Kane must simply observe as the order is issued and their grim predictions come true. This example illustrates Kane's inability to act and to salvage the situation, and how he is at the mercy of events which occur outside of his control. It also provides a critical commentary on the (military) system by emphasizing its flaws and the devastating effects these flaws have. Such social criticism is, as noted in chapter 2, a fundamental trait of Nordic Noir, and can thus, by extension, be counted among the Morgan Kane series' Nordic aspects.

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<sup>108</sup> My translation. Original text: "-Den dritten, sa Sarge giftig. ... Hørte du hva han sa? 'Tilintetgjøre deres forråd!' Akkurat som om indianerne rolig ser på at vinterutstyret deres blir ødelagt! Prøver han på noe sånt, er det full krig, for svingende! Indianerne vil kjempe til siste mann for hester, telt og våpen! Åssen skal de ellers klare seg gjennom vinteren?"

## 4.2 Morgan Kane vs. the Progressive American Western Hero

In order to explore Kane's difference from the progressive Western hero, this section will begin by identifying the qualities of the prototype so that these qualities later can be compared to those of Kane.

The prototype of progressive American Western heroes was introduced by Owen Wister's seminal work *The Virginian* in 1902. Known as the original Western, Wister's *The Virginian* has epitomized the Western hero-figure. As McVeigh notes, "It is Wister's formularization of the cowboy character, in terms of speech, manner, dress and skills, that lie at the heart of what the Western would become in the twentieth century" (39). At the time he created *The Virginian*, Owen Wister belonged to the circle of high society authors and artists who came together in Theodore Roosevelt's Boone and Crockett Club,<sup>109</sup> and shared Roosevelt's notion of the ideal Western leader-figure as a new kind of aristocrat. As Slotkin explains, for Roosevelt, Wister and their fellow club members, a ritual reverence of frontiersmen like Boone and Crockett was "an American equivalent of the Victorian gentleman's playing at medieval chivalry. But their choice of ancestors, and the rituals through which they affirmed their connection, reflected the ideological needs of a distinctly American gentry" (*Gunfighter Nation* 37–38). This American gentry would need to be plebian in its origin in order to provide a much-needed legitimate connection between their own aristocratic position and the democratic ideal they were promoting where traditional aristocratic privileges should not exist. Roosevelt and Wister's ideal Western hero was thus a man who easily masters all the sophistication they appreciated from cultured and educated circles, but who still represents the social class of the common man (35–38). The suggestion of a combination of an aristocratic and a plebian hero-figure had been set forth by Roosevelt's predecessor J. F. Cooper, whose *Leatherstocking Tales*<sup>110</sup> created a plot formula where two characters, a hunter or farmer and an aristocratic soldier, join forces to save the day. The succeeding generation of dime novelists gradually merged the central character-traits of Cooper's two lead men into a single hero-figure who was a hybrid mix of character traits from the hunter and the aristocrat combined (35). In Wister's hero-figure, this suggestion of a potentially

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<sup>109</sup> The Boone and Crockett Club was founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell in order to advocate responsible and sustainable hunting policy and wildlife conservation. It was named after hunting-heroes Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. Today the Boone and Crockett Club stands as the oldest wildlife conservation organization in the US.

<sup>110</sup> The *Leatherstocking Tales* comprises the five novels *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827) *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841), which each features the main hero Natty Bumppo's adventures on the Western Frontier.

aristocratic character in plain clothes is combined with Roosevelt's ideal of a new neo-aristocratic leader class; men who have earned their right of mastery (and their peers' respect and acceptance to do so) by proving to be the most skilled, wise and virtuous among their fellows. Roosevelt proposed the Western Frontier as a place where different races of men contend to earn the right to rule. His notion was that such strife tests their character as well as their might, and that from this hero-making environment a new class of leaders is made (35-43). Wister's hero the Virginian represents this new kind of leader who is born from plebian origins but who, when tested in the Western environment, proves to be noble in character and supreme in skills and virtue.

L'Amour's Barnabas Sackett serves as an appropriate example to compare Kane with as he has been given a story and a character that resembles Wister's Virginian. L'Amour's Sackett is also a man who identifies with the hardworking and honest commoner, at the same time as he has all the grace, knowledge and refinement of a nobleman. In *Sackett's Land*, L'Amour describes his hero as a man who "looked and acted the gentleman," but who has dirt on his boots and a face which is "weathered from the elements as no gentleman's is likely to be" (160). Sackett's link to humble and pastoral values comes from a childhood in the Fens, or Fenlands, of England. Sackett's native Fens is described as one of the few remaining areas that has escaped the urbanizing forces of English society, mostly due to its challenging natural conditions which are experienced as dangerous to navigate through by most outsiders.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, those who have made a life for themselves under these conditions, either as fishers, hunters, or farmers, are skilled in ways that can only come from close contact with the surrounding landscape. "We of the Fens," Sackett describes, have "learned to be aware of all that is happening about us," to navigate "in darkness and in light," and to know "each small sound for what it was" (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 1, 3, 15). They are strong and silent types who are "close-mouthed" around strangers and fiercely loyal towards one another (15). As such, L'Amour attributes the people of the Fens with qualities that are idealized in Western mythology, and from the example set by these proud and honest yeomen Sackett learns the value of equality, humility and hard work to a degree that a privileged upbringing could not have taught him.

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<sup>111</sup> In this, L'Amour's setting is based on historical information. The Fens, also called the Fenlands, is a naturally marshy region in Eastern England. In modern times it has been drained and reclaimed as an agricultural region, but in Sackett's early 17<sup>th</sup> century this process had not yet started. Sackett's Fens would thus have been a thinly populated marshland ("Fens | Marshland, England, United Kingdom").

But like Wister's Virginian before him, L'Amour's Sackett's humble upbringing is also paired with a degree of sophistication.<sup>112</sup> Though the Sacketts have the social status of commoners, they are depicted as noble in all but the name. A military man, Sackett's father has proven to embody all the qualities associated with an officer and lacks only the required birth to achieve the title. As Barnabas Sackett idealizes his father, the noble class' failure to recognize his father's talents and achievements has a major impact on Sackett's perception of society. The apparent injustice performed against Sackett senior provides a context for L'Amour to demonstrate such central ideals from American Western Mythology as the notion that America is a place (and space) where the hero can finally reach his full potential since "only achievement would give rank, and not birth" (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 19), and the Western's classic rejection of the social order connected with the "Old World" which has been communicated through the tradition of popular Westerns. Sackett performs this rejection literally in the plot by leaving the Old World behind in favor of the New. His resolve is tested early on as his father's good name soon opens doors for him in English high society, but Sackett has developed such a distaste for the traditional aristocratic system that he is unwavering in his decision to leave it behind. As he says: "I had my father's contempt for the courtier who suspends his life from the fingertips of those in power, looking for morsels. I would be beholden to no man" (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 7).

The background story of Sackett's father also means that Sackett grows up with a role model who has intimate knowledge of the education and military training of the privileged few. Through his father's teaching, Sackett is thus able to learn the skills of a fighter, the sophistication of a gentleman and the knowledge of a scholar (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 28). Through Sackett's character and abilities, he is the prototype of Roosevelt's ideal leader. Whereas his father has had the quality, but not the opportunity to raise the Sackett name to its full potential, Barnabas Sackett has both. He is cultivated with both the required skill set and the right attitude to become a leading figure in the New World:

My father had taught me much of arms and fighting. Laboriously and through long hours he had taught me to read and write. He had schooled me in manners. He had given me the knowledge and skills that could make me an officer and a

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<sup>112</sup> Although Wister's hero comes from a parentage that is not aristocratic, his identity as a native Virginian still suggests a noble ancestry. In Wister's day, Virginians were considered as the Americans that closest resembled British nobility in breeding and in status. See e.g. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* (176).

gentleman... Was I to waste them here? This much *he* had done. It was up to me to take the next step. (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 28)

“Lad,” [my father] would say to me. ... “For some men an acre and a cottage are enough, but not for you, Barnabas. I have tried to fit you for a new life in the new world that’s coming, where a man can be what he’s of mind to be.” (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 7)

Sackett declares with an unashamed assertiveness that due to his “circumstances and heritage,” his “sophistication was beyond that of most fen-men” (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 38). As it turns out, this sophistication is not just beyond most fen-men but also beyond most men in general. A part of L'Amour's mythic atmosphere is the way Barnabas Sackett excels in everything he does. His knowledge of history and world politics, for example, is such that it surpasses that of many a student at Cambridge (8). However, as a bookish hero would not do in a traditional Western, Sackett is sure to stress that his appreciation of reading is an aid and not an alternative to physical action: “History is best made by men with hands. Brains are well enough, but count for nothing without the hands to build, to bring to fulfillment,” he says (8). Thus, also Sackett's skills as a swordsman and a military strategist are unmatched throughout the story. Even as a young man, he is so proficient with his blade that he declines an offer of assistance from a friend when trailed by “only four” hired assassins coming to kill him. Emphasizing his own confidence, he even utters a hope that the men will provide him with worthy competition:

Sword in hand, and two pistols belted on, I walked out upon the road of gray pounded shells, and I stood there, dark against the road, watching them come. The mountain was behind me, dark against the sky, a piece of the sea was on my right. Under my black cloak was my sword. My hand on the hilt, the sword half-drawn.

I waited for them there, and hoped they would be strong. (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 107)

The way Sackett faces down his foes alone illustrates his individual agency, and L'Amour's use of a first-person account emphasizes the way Sackett takes firm action and control of the situation. This is an interesting contrast to the way Masterson uses a third-person narrator to describe how Kane reacts more than acts. Masterson has

created a hero who is a product of his environment. When Kane enters the West as a young man, Masterson has made him a man devoid of history – a blank slate to be shaped exclusively by the Western experience. Kane has no connection to his family, as his parents were killed while he was still an infant and all their belongings burned. Even his family's name was lost that day as his parents' last name, the Irish Cairn, was mistaken for the more Americanized "Kane"<sup>113</sup> by the strangers who found baby Morgan and the name-change never was amended. This demonstrates how Kane is not only an orphan, but also a man cut off from his history. Kane was born both literally<sup>114</sup> and symbolically on the Western prairie and has no other identity than this. There are few references to Kane's existence between the time he lost his family on the Santa Fe trail as a baby and the time he reenters it again as a teenager, save that he had been taken in by a strict religious community and that his childhood there had been unhappy. Contrary to Sackett, whose skills were developed during his formative childhood, Kane's childhood seems to leave him with little of use other than a basic knowledge of reading and writing. With this, Masterson creates the impression that Kane's character is a product of what he has experienced on the Western frontier more than any experiences or schooling he might have received early in life. As Masterson writes in *Den siste Cheyenne*, the Kansas prairie becomes Kane's real classroom and the years on the Santa Fe trail his actual education (15).

The story of how Kane's parents were murdered, which is described in *Jornada de Diablo*,<sup>115</sup> is interesting to note for several reasons. First, it creates a context which allows Kane to become a product of the West. Secondly, it demonstrates how Masterson has incorporated social realism into something as central to American Western mythology as the pioneer story. And finally, it also reveals several of the aspects which the Morgan Kane series shares with Nordic Noir, such as the mood and atmosphere, the cold and naturalistic feel, and the attention to the sordid levels of society. *Jornada de Diablo* centers on a group of Irish immigrants, Kane's family among them, who travels westward in search of a new and better life in Santa Fe. But the story is not the optimistic tale of new beginnings which is traditionally associated

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<sup>113</sup> It is also worth noting that the name Kane has got some interesting symbolic connotations. In a Norwegian context the surname is associated with a Norwegian noble medieval family line. As an Irish surname it is an Anglicization of Cathan and is associated with "war like" or "warrior," and from the biblical book of Genesis, the name Cain is associated with a murderer.

<sup>114</sup> Kane is born in a wagon train somewhere on the Santa Fe trail. The birth is depicted in *Jornada de Diablo*.

<sup>115</sup> *Jornada de Diablo* is published as a short-story in the collection *I Morgan Kane's fotspor* (1975), and as a prologue to later editions of the novel *Blodsporet til Santa Fe*.

with pioneer stories. The opening passage, which depicts the death of Kane's older brother, sets the tone for the rest of the story:

They had to restrain the mother by force as they doused the dead boy with paraffin and threw clothes, boots, some toys and a woolen blanket at the fire. The father stood on the other side of the wagon train. A sudden gust of wind drew the smoke in-between the shafts so that it reached him where he stood.<sup>116</sup>

Adding to the tragic nature of the death of a small child, the detached and impersonal tone of Masterson's description of the pyre sets a cold and grim mood. As does the unceremonious way the pyre is created, and the way the boy's toys and belongings are thrown onto the fire while the grieving mother is physically held back. We also learn that she is heavily pregnant with the child that will be named Morgan Kane. The image of the father who tries to distance himself from the pyre but who is still hit by the smoke from it enhances the cruel nature of the situation. Children being a classic symbol of the future, the way Masterson begins his story of Western pioneers by depicting the death of a child is a strong indication of what follows. Masterson has reversed the tone of optimism and hope which is traditionally associated with pioneer stories and written a story of broken dreams and desolation. By the time we are introduced to them, Masterson's pioneers are already worn down by continuous misfortune and misery in the Western desert. Kane's older brother is only the latest of numerous victims of the tough conditions of daily life in a wagon train and the settlers' vulnerability to disease, accidents and violent attacks from raiding bandits. Consequently, Kane's mother is introduced as a woman who has come to regret leaving their home for a shot at a better future in the West. "Once she had been singing the songs of her homeland in pure joy while digging in a foreign land's soil," Masterson writes, "but the toil had gradually transformed happiness into melancholy, joy of life into a monotonous rhythm which got the work done" (117). Their unwelcoming encounter with the West reaches a violent end as they, in desperation,

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<sup>116</sup> My translation. Original text: "De måtte holde moren med makt da de dynket den døde gutten med parafin og slengte klær, støvler, noen leker og et ullteppe på bålet. Faren sto på den andre siden av vognrekken. Et plutselig vindkast drev røyken mellom akslingene og nådde ham."

<sup>117</sup> My translation. The original full quote: "Engang hadde hun sunget sitt hjemlands viser med glede mens hun arbeidet på et fremmed lands jord. Fremdeles kunne sangen ligge på tungen, det kunne glimte av vill humor i de lyse, grå øynene – men slitet hadde langsomt forvandlet munterhet til melankoli, livsgleden til monoton rytme som fikk arbeidet unna uten glede" (Jorna de diablo 1.) (Masterson, *I Morgan Kane's fotspor* 119).

put their trust in a local stranger who offers to show them the way through the desert, only to lead them into an ambush instead. In the ensuing action, Kane's father eventually kills his own wife in order to save her from captivity, before succumbing to a bullet wound. Two-week-old Morgan Kane survives the massacre under the shelter of his mother's dead body.

The tragic end of Masterson's pioneers is a divergence from the way pioneers have been associated with new beginnings through generations of mythic stories describing pioneers who have succeeded in conquering an unfamiliar territory in the West and established a new society within it. Sackett represents such a classic image of the pioneer who creates and defends a bubble of civilization in an otherwise savage and lawless wilderness. In Western mythology, the role of a pioneer is to be an agent of civilization, and Sackett brings symbols of culture and education to the New World in the form of books that he transports all the way from England even though "the luggage of books is no easy thing when they must be carried in canoes, packs, and upon one's back" (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 19), and symbols of civilization in the shape of women and children (118). Ever present in these tales is the notion of advancement. Like a Western pioneer of myth, Sackett does not want to lean on tradition or history but to leave the past behind for a shot at a better future. So even when faced with the ultimate temptation of being named heir of an Earl that his father once saved on the battlefield, Sackett is determined to make his own fortune in America:

"It is not that I do not appreciate the offer," I assured him, "but I was born to action. It is not my way to sit contemplating the deeds of others, nor to fatten on wealth not gained by my own hands. There's a vast land yonder, and my destiny lies there. My own destiny, and that of my family." (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 181)

The Western pioneer's story is always a story of success, which illustrates how the Western celebrates winners. Sackett's story typifies the American dream that hard work can better one's character and station in life, which has been communicated

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<sup>118</sup> As Cawelti writes, women functions as "primary symbols of civilization in the Western" (Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* 46-47).

through generations of mythic stories about Western pioneers. In such tales, their degree of accomplishment is ultimately measured by the amount of progress they make. The pioneer's reward for all his or her toil and hard work comes in the form of individual and material success. A sign of achievement is to start empty handed and eventually be able to leave behind a prosperous farm or business for the next generation, a feat Wister's Virginian performed and which also is Barnabas Sackett's great ambition. Central to this ideology is that success is only dependent on one's character, so that if a person is good enough he or she will create their own good fortune. Channeling this notion, Sackett manages to interpret every instance of good fortune which is instilled upon him by others as a result of his own activities. On his journey to the New World, Sackett would be in prison, wholly destitute, or even dead if not for the help of various rich and connected patrons, a fact he conveniently disregards as he promotes the classic Western ideology that luck favors the worthy. He lives by the philosophy that good fortune comes to the one who puts himself in the way of it (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 239). In Sackett's mind, the reason why he is more fortunate than others is because he is a man who pursues his good fortune, rather than to wait around for luck to come and find him. He even goes so far as to take credit for the coincidental find of a purse of coins when walking home one day:

I had found no luck and no opportunity except that I made. Finding the gold - that was luck, but on the other hand, had I not been walking the Dyke home from work I would never have been where the gold was. It did not come to me. I went to it. (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 53)

Consequently, an overriding impression in the stories about the West is that the one who fails does so because he or she does not have what it takes to make it. Thus, in the Western, misfortune earns little by way of sympathy and failure is stigmatized (Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* 74-75). This notion provides a stark contrast to Masterson's native social democratic culture, and Masterson has chosen to create a hero-figure who does not share the success story of the classic Western hero. Sackett can speak in an overbearing and confident manner about making the most of our given opportunities because L'Amour has placed him in a mythical West where opportunities exist which make anything possible for the one who is of mind to realize

them. Masterson, on the other hand, has created a West of limited opportunities for a poor man like Kane where there seems to be little Kane can do to change his meagre lot in life. Throughout his lifetime in the West, Kane makes little to no progress regarding material possessions. At the end of his life, he also experiences that his career and skillset not only are deemed obsolete, but also an embarrassing reminder of a past which the US government prefers to forget. Rather than being celebrated for his life of service, Kane is exiled from the US and lives out his last days under a false identity in Mexico.<sup>119</sup> In this regard, Masterson's stories not only break with the myth-based image of the Western frontier as a place of opportunities and of possibilities to reach one's full potential, but also affect the Western's fundamental ideal that hard work will be awarded by advancement and progress.

The lack of opportunities Kane (particularly in the Indian-books) is faced with reinforces the overall impression that Kane does not shape the West like the progressive Western hero does but reacts and adapts to his Western environment. Major decisions in Kane's life are often governed by a lack of options rather than by his own choices. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, Masterson describes how Kane walks the streets of a frontier town looking desperately for a job which is not connected to the US Army's campaign against local Indian tribes, which he has ethical reservations with. In his search, he daydreams of a life as a hunter and fantasizes of living the kind of pastoral ideal existence that is known from Western mythology. Quickly, and with considerable regret, he discards them as nothing but romantic notions which are unattainable in real life:

What the hell should he do? Risk going without work throughout the summer? But how to get money for ammo, horseshoes, equipment, warm clothes for the winter, even such a mundane item as *salt*? Once he had nurtured romantic ideas of an unrestricted existence as a hunter, to provide his own food, hunt game and be free. But the reality was a different matter; he would always need money for equipment. In a few months winter would come, blizzards and storms would torture the land, kill all unfit life in its path and force the few white people of the territory indoors – or to migrate south.

Except for the army, that is.

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<sup>119</sup> The story of Kane's forced exile is told in *Den siste jakten* (1982).

The fort would stand. The units were intact. Service would continue as normal ...<sup>120</sup> (103)

Due to a lack of options, Kane chooses to bury both his dreams and his ethical reservations and rejoin the army's operation.

Another romantic ideal communicated through the Western formula which Masterson disregards is the notion that the Western hero is born exceptional. Whereas Sackett in his representation of Roosevelt's ideal neo-aristocratic leader always comes across as unique among his peers, Kane is just one of several young men in similar circumstances and with comparable talents and dispositions. Masterson paints Kane's life story as hard, but not as unique. "In the wake of historical upheavals there will always be people like Morgan Kane," Masterson writes in *Den siste Cheyenne* (15). He describes them as people who never get a chance to settle down and grow roots, but who drift at the mercy of the historical current and are tossed around by its various waves and storms (15, 102). Masterson adds other gunslingers (Bat Masterson and Billy the Kid among them) to mature alongside Kane and to share his journey. Consequently, Kane and Sackett harbor different views of their place in the world. Whereas Kane is under the impression that "there are hundreds of men like me" (Masterson, *Kane's Kvinner* 118), Sackett grows up with the notion that he is exceptional. Leaning on a tradition of mythic heroes, he is both born and groomed for greatness. This unlocks opportunities that Kane does not have, but it also comes with more expectation. There are thus both confidence and a promise behind these words:

"Barnabas Sackett, is it?"

"Aye, and by the time you get [to the New World] the name will echo in the hills." (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 90)

Sackett can be confident in his own superiority because he is supreme in every way. Compared to the way Sackett's skills are fully developed even as a young man, the young Kane comes across as a novice. By portraying Kane as an unskilled youth, Masterson accentuates the point that it is Kane's environment that shapes him into the

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<sup>120</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Hva fan skulle han gjøre? Ta sjansen på å klare seg uten jobb sommeren gjennom? Men åssen skulle han få tak i penger til ammunisjon, hestesko, utstyr, klær til vinteren, selv en så dagligdags sak som *salt*? Engang hadde han hatt romantiske forestillinger om et fritt jegerliv, å kunne skaffe sin egen mat, skyte vilt og være fri. Men virkeligheten var noe annet; han ville alltid trenge penger til utstyr. Og om noen måneder ville vinteren komme, snøstormer og vind kom til å torturere landet, drepe alt uskikket liv og jage de få hvite som befant seg i territoriet i hus – eller sørover. Bortsett fra hæren. Fortene ville stå. Avdelingene var intakte. Tjenesten gikk som normalt ... "

fierce gunman that he becomes in middle age. Without the natural born talent of an epic hero, Kane must learn every skill from experience, and the young Kane's path towards the hero he becomes in middle age is described as a long and brutal learning curve. Contrary to the way Sackett is on top of every situation, Kane stumbles into actions and learns as he goes along. This means that he often makes mistakes, and then realizes afterwards why it was a bad idea. His blunders range from trivial matters, like bringing the wrong kind of provisions into the wild; "now he knew that it had been a mistake to bring bread rather than a sack of flour and some more salt"<sup>121</sup> (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 9), to serious errors that endanger himself and others:

"He was embarrassed not to have considered that the Cheyenne and Kiowas were likely to follow them. He had sent the Tonkawas ahead but had forgotten to secure from attacks coming from behind."<sup>122</sup> (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 105)

"Morgan Kane aimed towards a low, indistinct figure and pulled the trigger. Click!

The rifle was empty! He had forgotten to reload!"<sup>123</sup> (Masterson, *Comanche* 35)

It is not only his inexperience that leads him to make foolish decisions, however, but also his hotheaded, impetuous manner. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, Kane is so impatient that he tries to cross the prairie from Texas to Dakota alone in the midst of winter instead of taking the others' advice and wait for spring. Only luck saves him from freezing to death on three different occasions (10-11). Such character flaws are common amongst Nordic Noir-heroes, but, as is evident from the example of Sackett, not a feature of the formulaic Western hero. Sackett never makes simple mistakes or foolhardy decisions. His young age and limited experience of the world notwithstanding, everything he does "has an intelligence" behind it (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 54). Thus, when costly mistakes are made, they are made by others who acted against Sackett's better advice. When his friend Rufisco is captured by the

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<sup>121</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Nå visste han at det hadde vært en tabbe å ta med brød i stedet for en sekk mel og litt mer salt ..."

<sup>122</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Han var skamfull over å ikke ha tenkt på at cheyennene og kiowa'ene sannsynligvis ville følge etter. Han hadde sendt tonkawa'ene foran, men glemt å sikre bakfra."

<sup>123</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Morgan Kane rettet siktet mot en lav, utydelig skikkelse og trykket av. Klikk! Geværet var tomt! Han hadde glemt å lade!"

villain, for example, it comes as a direct result of Rufisco not paying heed to Sackett's warning against starting a fire that could alert potential foes of their whereabouts (101). Sackett's better judgment also extends to high-pressure situations where he, like an experienced general, coolly and calmly evaluates the most fruitful line of action. In the case of Rufisco's capture, for instance, Sackett's cool logic tells him not to chase after the villains and attempt to rescue his friend, but to bide his time and wait for a better opportunity to arise (102). The ability to keep his wits about him during a stressful situation is another skill which seems to come naturally to a natural born hero like Sackett, but which exemplifies Kane's need to learn through recurrent exposure and experience. Though the middle-aged version of Kane has perfected a calm professionalism and an ability to act with purpose under extreme pressure, the young Kane we meet in the books about the Indian wars demonstrates that this is not an innate quality. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, the overwhelming sights and sounds of a battle scene drive Kane into a temporary state of shock where his mind blanks out, and his body acts as if of its own accord. As if watching his body from the outside, he notices himself "roaring like a maniac" and shooting blindly at random disturbances in the dust:

The sound of horses' hooves, the trumpet, the deep roars emanating from the cavalrymen, the sight of the thickening cloud of dust, the flashes of gunfire, the men on horseback with their heads crouched low along the neck of their horse – it all created an immense degree of excess pressure within him.

He heard himself roar like a maniac during the attack.<sup>124</sup>

...

Morgan Kane had no idea what he shot at. Every vague form, every whirl in the dust and smoke received a bullet.<sup>125</sup> (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 257, 259)

The contrast between Sackett's natural exceptionalism and Kane's apparent lack of innate aptitudes is also reflected through their physical appearance. L'Amour has shaped Sackett with a physique that matches his attributes as a classic hero of myth. Sackett strikes an impressive figure with the build of a soldier, "the shoulders of a fighting man," and the strength of "two men... or three" (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land*

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<sup>124</sup> My translation. Original quote: "lyden av hovene, trompeten, de dype brølene fra kavaleristene, synet av støvspruten, blinket av våpen, rytterne som lå fremover hestene – alt skapte et voldsomt overtrykk i ham. Han hørte seg selv brøle som en gal under angrepet."

<sup>125</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Morgan Kane ante ikke hva han skjøt på. Hver fortetning, hver virvel i støvet og røyken fikk et skudd."

14; L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 116). He also appears to have higher alertness, better hearing, and a more perfected night-vision than those that he encounters. With a customary nod to the old pastoral ideal within Western mythology, Sackett credits these abilities to his background from the rural "Fens." As he says, "the Fens had trained me well" (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 1–3).

Masterson, on the other hand, augments the Morgan Kane series' more realistic aspects by depicting Kane with a physicality that seems to be working against him as often as for him. As we will see in chapter 5, this is another feature Kane shares with Nordic Noir-heroes. Kane discovers, for example, that his eye-sight is not as keen as that of the other scouts around him, a handicap he must learn to compensate for during his training (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 246). Another and more prominent handicap is a lame ring finger on his right hand which he needs to tie to his index finger with a leather strap in order to get a proper grip. The most striking contrast to Sackett's strong and healthy body, however, is the way Kane's tall frame is described as so thin and undernourished that his strength often suffers from it. He is generally of poor health, as is evident in *Død manns skygge* where Kane is diagnosed with tropical malaria, disruptions on his optical nerve due to an earlier (and untreated) case of severe concussion, severe malnutrition, fluid in his left lung that is caused by an infected bullet fragment which is lodged there, bronchitis from excessive smoking, general exhaustion, and insomnia even before the story begins (*Død Manns Skygge* 5–8). Needless to say, the plot of *Død manns skygge* does little to improve his general health.

But also Kane has got some traditional heroic qualities. Making up for Kane's poor health and physical limitations, Masterson has given his hero a quite extraordinary stamina, for example. He demonstrates this in *Comanche* when Kane manages a harder and faster ride than the others around him imagined possible. After the wagons of buffalo hides that Kane was hired to guard across Indian territory are attacked by Indians, Kane is entrusted with the responsibility of riding to the outpost of Adobe Walls for help, while the other men try to hold off their attackers. This means a perilous and exhausting race across hostile territory, and the way Kane handled this ordeal makes an impression on those who welcome him at his destination:

Hanrahan looked at the boy for some time, regarding him sharply. So, he had made it out of the canyon at night – with six bullets in an old Walker.

Interesting, Hanrahan mused, how this territory shapes the straight twigs into men and the twisted ones into bastards.<sup>126</sup> (51)

In addition to stamina, resolve, and overall grit, Kane also has the advantage of being a fast learner. Kane demonstrates his capacity to learn when he quickly masters the scouts' ability to use their senses (their "eyes, ears, the nerves of their face") to judge the wind, calculate distances, or read tracks in the terrain.<sup>127</sup> Hence, although the teenage Kane is seemingly helpless in everything new and unknown, he excels in those activities where he has had an opportunity to acquire a degree of experience and/or training. He is an excellent rider,<sup>128</sup> for example, and he impresses the other men by climbing a steep cliff that the rest of them considered unclimbable. In response to their surprise, Kane explains that he has some experience with mountain climbing from earlier hunting-trips (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 84). However, it is in skills that are not so easily learned, such as Kane's infamous 1/5 second draw for example, that Kane demonstrates his perhaps biggest assets: his discipline and his attention to detail. "When Kane has survived as long as he has," Bø writes, "it is not just because he has a quick draw and has learned the most useful tricks. It is also because he is thorough, diligent and persevering" (106). Kane spends hours on end perfecting his aim and takes great care to keep his weapons and equipment clean and maintained. Behind Kane's quick draw lies not only hours of training, but also careful preparation; he keeps the holster of his gun waxed at all times to keep any friction at a minimum, and has calculated the ideal height and angle of his gun-belt in relation to the length of his arms to make the movement as smooth as possible.<sup>129</sup>

Kane's tenacious and strong-willed character has the advantage of ensuring that he can endure enormous physical exertions (even torture) without giving up. He is also equipped with good instincts, and particularly in his youth, before he has acquired the benefit of experience and training, his survival often relies on these instincts. We see a clear example of this in *Der ørnene dør*, where the inexperienced Kane ends up in a gun-fight against two men:

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<sup>126</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Hanrahan så på gutten, skarpt og lenge. Han hadde altså kommet seg ut av canyon'en nattetiders – med seks skudd i en gammel Walker. Pussig, tenkte Hanrahan videre, hvordan dette territoriet gjør mannfolk av de rette emnene og drittsekker av de krokete."

<sup>127</sup> See e.g. *Den siste Cheyenne* (101).

<sup>128</sup> See e.g. *Comanche* (30).

<sup>129</sup> *El Gringo* (1970) tells the story of how Kane learned to appreciate such details while he trained under the Mexican *pistolero* Coyote. See e.g. (49-50, 73).

Without thinking, driven by instinct, Morgan Kane knew that at the moment Ewers was his greatest threat, it would take a few more seconds before Ogden reached the Spencer or the Henry and would be able to take aim.<sup>130</sup> (30)

What ultimately makes Kane a Western hero-figure, however, is that he performs the appropriate actions that tradition dictates of an epic hero. Masterson's incorporation of social realism into his Western does not keep the Morgan Kane series from following the same stereotypical action plot as the traditional American Western (Bø 166). Kane's adherence to the Western formula in this respect connects him to both the classic Western hero, and to the tradition of epic heroes that the Western hero descends from. The historical mythic hero that the Western hero resembles most closely is the knight of medieval Europe, and, in the words of Julian Crandall Hollick, the classic Western hero figure is in many ways a character who could step out of the pages of novels by Sir Walter Scott (19). As will form the topic of the last part of this chapter, though Kane performs such knightly deeds as hunting down bad men and saving women in distress, Masterson has created a hero who rejects some of the central virtues and attitudes associated with a classic knight. In this he distinguishes himself from the example set by Wister's *Virginian* and followed by popular Western heroes like *L'Amour's Sackett*.

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<sup>130</sup> My translation. Original text: "Uten å tenke, drevet av instinkt, visste Morgan Kane at i øyeblikket var Ewers den farligste, det ville ennå ta noen sekunder før Ogden nådde Spencer'en eller Henry'en og fikk tatt ladegrep."

### 4.3 Morgan Kane vs. the Moralistic American Western Hero

This section will demonstrate the knightly ideal through the example of L'Amour's Sackett and show how Masterson has positioned Kane in regard to this ideal. Sackett resembles the knights of mythic tradition in the way he is depicted as impossibly, romantically good and noble. When Sackett is outlawed by the crown of England it is not as a result of any flaw to his character or decorum, but due to the abuse of power by a member of the British aristocracy. As such, Sackett joins the long tradition within the Western genre of benevolent outlaws. Classic Western outlaws, like Billy the Kid and Jesse James, have been glorified through the Western and their use of violence has been romanticized as a respectable crusade against injustice and corruption. As Cawelti writes, the Western outlaw-hero has typically been represented as "a decent person who had been unjustly treated by the rich and powerful, or by women" (Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* 77). In Sackett's case, he has fallen victim of both; his misfortune is caused by the thoughtlessness of a rich woman and the jealous pettiness of a nobleman (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 10, 21). Like his Western predecessors, Sackett's status as a criminal does not impact his general respectability. The benevolent outlaw of the Western, Cawelti explains, is not like the immoralist rogue we know from the crime genre. He shares more commonalities with the mythical Robin Hood in the sense that he is "a supremely moral man whose 'crimes' were actually heroic acts of private justice" (77). Sackett is no rebel towards moral restrictions in general, he only opposes those laws that he perceives as unfair and abusive. As he says: "I've a regard for the law, although I do not always agree with it. Without law, a man becomes a beast" (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 26). Neither is he an enemy of the state, a fact he proves fully by refusing to take up arms against the English ship that has come to arrest him and bring him back to England (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 68).

Cawelti describes the benevolent outlaw as "a supremely moral man," and the notion of claiming the moral high-ground is very important for Sackett. He is so concerned with being fair in his dealings with everyone he meets that he even applies this to those who mean him harm. After escaping captivity on a ship where he has been held captive, pressed into service, and threatened to be killed, for example, Sackett finds himself in a position where he holds the captain and his crew at gunpoint. From this position, Sackett has the power to gain whatever retribution he wants for the crimes committed against him. Still, he does not help himself to more of the ship's cargo than what he (by his own calculation) feels he is owed. As he says, "I had no

wish for aught but my due” (L’Amour, *Sackett’s Land* 69, 73). Further, though he considers the crew members “rascals” and such a “dirty, poisonous lot” as to “kill the fish for miles if dumped in the water” he still does not want to endanger them in any way during his escape, even though taking such consideration lowers his own chance of success (71).

If fair with his enemies, Sackett is munificent with his friends. His generosity is evident in his dealings with his neighbor William, who will be looking after the Sackett farm in Barnabas’ absence:

With a warm fire going William and I talked much, and at last he said, “Do not worry about your fields. I shall handle them as I would my own, and will take one-third.”

“One-half,” I repeated.

He shook his head. “You give too much, Barnabas.”

“One-half,” I insisted. “I wish you to have the reward of your care, and with what you have and what you can make of mine you can become a man of consequence.” (L’Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 15–16)

Sackett’s kindness extends into acts where he puts himself in jeopardy in order to help out complete strangers. An example of this is how Sackett, while hiding from the English Crown in America, hears rumors of an English colony nearby that is in danger of starvation and risks possible arrest with subsequent execution to help them. What is more, he proves his pure intentions as he refrains from profiting financially on the grain that he offers the desperate colonists. As he says, “we came to help, not to profit by your troubles. We will take the fair market price and no more” (L’Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 333).

Contrary to a knightly hero-figure such as Sackett, Morgan Kane is no model of moral correctness. This makes him not only among the most popular literary heroes in Norway but also among the most controversial. Particularly in the first part of the nineteen-seventies, Kane’s excessive use of violence, his adoration of brute masculinity, his patronizing attitudes towards women, and his unhealthy lifestyle gave him the label of a poor role model. At this time, traditional and good-natured Westerns were still the prevalent form in Norway. Public broadcaster NRK (Norsk

rikskringkasting) aired the family-friendly TV series *Gunsmoke*<sup>131</sup> and *Little House on the Prairie*;<sup>132</sup> and the Belgian-produced comic *Sølvpilen (Zilverpijl)*, which depicts a sentimentalized American West reminiscent of the works of James Fennimore Cooper, was immensely popular among Norwegian readers. *Zilverpijl* (Flemish for “silver arrow”) is a Kiowa chief whose best friend is a blond, tall, Anglo-Saxon man by the name of Falcon. Together with the Native American girl Moonbeam, they go on adventures and save their idyllic forests and fields from bullying rustlers, bank robbers, and hostile Indian tribes. Another Western favorite among adolescent boys and girls in the nineteen seventies Norway was the Italian-produced Western hero *Tex Willer*,<sup>133</sup> who arrived on the Norwegian comic book scene in 1971. The series was made out to be more “adult” and “cutting edge” compared to other available Western magazines, Bjørn Hovde writes, but was still decidedly traditional (Hovde, *Nostalgi i Slengbukkas Tidsalder: Den Norske Retroølgen På 70-Tallet, Del 6*). Masterson’s favored director Leone, however, was so controversial in Norway that the Norwegian Media Authority (Medietilsynet) banned the third installment in his *Dollars’* trilogy, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), from Norwegian movie theatres. Not until 1982, sixteen years after its production, was the ban lifted. It is thus descriptive of the direction Masterson took with Kane’s character that among Masterson’s biggest dreams was to see Kane on the big screen, directed by Leone and played by Clint Eastwood. For, as Masterson said in an interview in 1971, “Eastwood is so much like Kane that it is scary. He could become Morgan Kane” (Hallbing 23).

And like Eastwood’s character, Kane was also experienced as shockingly immoral compared to the standards provided by the mythic hero-tradition which still permeated Masterson’s contemporary Norway. According to Fiske, being controversial is a typical aspect of many popular texts. The producerly text is typically excessive, sensational, vulgar and obvious, he writes, because excessiveness and obviousness “provide fertile raw resources out of which popular culture can be made” (114). As popular culture is a process of rewriting or creating new meanings from cultural elements that are provided by the dominant mainstream culture, it is, by definition, a reaction to, or a comment on, the dominant system. Sensational being the

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<sup>131</sup> *Gunsmoke* (1955-75) was produced by Arness Production Company, CBS Productions and Filmaster Productions, directed by Norman Macdonnell and written by John Meston.

<sup>132</sup> *Little House on the prairie* (1974-83) was a TV series based on Laura Ingalls Wilder’s best-selling series of *Little House* books. It was produced by Ed Friendly productions and National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Michael Landon and William F Claxton directed most of the series 204 episodes.

<sup>133</sup> Italian produced *Tex Willer* was created by writer Gian Luigi Bonelli and illustrator Aurelio Galleppini, and first published in Italy on 30 September 1948. The series first appeared in Norway in 1971, and has run continually since. In 2015, 25 issues of *Tex Willer* was published in Norway (Wandrup).

opposite of normal, the sensational aspect of popular culture is a response to dominant society's concept of "normality," Fiske explains (114-117). Being excessive allows a text to be parodic in the encounter with what is conventional. The sensational aspects of a popular text are not simply a means to catch the reader's attention (though they do that as well), but also a way of exploring the boundaries of its culture's norms and attitudes. By exceeding established norms, it brings attention to them and to where their limits are drawn. As such, these norms lose their status as simply common sense and become subject of critical attention and/or discussion (114). In other words, a text's excessiveness allows it to question the status quo and its culture's "given" cultural norms and attitudes. Paradoxically, sensational texts can also be experienced as more relevant for people's everyday lives than those texts which communicate what is normal, Fiske argues. This is because an ideal of "normality" is by many people experienced as too artificial to adequately describe their everyday experiences. They thus feel that texts that parody the conventional are more relevant for their own situation than texts which communicate a normality that they don't recognize (114-117).

The way the Morgan Kane books hit a nerve in Masterson's contemporary Norwegian society is illustrated by the critical debate they initiated. Particularly in the first part of the nineteen-seventies, Morgan Kane was condemned as a potentially negative role model by literary critics, scholars, and politicians from across the political spectrum; Kane was referred to as a "Wild West fascist" by critics in the conservative newspaper *Aftenposten*, as "pure fascism in a million copies" in the more liberal *Dagbladet*, and as a "gender-fascist" by activists for Women's rights.<sup>134</sup> The books were called "exponents of direct gender slander" and "an unequivocal disparagement of women," and the character Morgan Kane "a sick, dangerous, evil creature."<sup>135</sup> Heated debates went on through the nation's leading newspapers about the possible signal effects of Masterson's extensive accounts of sadistic violence and his depiction of female characters as sexual objects. Teenagers were among Morgan Kane's most keen readers, and a primary concern in the debate was the potential long-term effects that this kind of literature might have on juveniles. As Ulf Gleditsch (who wrote Western short-stories based on the traditional American formula and was among

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<sup>134</sup> These descriptions are voiced in Tor Edwin Dahl's "Morgan Kane, en Wild West-fascist", Terje Rød Larsen's "Reinspikka fascisme i millionopplag", and by professor Willy Dahl (see Nielsen and Holbye 31-32; Arnesen, "Fra Fordømmelse Til Berømmelse. Eventyret Om Morgan Kane – Del 4").

<sup>135</sup> Quotes are from Tor Edwin Dahl's article "Morgan Kane- en Wild West fascist" which can be found in Holbye (30). My translation. His original wording: "eksponenter for direkte kjønnsjets, en utvetydig nedvurdering av kvinnen," and "et sykt, farlig, ondt individ."

Masterson's most vocal critics) wrote in 1977, theirs was a time of moral decay and of a general dissolution of good norms and conventions, and he expected Morgan Kane to be "particularly active in that development:"

How much of youths' anti-social attitudes can be traced back to the psychopath Morgan Kane? How much drunkenness among youths can be traced back to his binge-drinking? How much disdain for women and casual sex is he responsible for in today's Norway? The man, if that is not too kind a word to describe him, has eventually become something of an ideal. In the homeland of Nansen an enemy of the state, an oppressor of women and a paranoid self-indulger has become idolized!"<sup>136</sup>

Another prominent voice in this debate, Tor Edwin Dahl who published critical analyses of Morgan Kane in *Aftenposten*, approached this issue from another angle. His primary concern was not so much that the books could be the cause of criminal behavior in the young generation, but that the Norwegians embraced them so eagerly. What, he asks rhetorically, does Morgan Kane's immense popularity say about Norwegian society?

The Kane novels are not alarming because they have a dangerous effect. They are alarming because they are read everywhere in Norway. Kane is a symptom of a disease, a warning. Is it really the values that Kane stands for that have the greatest impact on Norwegian society today? <sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Quote from the article "Morgan Kane – en svøpe for vår tid" printed in *Aftenposten* 27.10.1977. The article has been reprinted in Holbye (38). My translation. Original quote: "Hvor mye of ungdoms antisosiale holdning kan tilbakeskrives til psykopaten Morgan Kane? Hvor mye fyll blant unge kan tilbakeskrives til hans drikkegilder? Hvor mye kvinneforakt og simpel sex har han ansvaret for i dagens Norge? Mannen, hvis man kan bruke et så fint ord om undergangstypen, er etterhvert blitt noe av et ideal. I Nansen's hjemland er en samfunnsfiende, kvinneundertrykker og paranoid selvnyder blitt idolisert!"

<sup>137</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Kane-bøkene er ikke skremmende fordi de har en farlig virkning. De er skremmende fordi de blir lest overalt i Norge. Kane er et sykdomstegn, en skremmende advarsel. Er det virkelig de verdiene Kane står for som har størst gjennomslagskraft i den norske samfunn i dag?"

When confronted with the increasingly violent and sadistic content of his books, Masterson ascribed this to a general trend within popular fiction. In an article printed in *Western*, he justified the growing crudity in Morgan Kane as a question of demand and supply. Violence and sex were a dominant trend in popular fiction and films, and as he wrote to make a living that meant producing what people would buy, he said.<sup>138</sup> It should be noted that the Morgan Kane novels of the early seventies, when the criticism was at its most intense, are Masterson's most brutal titles. Particularly rough were the five successive stories, published in 1972, of Kane's encounters with the so-called "Wild Bunch."<sup>139</sup> After the "Wild Bunch-books," however, Masterson did moderate his crude descriptions somewhat, and the subsequent novels, the so-called "Alaska books"<sup>140</sup> which were published the following year had a slightly milder tone (Arnesen, *Eventyret Om Morgan Kane: Del 4*; Holbye 37).

In response to the criticism of his hero, Masterson uttered through various interviews that it had been his intention all along to create a darker hero-type. In Kane he has fashioned a hero who essentially is forced into a life of violence by the cards he is dealt in life. The tragic events that occur in his childhood mean that Kane has to take care of himself in the untamed West from a young age, and as he does not have the mental resources to do that in any other capacity than with a gun in hand, his life becomes that of a gun-slinger – an existence which slowly but inevitably leads to Kane's demise.<sup>141</sup> Masterson saw Kane as emblematic of a particular category of men that developed in response to the challenges of the conditions that they faced on the outposts of the American West. As he said,

Those conditions must have attracted a certain kind of people, both in a good and in a bad way. When one reads the stories about the legendary Western "heroes," how they really were, one realizes that one has an exceptional collection of neurotics, alcohol addicts, and psychopaths at hand. A man willing

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<sup>138</sup> (see Masterson's article in Nielsen and Holbye 22).

<sup>139</sup> The Wild Bunch-books include *Satans Horn*, *Morgan Kane og "the Wild Bunch"*, *Tigeren fra Montana*, *Den gale hunden fra Utah*, *Tigeren er løs*, and *Satans Kane!* The first five were published in 1972, as *Morgan Kane* titles no 60 to 64, whereas *Satans Kane!* came out some time later, in 1976, as *Morgan Kane* title number 80.

<sup>140</sup> The "Alaska-books" depicts Kane's time as US Marshal in Alaska after his Marshal services have become redundant in the old West. They include *Alaska marshal* (1973), *Yukon's onde ånd* (1973), *Klondike '97* (1973), and *Dommedag I Skagway* (1973).

<sup>141</sup> Masterson and Arnesen talk about the creation of Kane's character in e.g. Bø (163–65), Hallbing, "Oss Undertrykkere Imellom" (39) and Holbye (290).

to enter the streets with a star on his chest and a gun in his hand and attempt to stop the goings-on of an assembly of senseless cattle workers every Saturday night for a salary of 25 dollars a month was no Burt Lancaster with neatly pressed pants and thunder in his voice. In his own way, he was as crazy as them. This is what I find truly interesting about the “Wild” West. And it is this aspect I try to capture in the Morgan Kane series.<sup>142</sup>

Consequently, Masterson argues, Kane has the features and attitudes that he needs in order to survive in that environment and at that time, albeit that some of them are not agreeable to our contemporary norms and standards. “I have never considered Morgan Kane a hero, or a human ideal. And neither have the majority of my readers,” Masterson writes,<sup>143</sup> and goes on to explain that Morgan Kane’s attitudes are Victorian, hypocritical and patronizing towards women because this was how American society was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is in that environment Kane exists – not in 20<sup>th</sup> century Norway.

Through Kane, Masterson has not only created a hero with a more relaxed attitude towards alcohol, sex, and vice, but also a hero who actively rejects the pure and virtuous lifestyle which classic Western heroes such as Sackett eagerly promote, as illustrated by these examples:

[The bar man] turned away. “I’ve ale or beer, but if you want it there’s milk and buttermilk. We be country folk here, and there’s milk in plenty”  
“Milk,” [Sackett] said, “by all means. There’s always beer.” (L’Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 51)

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<sup>142</sup> The interview was given in 1975 and published in the magazine *Vinduet*. A copy of the article is also printed in Holbye (290). My translation. Original text: “Det er klart at disse forholdene tiltrakk mennesker av en særlig konstitusjon, både til godt og vondt. Når en leser beretningene om de legendariske western-«heltene», hvordan de virkelig var, blir en med ett klar over at en sitter med en enestående samling nevrotikere, alkoholvrak og psykopater på hånden. En mann som var villig til å gå ut på gata med stjerne på brystet og revolver i neven og forsøke å stagge utskeielsene til en flokk sanseløse kvegdrivere hver lørdagskveld, med en lønn på 25 dollar i måneden, var ingen Burt Lancaster med press i buksa og malm i røsten. På sin egen måte var han like gal som dem. Det er dette som er det virkelig interessante ved den «ville» vesten. Og det er dette aspektet jeg forsøker å fange inn i serien om Morgan Kane.”

<sup>143</sup> Masterson writes this in a letter to the editor that was printed in *Aftenposten* 3.11.1977. The article is also printed in Hallbing, “Oss Undertrykkere Imellom” (39).

Morgan Kane glanced at the glass of milk with revulsion. He had a nagging notion that the waitress waited for him to empty it – like a mother would before her boy left for school in the morning. He glowered at her, grabbed the glass and gulped it down. ... Kane sat grinding his teeth while the vile fluid searched around his belly for available space. Damned slop! And such was forced into *human beings!* Dear heaven, milk was for calves and babies!<sup>144</sup> (Masterson, *Død Manns Skygge* 9)

In Masterson's Norwegian culture milk has been emblematic of a healthy diet and symbolic of healthy living.<sup>145</sup> Kane's rejection of the glass of milk thus carries substantial symbolic value. A life-long alcoholic, Kane's self-medication of choice involves liquor. As Masterson writes in *Revenge*, "He felt an intense urge for alcohol. The tension still sat in him, like a hard knot in the stomach. He still had the memory of the terrible fight in his thoughts. It would take some time to push them into the back of his mind, both time and liquor" (*Morgan Kane: Revenge!* 1).

Another symbolic rejection of the chivalrous manner of the moralistic formula-hero is Kane's liberal attitude towards casual sex and his habit of frequenting brothels. Sackett, as the knightly figure he is, has but one love, Abigail, whom he refers to as a "fair lady." He has nothing but the noblest intentions towards their union, and their most intimate moment before marriage is when he takes her hands in his and kisses her "very gently" (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 185).

In this, as in all other aspects of his life, Barnabas Sackett follows the Western genre's established norms for good conduct. As noted, the Western sees the world through a set of clearly defined oppositions where actions are either right or wrong,<sup>146</sup> and as long as Sackett acts safely within the established parameters of what is regarded as right he can always rest easy in the knowledge that his actions are good. In each fight Sackett enters into, for example, he acts appropriately according to the Western's definition of how a hero should use violent force (as explored in chapter 3). He is

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<sup>144</sup> "Morgan Kane så med avsky på melkeglasset. Han hadde en ekkel følelse av at serveringsdamen sto og ventet på at han skulle tømme det – som en mor før en guttunge skulle på skolen.

Han skulte på henne, grep glasset og tømte det. ... Kane ble sittende en stund og skjære tenner mens det motbydelige fluidumet lette etter plass i maven hans. Fy pokker for skval! Og denslags skulle tvinges i *mennesker!* I himmelens navn, melk var for kalver og spebarn!"

<sup>145</sup> Meals served in Norwegian schools have, for example, always included milk as the nutrients in milk have been considered essential for a healthy diet. See e.g. (Bjelland; *Skolemåltidets historie*).

<sup>146</sup> See e.g. Tompkins (48).

never the one who provokes the initiation of violence, but typically defends himself from hired goons sneaking up on him in the darkness, attacking him from behind, or surrounding him in the street. Though these thugs are no match for Sackett's fighting skills, he validates his moral high ground by avoiding unnecessary bloodshed when he can, preferring to remove himself from the situation rather than to kill them.<sup>147</sup> Only those who are decidedly evil men, and who have acted in such a way as to earn the status of villains, are killed.<sup>148</sup> Among these villains is Sackett's nemesis, the Lord Genister. As Cawelti points out, faced with the lead villain is when the Western hero most clearly demonstrates the discipline of his violence. In the tradition of the medieval knight, the Western hero faces his enemy man to man, and though his six-shooter has taken the place of a medieval sword, the duel is still a test of skill with pre-established norms of conduct. In addition to channeling long-standing traditions of heroism and masculine honor, the duel also demonstrates the hero's professionalism. The distance between the two gunfighters, and the control and poise that the hero demonstrates add an air of detached expertise to the encounter which allows the hero's violence to appear more clean and clinical (*The Six-gun Mystique* 59-60). "Something like the old ideal of knightly purity and chastity survives in the cowboy hero's basic aversion to the grosser and dirtier forms of violence," Cawelti writes (60). Sackett validates his link with the chivalric Western tradition when he eventually defeats the Lord "man to man in a duel" (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 28).

In fact, Sackett takes the knightly virtue of honor and fair play so seriously that he extends it to most violent encounters he performs, also against lesser foes than his nemesis. When faced with a hostile Indian warrior in the New World, for example, Sackett realizes that his enemy is equipped with a knife where Sackett himself has a pistol. Unwilling to enter into an unfair fight, Sackett discards his own gun and draws a knife of his own instead so that the fight will be on equal terms (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 360). This kind of respect and fairness is only given to those characters that Sackett deems worthy of it, however. As Sackett lives by the knightly code of strength, courage, and honor, this is also the standard he judges others by. He feels no moral obligation to treat those men who fall short of this standard to the moral code that he treats others by. He has, for example, no reservations about stealing two different ships on his way to America under the excuse that their captains proved unworthy of the honor of commanding such fine ships. The captain of the first ship

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<sup>147</sup> Examples of Sackett preferring to escape rather than to fight can be found in *Sackett's Land* (39-40, 70-75).

<sup>148</sup> An example of this is the men who took his love-interest Abigail captive and demonstrated a capability of both rape and murder (L'Amour, *Sackett's Land* 133).

Sackett commandeers is a pirate and a decidedly low character. The take-over is, as such, justified as a way to stop a man who disregards the law, acts in a discourteous manner towards women, and neglects his responsibilities towards his own men (all of which are important virtues for Sackett) (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 116–20). When Sackett later decides to commandeer a Dutch merchant ship and use it for his own benefit, however, we see an example of how his moral justification can be conveniently adapted and used to rationalize actions which suit his own purpose. The Dutch captain is an honest trader, and he shows no hostility towards Sackett or his friends. Sackett's moral high-ground when seizing this ship is thus less easily vindicated than when he commandeered the pirate ship, but Sackett justifies his actions by declaring the Dutch captain an unsuitable leader. In the face of enemy pirates, the captain has proved a lack of bravery that Sackett points out in no uncertain terms:

You have water for blood, Captain. You were afraid to fight, afraid to fire, afraid to resist or not to resist. I suggest that when next you come to shore, if you live to do so, that you stay there. That you find yourself a shop in town that has a good nightwatch and always be under cover with the doors locked by sundown. (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 142)

The Dutch captain, Sackett reasons, lacks the “will to fight when he must” (L'Amour, *To the Far Blue Mountains* 143) and for this reason he is a liability to his crew as a captain. The way Sackett is able to convince himself that commandeering the ship is ethically justified demonstrates that even while performing acts that are morally dubious, Sackett never questions his own moral righteousness. A crucial difference between the traditional Western hero and Masterson's Nordic hero-figure is that Kane does not share the formula-hero's black-and-white interpretation of right and wrong. Particularly in his younger years, Kane spends much time and effort second-guessing the choices he has made and contemplating the ethics involved. Thus, whereas Sackett's confident justifications can make his every action seem righteous, the impression of blurred moral categories in Morgan Kane may be caused as much by Kane's own uncertainty of whether his actions are “good” or “bad” as by the actions themselves. In the heat of the moment, Kane's first reactions are often governed by means of self-preservation and he simply reacts to the situation without accounting for

the ethics of his actions. Later, however, the shame he feels about not reacting in a more noble way demonstrates that he, like Sackett, hold such traditional values as selflessness, bravery, and acts of altruism as ideals, but that he struggles to live up to them. We see an example of this in *Der ørnene dør* after Kane has killed two men out in the wilderness. Though the men attempted to rape him, Kane is nonetheless of the impression that he has committed murder. His first reaction is one of self-interest as he immediately worries about the consequences:

While he gazed at the raven, it dawned on him that he had killed two people – murdered them. The realization frightened him. Echoes of the gunshots would reach far. Someone must have heard. There were supposed to be hundreds of men in Black Hills. Perhaps someone knew Ewers and Ogden, knew that they had been heading up river. Maybe someone would come to check – maybe Indians.<sup>149</sup> (34-35)

Kane's fear that someone might discover what he has done soon turns into an ethical dilemma where his interest in self-preservation is weighed against the lives of two other men. After Kane has rejoined his army regiment, news reach the army of white prisoners who are being held by hostile Indians. The Indian camp is situated in the same area of Black Hills where Kane shot the two men, and he fears that a rescue operation might lead the army to discover the bodies he has hidden. In that case, Kane might be charged with murder. Hence, for Kane, the question of whether or not to organize a rescue party becomes a dilemma where his own life is weighed against the life of the prisoners. To make matters worse, he realizes that the prisoners are being brutally tortured for days before they are killed. As he contemplates this dilemma, the shame he feels regarding his own cowardice manifests literally as a bad taste in his mouth. Eventually, Kane is able to sidestep the final choice, passing the decision over to the army commander (58-59). In this he demonstrates another example of the strategic passivity which separates him from the progressive Western hero but links him to the tradition of Nordic Noir. Another Nordic trait is illustrated by the fact that the bad taste lingers in Kane's mouth for a long time afterwards, which suggest that Kane keeps contemplating the situation.

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<sup>149</sup> My translation. Original text: "Mens han så på raven, gikk det opp for ham at han hadde drept to mennesker – myrdet dem. Vissheten gjorde ham redd. Skuddsmellene ville nå langt. Noen måtte ha hørt dem. Det skulle jo være flere hundre mann i Black Hills. Kanskje noen kjente Ewers og Ogden, visste at de hadde vært på vei opp langs elven. Kanskje det snart kom noen for å undersøke – kanskje indianere."

Contemplations of ethical issues and dilemmas are frequent in those installments of the Morgan Kane series where Masterson's focus on social realism is most clearly felt. Particularly in the novels that chronicle Kane's youth, the issue of taking lives is often in Kane's thoughts:

To kill a person face to face, make a decision, perform the killing and then face the responsibility of it, face death – that was something he could never get over. And the doubt never left him alone: was it necessary? Could it have been avoided?<sup>150</sup> (Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 168)

In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, Kane's reluctant participation in a military campaign prompts him to contemplate his own role and responsibility in the violence that occurs. It is worth noting that Masterson here approaches a topic which was the subject of much critical debate at the time, as Masterson wrote the novel while the United States' involvement in Vietnam was a matter of public concern also in Masterson's Norway. In this regard, Kane's ethical contemplations can also be read as a comment on political and societal issues of Masterson's contemporary society. Kane's thoughts revolve around whether there is a real ethical difference between taking lives in war and killing someone in a personal encounter, and to what degree following military orders absolves him from responsibility. By labeling their military campaign as a war, it feels somewhat "cleaner," more "fair" and more "impersonal" to Kane, almost like a sport. He wrestles back and forth with this notion, weighing arguments on both sides against each other. Struggling with his conscience, he questions whether he might be lying to himself by labeling a violent attack, a battle, as something that is impersonal. After all, he argues, he is an active participant and if women and children are killed by his hand then he is ultimately responsible. "There is no room for 600 men behind Custer. Everyone must accept their share of the responsibility," he concludes. In the next moment, however, he reminds himself of the general saying among the men; that this is simply a job, and that if Kane did not do it, someone else would simply take his place. "And would it not, really, be a more cowardly action to simply leave the responsibility to someone else?" he muses. Unconvinced in either direction, Kane eventually returns his attention to the task ahead (242-43). As with most ethical dilemmas he contemplates, Kane raises questions but takes no firm standpoint and thus

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<sup>150</sup> My translation. Original text: "Å drepe et menneske ansikt til ansikt, ta en avgjørelse, utføre drapet og etterpå stå ansikt til ansikt med ansvaret, med døden – det var noe han aldri helt klarte å kvitte seg med. Og tvilen lot han aldri i fred: var det nødvendig? Kunne det ha vært unngått?"

leaves judgement for the reader to decide. In this aspect, the Morgan Kane series resembles the formula features of Nordic Noir more than those of the Western formula where, as noted, the reader is given all the answers.

This chapter has illustrated areas where Masterson's Western differs from the American Western tradition, such as: its treatment of topics, values and ideology connected to the mythology of the American West; the strategic passivity of the hero-figure; the naturalistic depiction of a West which lacks possibilities and where the hero is unable to save those around him; and a hero-figure who takes pride in rejecting those qualities which a moralistic Western hero promotes. Along the way, areas of the Morgan Kane series which stand out from the Western formula have been identified as typical features within the tradition of Nordic Noir. The next chapter will explore this link between Morgan Kane and Nordic Noir.



## 5 Conclusion: Transculturation going full circle

This chapter will outline the full circle of transcultural influences connected to the Nordic Western Morgan Kane: how themes and topics from the mythology of the American Frontier are linked to the Nordic context Nordic Noir and Morgan Kane was created in; how these themes and topics have been adapted and transformed by the Nordic Noir style (including Masterson's Western); and how they now return in a Nordic version to American popular culture – where they, illustrative of the circular and dynamic nature of transcultural influences, are being “Americanized” anew.

To illustrate the convoluted and many-layered web of transcultural influences that connects and surrounds Morgan Kane and Nordic Noir, this chapter will begin by exploring the link between their predecessors, the American Western and the American hard-boiled genre. In addition to being connected through their common Nordic context, the Morgan Kane series and the tradition of Nordic Noir are also based on American genres which are connected through *their* common cultural context. As noted in previous chapters, the Western has always represented the mythology of the American West, but the first part of this chapter, “From American Frontier Myth to Nordic Noir,” will show how Slotkin, Cawelti and Jesus Angel Gonzalez point out that also the hard-boiled crime genre began as abstractions of essential elements of American Western mythology. The link between the two American genres adds another layer to the web of transcultural influence around Morgan Kane and Nordic Noir as it shows a mutual connection to American Western mythology. After illustrating how also Nordic Noir has inherited themes and topics which originates from the mythology of the American West, this chapter relies on scholars such as Creeber and Kerstin Bergman to examine how Nordic Noir has approached these topics in its own unique way. As noted in earlier chapters, Nordic Noir's genre features also match aspects of Masterson's Morgan Kane series, and this part will examine the similarities between Masterson's Nordic Western and the genre of Nordic Noir in more detail.

The second part of this chapter, “Morgan Kane from Scandinavia to American popular culture,” addresses the Morgan Kane series' future in the US, and therefore in an even more global environment. As Wide Release Entertainment's film project about Morgan Kane with its subsequent promotion of the Morgan Kane books is still in production (per spring 2018), this part will look at examples of other Nordic

productions which have been released in the US in recent years in order to identify challenges which the Morgan Kane series is likely to encounter as it goes from Nordic to transnational popular culture. Interestingly, these examples illustrate that in a manner which mirrors how Nordic writers tailored American genre traits to suit their own native traditions in the creation of the Nordic Noir style, today's American adaptations of Nordic Noir are being altered to suit American popular culture. Louise Nilsson and Kim Akass have shown examples of American adaptations of Nordic dramas which have blurred and even transformed the original's political or ideological message into a version which is considered better suited for the American market, and this topic will be addressed in relation to Morgan Kane. Finally, the following chapter will also look at international expectations of Nordic productions and how they are interconnected with mythology about 'the North.'

## 5.1 From American Frontier Myth to Nordic Noir

The Western and the hard-boiled crime genre both began as abstractions of essential elements of American Western mythology (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 217; Gonzalez 209). As Slotkin writes, differences occur in setting, attire, and perspective, but the essence of the Frontier Myth is still at the heart whether you read a Zane Grey Western or a Hammett novel (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 217). Like the Western hero, the hard-boiled detective is also an offspring of the so-called dime novels' myth-inspired tales about life on the Western frontier. Dime novel stories, and particularly those written by Allen Pinkerton and his son, formed the basis of what would become the hard-boiled hero's characteristics, his<sup>151</sup> environment, and the kinds of activities and objectives he performs (142-43). The new detective stories were written in the same well-rehearsed formula of action-packed adventures, stereotypical heroes and villains, and moral attitudes based on mythology of the Frontier which stories about the Wild West had perfected. As a consequence, though the cowboy was replaced by a new protagonist the urban setting was often the only detectable change between the popular Western and these new detective stories (Gonzalez 213).

As pulp magazines succeeded the dime novels, and the American detective grew into the hard-boiled hero, links between the Western and hard-boiled fiction remained convoluted. Hammett, who is generally regarded as the creator of hard-boiled detective fiction,<sup>152</sup> carried the link to both the Pinkerton stories and the American West on to the emerging genre of hard-boiled fiction. Being a former Pinkerton agent who had been stationed in the Western territory, he incorporated both his experiences with the Pinkerton Agency and the Western locations which he was so familiar with into his stories<sup>153</sup> (Gonzalez 209–10). Furthermore, in the pulp magazine where Hammett published most of his detective stories, *The Black Mask*,<sup>154</sup> Westerns

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<sup>151</sup> As most heroes within the Western and hard-boiled genre are male, I will, for practical reasons, use masculine pronouns when referring to the hero.

<sup>152</sup> See e.g. Gonzalez (209).

<sup>153</sup> Most of Hammett's Continental Op stories are set in San Francisco and its surrounding area, and the Op also investigates cases around the American West, Gonzalez points out. He mentions as examples both real places like Tijuana (in "The Golden Horseshoe") and fictional places like the island of Couffignal (in "The Gutting of Couffignal") which Hammett situates north of San Francisco (210).

<sup>154</sup> *The Black Mask* (1920-87) was an American pulp magazine which specialized in hard-boiled detective fiction. Among a number of other comparable magazines, *The Black Mask* has secured its place in history as the journal which introduced Chandler and Hammett. Chandler's first story "Blackmailers don't shoot" was published in *The Black Mask* in 1933, and Hammett's "Continental Op" stories appeared regularly during the early 1930s (Stringer and Sutherland 69–70).

and detective stories were published side by side. It is thus “no wonder that the features of Westerns influenced Hammett’s Continental Op stories,” Gonzalez writes (213-14). Illustrative of the commonalities in themes, plots, characters and moral attitudes between Hammett’s stories and the Western, Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929) is considered to be the inspiration behind the Japanese director Kurosawa’s film *Yojimbo*<sup>155</sup> which, as noted in chapter 2, inspired Leone’s *A Fistful of Dollars*. As such, one of the most significant Western’s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is based on the script of a hard-boiled novel.

The connection between the Western and hard-boiled crime fiction has also been addressed by Cawelti who points out that the same basic formula plot forms the hero’s story in either genre: An initial conspiracy soon evolves into a plot where the lead character needs to take heroic action. Typically, this entails a revenge-rescue situation where the hero is forced to either rescue a loved one or to avenge an act of injustice. Like the Western hero, the hard-boiled hero’s quest is thus a story of saving victims from the clutches of the lawless or tracking down villains in order to bring them to justice. Comparable to a classic Western plot, the situation typically involves persons who are close to him or issues that challenge his image of himself. The personal aspect of the pursuit gives the hero an emotional and moral commitment towards seeing it through. Thus, where the classic detective we recognize from the British tradition is primarily concerned with the intellectual process of solving the mystery, the identification of the guilty party is simply the beginning for the hard-boiled hero (Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 142–43). His involvement in the actual capture of the criminal brings him in direct contact with the perpetrator, and the hero’s chase of the villain leads to a physical confrontation with the criminal that often turns into a violent, climactic shoot-out reminiscent of the American West. Face to face with the villain, the hard-boiled hero often operates as both judge, jury, and executioner (143). What justifies his actions is the same intuitive moral code inherited from mythic tradition as the Western hero operates by. As Cawelti writes:

Despite his involvement in the contemporary urban metropolis, the hard-boiled detective’s ethical attitudes and modes of judgment usually evoke some earlier

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<sup>155</sup> Although Kurosawa never acknowledged that he had used Hammett’s *Red Harvest* as inspiration, “*Yojimbo* follows *Red Harvest*’s plot so closely (now with an unnamed samurai walking into a Japanese town dominated by two warring factions, and managing to make them destroy each other) that many Hammett and Kurosawa scholars were quick to point it out,” Gonzales writes (223).

era, most commonly the chivalric code of the feudal past, though sometimes, as in the case of Mickey Spillane, a more primitive tribal ethos of vendetta. In this respect, the hard-boiled detective greatly resembles the western hero whose moral code also transcends the existing social order. Like the western hero, the tough-guy detective's action-oriented code of honor enables him to act in a violent world without losing his moral purity and force. (151)

The hero's vigilante justice is described as necessary due to the flawed system he operates in. Comparable to how the Western hero operates in a West where legal institutions cannot be trusted, the hard-boiled hero feels that he lives in a society where "the law is too mechanical, unwieldy or corrupt" to achieve just punishment. For this reason he takes it upon himself to bestow it (Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 143). The police department takes on the symbolic function of the institution of law and order, and, as in the Western formula's worldview, the civic institution is considered to have such limitations, inadequacies, and venality that the hard-boiled hero must circumnavigate it in order to achieve proper justice (151). The hard-boiled hero is not only worried about the police department's lack of ability to get the job done, but also of corruption within its own ranks as, in the hard-boiled story, what is seemingly a straight-forward criminal case tends to turn rapidly into a complex web of conspiracy and deception (146-49). In Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), for example, Captain Gregory of the Missing Persons Bureau explains his own acts of corruption with the excuse that in the world he lives in, being honest is "out of style" (Chandler 743). As Cawelti explains, there is a typical pattern of action to the hard-boiled story which begins with the detective being called out to investigate what appears to be a fairly ordinary case. The path, however, soon leads him to discover a hidden underworld of illegal activity and, while investigating this criminal organization, the hard-boiled detective learns of connections that tie the criminal underworld together with wealthy and reputable levels of society. The hard-boiled hero is therefore forced to go beyond simply solving a crime, as he must also deal with corruption among those regarded as the pillars of the community (148-49).

The hard-boiled detective distances himself from the corrupt system by living his life on the margins of society in a similar manner to the Western hero. The hard-boiled detective works out of a dusty office in a broken-down building in an abandoned part of the city and, analogous to the cowboy riding off into the desert, he

returns to this isolated office at the end of the story (Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 151). He also demonstrates his independence by not allowing his clients (no matter how wealthy and important they are) to dictate his loyalties or his ethical choices. He would rather turn down a case that does not match his values than to become rich and successful at the expense of his ideals. Chandler's hero Phillip Marlowe, for example, expresses his unwillingness to accept money for jobs that he cannot in good conscience perform. For Marlowe, it is a matter of personal pride that his loyalty cannot be bought. As he says to one of his clients after refusing to complete an assignment according to the directives given by the client:

"I'd like to offer you your money back. It may mean nothing to you. It might mean something to me."

"What does it mean to you?"

"It means that I have refused payment for an unsatisfactory job. That's all."

"Do you do many unsatisfactory jobs?"

"A few. Everyone does." (Chandler 748–49)

By labeling those who have achieved wealth and status as dishonorable and corrupt, the hard-boiled universe channels the Frontier myths' critical stance towards practices and ethics connected to industrial and financial capitalism (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* 150; Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 157). As formula features of the hard-boiled genre have been adapted into Nordic Noir, this facet of American Western mythology has been kept. It is, however, approached in a more contemplative and melancholic manner when treated by Nordic writers. Rather than the hands-on approach of the American Western or hard-boiled hero of action, the Nordic Noir-hero is a more reflective and introverted character. In the Nordic version of the hard-boiled tradition, the hero's role is to expose the corruption that lurks underneath the surface of modern society more than to actually resolve it. The Nordic hero can complete the mission (or solve the case) which occurs in the main plot, but a distinctive trait of Nordic Noir is how multi-layered storylines allow a number of other stories and themes to revolve around, and in addition to, the main plot (Creeber 14–15). These subplots often address and question deeper political and social issues of contemporary Scandinavian society, issues that cannot be fixed during the span of a novel. The only thing the Nordic hero can do is to bring attention to them. In this

regard we see that the strategic passivity of Kane – the way he cannot seem to actually civilize the frontier – which breaks so fundamentally with a progressive Western hero-figure such as Sackett is an appropriate trait for a Nordic hero-figure. As Creeber explains, “although the crimes will eventually be solved, the moral, political and social problems that produced them are not. These are issues that audiences are left to consider long after final climatic episode has come to an end” (22-23). This means that Nordic Noir protagonists work diligently for a system that they know is faulty. There is thus a difference in attitude between the American hero’s ingrained distrust of the system, and the Nordic hero’s willingness to work within the system even while knowing that it is faulty. In this, Kane resembles the Nordic heroes who sees the flaws and imperfections of the established order, but still decides to operate within the boundaries of civilized law and order.<sup>156</sup> As Bergman explains, the heroes of Nordic Noir are disillusioned by the extent of problems in their contemporary society, but still choose to face them knowing they fight a losing battle (*The Well-Adjusted Cops of the New Millennium* 35). As is typical for these Nordic heroes, Kane approaches his tasks with a world-weary cynicism rather than with lofty ideals of making a difference on a larger scale. Through his years in the West, Kane has lost any illusions regarding how ruthlessly capitalist-driven his West can be and has acquired a dejected acceptance that this is how the world is. The beginning of this process is depicted in the stories which chronicle Kane’s youth. An example can be found in *Comanche*, where a teenage Kane works for a company which transports goods and supplies by wagon trains across Indian Territory even though their practice violates the peace agreement in the area. Not surprisingly, their wagons are eventually attacked by a band of Indians. Kane makes a narrow escape but is nervously awaiting reports as to the fate of his colleagues and friends when his employer hands him a paycheck:

[Morgan Kane] swallowed, trying to rid himself of the bitter sensation at the back of his mouth. So *this* was what he had risked his life for...

– Regardless of how the situation turns out with the men up at the canyon, I am authorized to give you a slight token of our appreciation – on behalf of the company. Here you go... fifty dollars.

[Morgan Kane] glanced at the dirty notes.

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<sup>156</sup> Though not above breaking regulations when he finds it convenient, Kane still makes his career as an agent of the law through such institutions as the US army, the Texas Rangers and the US marshal service.

... He suddenly remembered the quivering arrow lodged in the hunter's face up in the canyon. He remembered the gray pallor of Galland's skin, he remembered the strap that disappeared into his thigh, the spray of blood that stilled – but too late. He remembered Buddy Rick standing on hands and knees next to his fallen horse, blood streaming from his nose. ... Perhaps all of them were killed, scalped, mutilated.

His narrow, finely formed mouth tightened slowly. A sore little frown remained at the corner of his mouth  
– Thank you, he said flatly.<sup>157</sup> (53)

Though nothing more sinister than a paycheck from a legitimate company, the money is here weighed against the lives of the men killed in the ambush. As such it becomes “dirty” both literally and figuratively. When Kane is informed that the company has decided to close the freight route, their decision is explained by financial reasons (the cost of losing wagons being too great) and not by concern for human lives or the fragile state of the peace treaty (52, 57). With aversion and disappointment, young Kane comprehends how much weight financial profit carries with the major players in the West. Needing the cash, Kane also realizes that he must accept it, and, in doing so, indirectly accept the order of things.

But even though Kane realizes that it is beyond his scope to reform his Western society, he never turns corrupt himself. As Bø explains, Morgan Kane is honest in the sense that he would never accept a bribe, and that it would never occur to him to wrongfully acquire something that belongs to innocent, “decent” people (105). Although Kane can be brutal and ruthless in his treatment of villains, he reacts strongly whenever he encounters instances of exploitation of innocent people. As he says, “I have lived in the gutter longer that I like to think about. For that reason I do not appreciate using the gutter as a stepping-stone” (Masterson, *Alaska Marshal* 59). To be an incorruptible character in an otherwise corrupt world is also a trait which readers familiar with Nordic Noir will recognize as typical for Nordic heroes. As Creeber states, “while *The Killing*'s<sup>158</sup> dark and gloomy esthetics do suggest that

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<sup>157</sup> My translation. Original text: “Han svelget en bitter følelse i halsen. Det var altså *dette* han hadde risikert livet for... – Uansett hvordan det går med mennene oppe i den canyon'en, har jeg fullmakt til å gi deg en liten påskjønnelse – på vegne av selskapet. Her, værsgod... femti dollar. Gutten så på de skitne sedlene. ... Han husket plutselig pilen som skalv i ansiktet på jegeren oppe i canyon'en. Han husket den grå huden til Galland, han husket remmen som forsvant i låret, blodspruten som stilnet – men for sent. Han husket Buddy Rick på alle fire ved siden av den styrtede hesten, mens blodet fosset fra nesen. ... Kanskje de alle var drept, skalpert, lemlestet. Den smale, fint formede munnen strammet seg langsomt. En sår liten geip ble hengende i den ene munnviken. – Takk, sa han tonløst.”

<sup>158</sup> Creeber here refers to a Danish drama series with the original title *Forbrydelsen* (*Forbrytelsen*).

something is indeed rotten in the state of Denmark, we also know that Sarah Lund will eventually shine her torch into the night and illuminate the darkness” (13).

However, as is also evident in the example of Kane, the fact that Noir-Nordic heroes are incorruptible characters does not necessarily make them exemplary hero-figures. In addition to exposing the flaws of the Scandinavian society, a characteristic feature of the Nordic Noir style is to also reveal the flaws of its characters. The character flaws of the heroes found in Nordic Noir are generally more profound than the character flaws of their hard-boiled or Noir descendants, Bergman explains, and they generally make more mistakes and doubt their own abilities more (“The Captivating Chill” 87). Like Kane, they are often physically weakened by severe health issues. Martin Beck, for example, is often held back by recurring colds, flus and depression, Henning Mankell’s Kurt Wallander suffers from diabetes and eventually from Alzheimer’s disease, and Jo Nesbø’s Harry Hole struggles all his life with alcoholism. In addition to the toll Hole’s drinking takes on his health, it also affects both his professional life and his personal relations. Like most Nordic Noir-inspired heroes, Hole is a character who is difficult for the reader to like, but, at the same time, whose eccentricity brings something refreshing to the story. Characters such as Lisbeth Salander in Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium*<sup>159</sup> trilogy, Saga Norén in *Bron*, Sarah Lund in *The Killing* and Rust Chole from *True Detective* are appreciated in spite of, or perhaps even because of, their less than amiable character. They generally have low social skills, and Salander and Norén to such an extent that speculations have occurred among the public as to whether they have Asperger’s syndrome though this diagnosis is never stated in the books or the TV series. Because of their poor social skills, Nordic Noir-heroes often live a lonely and isolated life as social outsiders. In this manner, they exist as much on the margins of society as the Western hero and the hard-boiled detective, albeit in a social rather than a geographical sense. Whereas the Western and the hard-boiled hero physically place themselves on the outskirts of civilized society, the Nordic hero’s position as an outsider tends to manifest through a reluctance to participate in society’s social activities. In Jo Nesbø’s *The Thirst* (Tørst, 2017), for example, Harry Hole’s stepson explains to a friend of his that “Harry doesn’t like people, you see.” In response to this statement Hole explains: “I do like people,” Harry

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<sup>159</sup> Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium* trilogy consist of *Män som hatar kvinnor* (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2005), *Flickan som lekte med elden* (2006, an English edition titled *The Girl Who Played with Fire* was published in 2009), and *Luftslottet som sprängdes* (2007, an English edition with the title *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets’ Nest* was published in the UK in 2009 and in the US and Canada in 2010).

said. ‘I just don’t like being *with* them. Particularly not when there’s a lot of them at the same time” (460).

Social relations are also a challenge for Morgan Kane, who has no family ties, and few, if any, close friends. Though Kane’s lonely existence might be partially explained by his rootless lifestyle, it is also caused by his reclusive manner towards those around him. As Masterson writes, “Bonney could probably become a faithful *compadre* – but Morgan Kane didn’t want a *compadre*, he wanted to be alone” (Masterson, *Møte i Tascosa* 90).<sup>160</sup> Kane has a brash and aloof manner around people, and often responds to someone’s friendliness with hostility or insult.<sup>161</sup> Part of Kane’s reclusiveness is caused by inherent jealousy of his peers. His competitiveness towards his contemporaries William Bonney and Bat Masterson, for example, thwarts what could otherwise have become fitting and beneficial friendships.<sup>162</sup> As it is, he experiences every positive feature of his peers as a negative reflection on himself. Thus, rather than making friends, Kane uses every opportunity to debase them so that they don’t outshine him. In *Møte i Tascosa* (1975), for example, William Bonney tries to befriend Kane, but Kane’s jealousy flairs every time Bonney is reflected in a positive light:

[Bonney] straightened his gun belt. It was polished and cleaned, and even the cartridges seemed to shine. Bonney actually seemed a few inches taller at the plaza this night – with his gun at his hip.

Without knowing why, this annoyed Morgan Kane. He reached out for the bottle of wine.<sup>163</sup> (167)

Kane’s difficulty with social relations is also connected to an insecurity which is particularly evident in his younger years, and which is often the cause of his wary and reserved manner around others. In *Den siste Cheyenne*, for example, a young Kane is so worried about the possibility that his peers might consider him a coward that becomes socially aloof, reticent and distrustful around them:

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<sup>160</sup> My translation. Original text: “Bonney kunne nok bli en trofast *compadre* – men Morgan Kane ville ikke ha noen *compadre*, han ville være alene.”

<sup>161</sup> See for example *Comanche* (59).

<sup>162</sup> As seen for example in the novels *Møte i Tascosa* and *Comanche*.

<sup>163</sup> My translation. Original text: “[Bonney] heiste litt i revolverbeltet. Det var gnidd og rensset, og selv patronene i hempene virket blankere. Bonney virket faktisk et par tommer høyere på plaza’en denne kvelden – med revolveren ved hoften. Morgan Kane ergret seg over det, uten å vite hvorfor. Han langet ut etter vinflasken.”

He caught himself scowling at them and weighing each word, each expression, each look to see if it was addressed at him.

This made him careful and suspicious, and he withdrew into his own mind and could ponder for hours.<sup>164</sup> (26)

As Bø points out, Masterson has depicted a Western hero-figure who is rare in the fact that he openly reveals less agreeable sides of his personality (103, 165-66). By demonstrating his hero's lack of confidence, Masterson sets him apart from both the traditional mythic hero, such as Barnabas Sackett, and more cynical and hard-boiled hero-figures such as Leone's Man with No Name. Particularly unconventional is Kane's display of fear, paranoia, and insecurity. In his younger years, Kane can be so scared in high-stress situations, for example, that his nerves incite intense physical reactions; he gets nauseous, his hands turn clammy, his heart beats faster in his chest, his bladder reacts, etc. As anxiety starts to take over his senses, Kane can experience moments of paranoia where he imagines invisible eyes looming in every shadow, sees potential danger in every whirl in the dust, and considers "each bush, each stone, each knoll" as "a threat to his life" (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 85; Masterson, *Comanche* 41; Masterson, *Der ørnene dør* 254). After the danger has passed and the initial rush of adrenaline subsides, the situation Kane has been through takes on a character that resembles trauma more than victory. At the end of a violent encounter, the young Kane we meet in the Indian books is a victim of shock more than the proud champion one might expect:

The reaction after the wild race hit Morgan Kane like a surge.

He was not aware that he ate and changed into dry clothes. He only knew that he could sleep and sleep for all eternity.<sup>165</sup> (Masterson, *Comanche* 50)

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<sup>164</sup> My translation. Original text: "Da grep han seg i å skule på dem og veie hvert ord, hver mine, hvert blikk for å se om det hadde adresse til ham. Dette gjorde ham sky og mistenksom, og han trakk seg inn i seg selv og kunne gruble i timevis."

<sup>165</sup> My translation. Original quote: "Reaksjonen etter det ville rittet slo sammen over Morgan Kane som en skavl. Han ante ikke at han spiste og fikk på seg tørre klær. Han visste bare at han kunne sove og sove like inn i evigheten."

The reaction made him as liquid as slush. He shivered, ice cold in the hot sun. Tears and spittle ran down his gray, distorted face.<sup>166</sup> (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 94)

Some of his violent clashes even traumatize him to the extent where they continue to haunt him in his sleep. In *Der ørnene dør*, for example, Kane is depicted sitting awake at night, holding his eyelids open with his fingers to avoid seeing the gruesome images that manifest every time he closes them (9, 36). Kane has a habit of retreating into deep thoughts and memories and spend hours in contemplation, reliving the memories and experiences that disturb him. He struggles with anxiety (which more modern medicine might have termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) which often brings about panic attacks recognizable by physical symptoms such as elevated heart rate, nausea, and dizziness. Even while not in his conscious thoughts, bad memories and experiences haunt him, a presence that is described as a physical “knot” deep within his core:

The knot deep within him tightened slowly and painfully. It was hard now, as hard as flint. He felt the pressure from it and knew suddenly that he always would carry this tight sensation deep within. It was a part of his life. Why couldn't he cry and scream it out, swear and drink, ride it off like so many others could? Why this hard, painful knot that kept on grating and never allowed him peace?<sup>167</sup> (Masterson, *Comanche* 56)

Whereas revealing a hero's weaknesses is rare in the Western, readers have come to expect it from a hero-figure in Nordic Noir. Today's readers of Morgan Kane are thus likely to recognize the troubled nature of Kane's personality as a typical feature of Nordic hero-figures. Nordic Noir-heroes are known as characters with poor social skills and a morose frame of mind, so in their company Kane's reclusive and brooding disposition, his anxiety, his social awkwardness, and the way his inherent jealousy of his peers leads him to act resentful and aloof around them is almost the norm. The aspect of Kane's character which perhaps most decisively places Kane

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<sup>166</sup> My translation. Original quote: “Reaksjonen gjorde ham bløt som snø. Han hakket tenner av frost i den hete solen. Tårer og sikkelt rant nedover det grå, fortrukne ansiktet.”

<sup>167</sup> My translation. Original text: “Knuten dypt inne i ham strammet seg langsomt og smertefullt. Den var hard nå, hard som flint. Han kjente trykket fra den, og visste plutselig at han alltid ville ha denne stramme fornemmelsen dypt inne. Den var en del av hans liv. Hvorfor kunne han ikke gråte og skrike det ut, banne og drikke, ri det av som så mange andre? Hvorfor denne harde, vonde knuten som knirket og aldri gav ham fred?”

among the hero-figures of Nordic Noir, however, is his introspective and melancholic focus on internal psychic turmoil. Lengthy moments of silent reflection are not something Kane shares with either the Western nor the hard-boiled hero, but it is a fundamental formula feature of Nordic Noir.<sup>168</sup> This passage found in Nesbø's *The Thirst*, for example, describes how Harry Hole faces his inner demon:

He closed his eyes.

And after a while he glided away. Out of bed, out through the window, through the night, down towards the glittering city where the lights never went out, down onto the streets, into the alleys, over the rubbish bins, where the light of the city never reached. And there, there he was. His shirt was open, and from his bare chest a face screamed at him as it tried to rip the skin apart and get out. It was a face he knew.

Hunter and hunted, scared and hungry, hated and full of hate.

Harry quickly opened his eyes.

He had seen his own face. (214)

Note the symbolism of how Hole “finds” his inner self in a place that is dirty, filled with rubbish, and where the lights from the city never reach. Kane is also typically surrounded by dreary and filthy settings which mirrors his dark frame of mind. He has no permanent home, and his sleeping quarters tend to be Spartan, unclean and generally uninviting:

Kane walked down to the room he shared with Charlie Katz. It was entirely empty and seemed abandoned and dirty.<sup>169</sup> (Masterson, *I dragens klør* 104)

Morgan Kane woke up and lay gazing at the ceiling. Long rows of cockroaches crawled along the joints of the planks. He threw off the dirty blanket and leaped out on the floor. More cockroaches filled the floor, especially underneath the bed. Outside the thin plank wall he could hear a wagon rumble past.<sup>170</sup> (Masterson, *Den siste Cheyenne* 12)

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<sup>168</sup> See e.g. Creeber (9).

<sup>169</sup> My translation. Original text: “Kane gikk ned til rommet han delte med Charlie Katz. Det var helt tomt og virket forlatt og skittent.”

<sup>170</sup> My translation. Original quote: “Morgan Kane våknet og ble liggende og se opp i taket. Lange kolonner av kakerlakker kravlet langs fugene i planketaket. Han slengte det skitne teppet av seg og sprang ut på gulvet. Det var flere kakerlakker på gulvet, særlig under sengen. Utenfor den tynne plankeveggen ramlet en vogn forbi.”

The Western towns which Kane stops by are typically depicted as dirty places, as exemplified by *Den siste Cheyenne*'s description of Dodge City anno 1874. Here the main street is described as “an ocean of mud” in the winter and “an ocean of dust” during summertime. As Kane is there in June, he makes a note of how even the slightest gust of wind makes flour-like dust settle everywhere, and how people swear and cough and sneeze brown dust. The local diner is small and grimy, and the coffee they serve smells like burnt grain and chicory. The clientele looks tired and hung over (12). On a similar note, *I dragens klør* (*In the Claw of the Dragon*, 1966) describes Eagle Pass as “a dying town by the shore of Rio Grande” consisting of “dirty adobe huts, dirty half-bloods, scabrous hounds [and] dusty dead-end streets”<sup>171</sup> (*I dragens klør* 114).

To use description of scenery as a reflection of the characters' state of mind is emblematic to Nordic Noir. Barren landscapes tend to underscore how the detective struggles to make progress in the case he or she is working, uninspiring weather conditions mirror his or her low spirit, and isolated and derelict scenes of rural poverty reflect the hero's own lonely and isolated life. Seasons play an important part in the story, and the formidable scale of natural surroundings is often inscribed with an innate sense of evil (Bergman, “The Captivating Chill” 85; Creeber 11, 21; Nilsson). Such an almost symbiotic relationship between the landscape, the seasons and the plot is for example found in Stieg Larsson's novel *Män som hatar kvinnor* (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2005). The main action takes place on a small island whose only connection to main land is a bridge that might be closed at any time and render the occupants isolated. The story is set in the dead of winter, and the severe weather deepens the island's already cold atmosphere both literally and figuratively. The Swedish winter forces the characters to adjust their activities according to its challenging conditions, and thus makes the landscape become not just a setting but also a presence in the story.

In Morgan Kane, the hostile landscape also functions as a reflection of Kane's various struggles and as an illustration of both his inner and outer demons. The climate is as unforgivingly hot as the Nordic winter is cold, and the striking grandeur of the prairie is generally paired with the toil it brings those who try to inhabit it. In the opening paragraph from *Den siste Cheyenne*, for example, we can read:

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<sup>171</sup> My translation. Original quote: “Eagle Pass – en døende by ved bredden av Rio Grande. Skitne adobebytter, skitne halvblods, skabbete kjøtere, støvete gatestumper.”

The heat was excruciating.

As far as their eyes could reach, the prairie lay dimmed by the haze. Here and there a hot whirlwind formed a small cloud of dust that spun and danced for a few minutes before dissolving. Far down to the south, a mirage shone green and blue – green thicket over blue water.

Patrick Hennessey had pulled his hat low over his eyes to protect them against the intense light reflections of the sand and the wide-open horizon. The grass had withered and died. The soil was gone, swept away by the wind. The roots were dying. The sand came creeping ahead. One more dry summer and this area south of the Kansas border would become a desert.<sup>172</sup> (7)

Masterson here portrays a landscape that is both beautiful and uninviting. It is grand, open and majestic, but it is also frighteningly hostile. The sand creeps ahead as if alive, swallowing all life in its path. Masterson's daunting and severe Western environment matches the grim atmosphere of his stories. Often, Masterson explores how the desert's extreme conditions can drive men to actions they otherwise would not consider. Dehydration in the desert, for example, is a slow and agonizing death which gives the victim time to experience real desperation, and in *Møte i Tascosa* Masterson uses this as a frame to test Kane's limits. The story begins with Kane being half delusional from thirst and sunstroke. In and out of consciousness he is clinging to a rope that is tied around the neck of his horse. His only hope of survival, grotesque as it is, seems to him to be to cut open the horse's artery and drink its blood:

Man and animal stared at each other at a distance of three to four meters, a chasm of pain and wild thirst.

The bridge over this chasm came in the shape of a knife, clenched in the man's scorched hand.

Under the animal's skin a vein bulged, a river of blood, of fluid – of relief.

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<sup>172</sup> My translation. Original text: "Hetten var forferdelig. Så langt de kunne se, lå prærien uklar i disen. Hist og her lagde en het hvirvelvind en liten støvsky som spant og danset i noen minutter før den løste seg opp. Langt nede i syd lå en hildring og lyste grønn og blå – grønt kratt over blått vann. Patrick Hennessey hadde trukket hatten langt ned over øynene for å beskytte dem mot den intense lysrefleksjonen fra sanden og den vidåpne horisonten. Gresset hadde dødd på rot. Vinden hadde feiet jorden vekk. Gressroten døde. Sanden kom krypende frem. En tørkesommer til, og dette område sør for Kansas-grensen ville bli en ørken."

Morgan Kane heard his own voice, hoarse and repulsive, a nondescript sound that the wind seized, shattered and sprinkled out over the bushes and the red, dry soil.

The horse stood with its head drooping and watched him with red, sore eyes. Its flanks were streaked by gashes from the use of spurs. Morgan Kane's boots had brown clots of dried animal blood on them. The rowels of his spurs were rusty red.<sup>173</sup> (7)

Not only is Kane here contemplating the unpleasant idea of cutting his horse and consuming its blood, but the passage also reveals that he has mistreated the horse for some time already by using the spurs on his boots to force the exhausted animal forwards. From the context we gather that these acts were caused by desperate necessity rather than cruelty on Kane's behalf. Still, there are some inherently anti-romantic aspects about the imagery used here which contrast with the mythic tradition that lies at the core of the Western genre.

So far this chapter (and dissertation) has focused on identifying the unique character of the Morgan Kane series as a Nordic version of the Western. The next part of this chapter will address how these Nordic aspects of Morgan Kane are likely to be treated as the series enters the transnational and/or American popular market.

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<sup>173</sup> My translation. Original text: "Menneske og dyr stirret på hverandre over en avstand av tre-fire meter, en avgrunn av smerte og vill tørst. Broen over avgrunnen var en kniv som mennesket klemte i en svidd neve. En åre svulmet under dyrets skinn, en elv av blod, av væske – av lindring. Morgan Kane hørte sin egen stemme, hes og frastøtende, en ubestemmelig lyd som vinden grep tak i, knuste og strødde utover krattet og den røde, tørre jorden. Hesten sto med hengende hode og så på ham med røde, såre øyne. Flankene på dyret var stripete av sporesår. Støvlene hadde brune kaker av størknet dyreblod. Sporehjulene var rust-røde."

## 5.2 Morgan Kane from Scandinavia to American Popular Culture

The project of introducing Masterson's Morgan Kane to American popular culture is motivated by the popular success of other Nordic productions and hero-figures.<sup>174</sup> Nordic Noir's first overwhelming international success came with Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy which has been translated into 37 languages and has sold 60 million copies worldwide (Nilsson). In Larsson's aftermath, an increased visibility of Nordic fiction in the US is reflected through the presence of Scandinavian authors like Nesbø and Liza Marklund at the top of New York Times' list of best sellers.<sup>175</sup> Considering the small size of the Nordic region, Nordic Noir has, as Creeber notes, "made a surprisingly large international impact" (13). Scandinavian crime fiction and drama have thus become examples of regionally based popular cultural expressions which are transnationally successful (Hedling 2). However, it is worth noting that the international popularity of Nordic productions chiefly applies to translated or adapted versions and not to the Nordic originals, Olof Hedling points out. In an article, he explains that even though original versions of Scandinavian TV and film drama have been broadcasted in the US, subtitled film and TV drama are still not mass-consumed products and their success is, as a consequence, measured in relation to their status as foreign language productions (5-7). The original Swedish film version of Larsson's *Män som hatar kvinnor* (2009), for example, was launched in over fifty countries and attracted a cinema audience estimated to more than ten million ticket-buyers (1). Though this is considered a significant feat for a Swedish production, a later American-produced remake, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) directed by David Fincher, has had a US gross ten times higher than the Swedish version<sup>176</sup> and has also been bestowed with numerous awards and recognitions.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See e.g. press release from Wide Release Entertainment's David Pritchard quoted in ("Sadler opp for nye generasjoner").

<sup>175</sup> Nesbø's *Cockroaches* (2013) (Original version: *Kakerlakkene* 1998) topped the New York Times best seller list 2.03.2014, and Marklund's *The Postcard Killers* (2010), which she co-wrote with James Patterson, achieved the number one position 5.09.2010 (*Best Sellers - September 5, 2010 - The New York Times; Paperback Trade Fiction Books - Best Sellers - March 2, 2014 - The New York Times*). Nesbø's most recent novel, *The Thirst* (2017) topped The New York Times Book's list of the Best Crime Novels of 2017 (Stasio).

<sup>176</sup> The US gross for *Män som hatar kvinnor* has been listed as \$10,095,170, whereas the US gross for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is listed as \$102,515,793. (source: International Movie Database (IMDb) accessed 14.07.2016.)

<sup>177</sup> *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* received an Oscar at the 2012 Academy Awards, and were nominated in five categories. It has also received two Golden Globe nominations.

The wider appeal of Nordic Noir stories, themes and topics is thus most evident in the emergent market for English-language remakes of Nordic narratives. Nordic productions such as *Forbrydelsen (The Killing)*<sup>178</sup> and *Bron (The Bridge)*,<sup>179</sup> for example, have been remade into English-language versions with an American cast which have achieved high ratings. Mirroring how Nordic writers made their own use of genres which were interconnected with American cultural history during the creation of the Nordic Noir genre and a Nordic Western, American adaptations now make their own use of the ingrained ideology and mythic undertones of Nordic Noir. We see an example of this in the American remake of the Nordic drama *Forbrydelsen/ The Killing*. In the original version the female lead, Sarah Lund, is an exceedingly withdrawn and uncommunicative figure. Her dysfunctional personality is paired with dark and gloomy settings which “appear strangely cold, distant and isolated,” and the series’ somber feel of loneliness and isolation reflects the desolate mood of its gruesome murder, Creeber notes (12). Lund is portrayed with an almost complete lack of backstory, which, paired with a reserved and reticent manner, makes her something of a mystery. At the same time, it soon becomes evident that she has some kind of uncanny connection to the case. These aspects, combined with an understated color pallet and a quiet and “unsettling soundtrack,” bring a mood of eerie mystery to the Danish series (11-12). In contrast, the American version has chosen to give the female lead, here called Sarah Linden, a backstory which is unique for the American version. Whereas the Nordic Lund was a mysterious character and her connection to the case had an aspect of uncanniness about it, the American Linden’s drive to solve the case is explained by a troubled childhood spent in foster care after her own mother abandoned her. These changes to the lead character’s story effectively alter the mood of the series, removing the looming sense of mystery and introducing new topics which were not a part of the original Danish version (Creeber 12; Akass).

Among these American topics is a pronounced focus on Linden’s struggles to combine motherhood and career, Akass points out (747-48). Whereas both the Nordic Lund and the American Linden prioritize the demands of the case over their personal

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<sup>178</sup> *Forbrydelsen* is a Danish crime drama aired on Danish DR1 between 2007 and 2012. The series consists of 40 episodes divided on three seasons. It is created by Søren Svestrup and produced by DR (*Forbrytelsen*). *The Killing* (2011-14), an American remake based on *Forbrydelsen*, was developed by Veena Sud and produced by Fox Television Studios, Fuse Entertainment, KMF Films and The Killing Production. It has been aired on AMC and Netflix for four seasons (*The Killing*).

<sup>179</sup> *Bron* (2011-2018) is a Danish/Swedish crime drama created and written by Hans Rosenfeldt for Sveriges Television and DR1. In the American version titled *The Bridge* (2013-2014), the Swedish/Danish border has been substituted by the border between the US and Mexico. The American adaptation was developed by Meredith Stiehm, Björn Stein and Elwood Reid, and aired on the FX Network (*Bron; The Bridge*).

life, including the needs of their teenage son, Lund's parenting skills are never questioned in *Forbrydelsen*, whereas Linden's priorities become an area of focus in *The Killing*. A comparison between the way maternity is represented in *Forbrydelsen* and *The Killing* reveals a different cultural story, Akass writes, as there is a negativity and a criticism towards working mothers in the US version which is absent in the original. In *The Killing*, motherhood and parenting become a recurrent theme, and the way it is approached demonstrates a continual critique of women who choose self-fulfillment or work over domestication, she writes (784). As the Nordic countries are renowned internationally for their relatively high degree of gender equality, and some of the most famous characters within Nordic Noir are strong female protagonists who combine career with family (Bergman, "The Captivating Chill" 85), the contrast to *The Killing's* show of apathy towards working mothers signals a striking ideological contrast. With the way the television market is changing through schedule-free streaming services eager to win audiences from the traditional cable companies, Akass predicts that we will enter an "unprecedented era of European acquisition and adaptation for the US (global) TV market." However, "what remains to be seen," she writes, "is whether the European audience will be able to accept the way narratives are adapted for a US audience." When streaming platforms offer adaptations alongside their original incarnations, it remains to be seen if cultural expectations from an American audience can be met in a way that does not alienate a European audience (751-52). In light of this example, it will be interesting to see how the upcoming Hollywood adaptation of Masterson's Morgan Kane series will treat its Nordic elements. In other words, if the Nordic aspects of Masterson's stories will survive the transformation into an American-produced movie script, and if Masterson's West will be given any new and "Americanized" topics or values.

In addition to being adapted to film, the Morgan Kane books will also receive new English translations as they enter the American cultural marketplace. 41 of Masterson's Morgan Kane titles were translated into English during the series' first international release,<sup>180</sup> and the remaining titles will receive their original English translations through the Morgan Kane series' American publisher. The books which will receive American translations include the latest installments of the Morgan Kane series, which is where Morgan Kane's Nordic aspects are most clearly felt (including the so-called Indian books which have been analyzed in this project.) This is worth noting since, as explored by Nilsson, translations of a fictional work are often adjusted

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<sup>180</sup> British Corgi books published 41 titles in English between 1971 and 1979.

to meet the expectations of their targeted international market. In the article, “Uncovering a Cover: Marketing Swedish Crime Fiction in a Transnational Context,” Nilsson explores translated editions of Swedish Larsson’s *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor* in order to outline a transnational marketing map which shows how Larsson’s novel is represented across different national contexts outside of his native Scandinavian market. “This opens a door to investigating the negotiation between the content of a literary work and the context where it is presented and framed as attractive and worth buying,” she writes (Nilsson). Nilsson explains that how a literary work is presented in a new cultural context is a continuous process of negotiation between the work’s content and the cultural context which it is introduced to. In order for the novel to sell, it needs to be adjusted to suit the targeted regional market, and that market can in turn be influenced by the economic power of dominating cultural industries.

The adjustments which cultural industries do to meet the expectations of their targeted market sometimes transform the product to such an extent that the adaptation ends up contradicting the author’s original intent, Nilsson explains, and uses Larsson’s *Millennium* trilogy as an example. She illustrates how the social critique and ideological agenda which Larsson articulates in the original Swedish version has been reduced or even transformed during the process where Larsson’s novels have circulated internationally and been reinterpreted in new cultural and national contexts. Larsson, who was an outspoken feminist, formed the original title of the first *Millennium* installment, *Män som hatar kvinnor* (which would translate as “Men Who Hate Women” in English), with the purpose of drawing attention to abuse against women. Accompanying the title, Larsson uses violence and abuse performed by men against women in Sweden as a recurrent theme throughout the novel. In spite of warnings from his publisher Norstedts Förlag that the title was not sufficiently commercial, Larsson was adamant in his decision to keep it.<sup>181</sup> “The Swedish title was chosen from an ideological standpoint as a feminist statement and can be understood more as a political act than a marketing strategy,” Nilsson writes. As translated editions to such European markets as France, Italy and Spain have been given titles which are quite close to Larsson’s original, it is interesting to note that the English-language translation of Larsson’s novel has received a title which brings about entirely different associations than the original title does. By translating *Män som hatar kvinnor* into *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, the English title has removed the

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<sup>181</sup> Larsson’s partner, Eva Gabrielsson, talks about this in an interview with *The Guardian* printed 4. October 2011 (Cochrane).

author's message about men who act violently towards women. And though it brings focus to the female lead, this female lead is portrayed in a manner which does not match the novel's feminist ideology. Most strikingly, the English title replaces 'woman' with 'girl,' which brings to mind very different associations. Whereas a woman signifies an adult, a girl is still categorized as a child. The term girl also tends to be associated with innocence and naiveté, which gives a decidedly misleading impression of Salander's character as she comes across in the story (Nilsson). "Calling Lisbeth Salander 'the girl with the dragon tattoo' diminishes her," Eva Gabrielsson, Larsson's partner, says.<sup>182</sup> The same can be said for the English version's image of Salander's tattoo. Gabrielsen points out that in the original edition, Salander's tattoo is "huge," and "runs from her shoulder, along the spine, and ends somewhere on her buttock," but that the English version changed this to a small tattoo on her shoulder which would better fit the cover image they had in mind. In her article, Nilsson describes a set of such cover images which has been used in international marketing of the novels. They depict Salander with her back to the camera, exposing her bare neck and shoulders to reveal the small dragon tattoo. She is looking away from the spectator, her head in a submissive pose. "The image is the very opposite of a feminist message," Nilsson writes, as it represents Salander as a passive woman, and places her in a pose which invites spectators to "participate in a male, empowered, domineering gaze." These examples demonstrate how Larsson's feminist agenda has been blurred as his novel has entered the transnational space and been adjusted to fit a wide spectrum of expectations and demands, central among them being the expectations from the dominant American popular market. Masterson's Indian-books are yet (2018) to receive English version titles and cover art, and it thus remains to be seen how the upcoming English editions will negotiate the books' content with their targeted American market.

Interestingly, the expectations that the international market have of Nordic productions are often connected to that market's idea of what Nordic Noir is and should be. An illustration of this can be found in the Hollywood adaptation of Larsson's *Män som hatar kvinnor*, Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. In the American adaptation, the story has been given a new ending which is different from the Swedish original in its political agenda, but which stylistically matches well-known formula features of the Nordic Noir genre. Whereas the Swedish film adaptation of the novel concludes with Salander in a tropical setting as a financially

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<sup>182</sup> Gabrielsson says this in an interview which is published in *The Guardian* 4 October 2011 (Cochrane).

independent and self-confident woman, the ending of the American version has been given a very different mood. In the American version, Salander seeks out the male lead, Blomquist, only to discover him in company with another woman. Salander then withdraws and rides off on her motorbike until she disappears into a cold and wintery Stockholm cityscape. While downplaying the original version's focus on female empowerment, the American remake has nonetheless applied a mood, landscape, and theme of lonely existence which is emblematic of Nordic Noir (Nilsson). In other words, the American remake has produced an ending which is different in its political agenda, but which otherwise matches the international *image* of Nordic Noir. This image of Nordic Noir is interconnected with the idea of the mythic North, Nilsson writes, as Nordic Noir is packaged and sold as exotic and mysterious in a way that ties it to a mythic notion of what Peter Davidson refers to as 'the idea of the North.' According to Davidson, 'the North' as an idea is located both in a geographical place and in the imagination. In this regard, it is comparable to how the American West is both associated with a physical place and a mythic space (Davidson 10). Davidson illustrates the idea of the North with a compass which always points further north than the place in which you are positioned. As a place, the 'True North' is illusive and will always recede further north as one advances towards it. But the idea of the North is something everyone carries within them, he writes, and this idea transcends the geographical north that can be drawn onto a map (11, 19-20). In *The Idea of North* (2005), Davidson illustrates how the concept of the North has been manifested through legends, art, and literature throughout history and across geography. It is this mythical vision of the North which contemporary popular culture uses as framework when Nordic Noir is presented in a transnational context, Nilsson writes:

Nordic noir and its literary and visual narratives are connected to a historic legacy, deeply embedded in western cultural history. The twenty-first-century's framing of and approach to Nordic crime fiction links to a complex, pre-existing narrative of the North and its scenery. This fascination with the North has become a concept for labeling domestic crime fiction that connects it to a specific geography and topography. The same fascination infusing the ideas of the North resonates in the way the genre Nordic noir is framed and perceived. (Nilsson)

The Scandinavian scenery offers the genre a naturally austere and intense setting, and for many international audiences arctic winters with long nights and little daylight, and thinly populated, often rural areas which create a solitary and reclusive atmosphere have become the contemporary image of the Nordic countries. As Bergman writes, “international scholars and critics interpret the sparsely populated landscape and the extreme character of the seasons almost as symbols representing a Nordic sentiment or mentality” (“The Captivating Chill” 81–82). International marketing illustrates how much these ‘Northern’ aspects have come to symbolize Nordic Noir. The dusky and remote Nordic winter scene is such a trademark feature of Nordic Noir products that it tends to be reflected on the covers of international translations even in cases where this illustration does not match the novel’s content (82). The English translation of Liza Marklund’s *The Bomber* (2011),<sup>183</sup> for example, has a book cover which depicts an empty, snow-covered road in the countryside even though the novel is set in metropolitan Stockholm. Through such international media discourse, Nordic Noir fuels the image of the Nordic countries as an exotic ‘Other’ in a transnational context (Nilsson).

At the same time, this exotically foreign is made more accessible for international audiences through Nordic Noir’s transcultural link to internationally familiar genres like American hard-boiled fiction, British crime fiction, and film Noir, Bergman points out (“The Captivating Chill” 86). International readers who read Nordic Noir fiction are likely to recognize basic genre conventions, and this serves to soften cultural differences. It “creates a perfect balance between the exotic and unaccustomed, on the one hand, and the comfortable and familiar, on the other hand. It makes readers feel safe while exploring the foreign Nordic otherness,” Bergman concludes (86). Perhaps a similar allure to the mix of foreign and safe has played a role in the Morgan Kane series’ popular success in Norway, as the Nordic Western Morgan Kane offers its readers a blend of the exotic Wild West and aspects and perspectives which are familiar to a Nordic reader. It will also remain to be seen, as the Morgan Kane series is introduced to an American audience, whether the international audience’s recognition of basic genre traits from the Western might serve to make Masterson’s Nordic Western be experienced as a product which is “safely” or “accessibly” exotic and different. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Masterson’s Nordic aspects are included in the series’ international marketing. Several

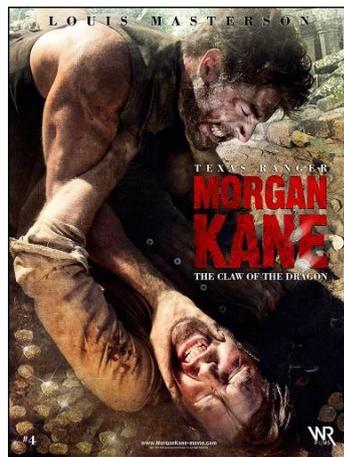
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<sup>183</sup> The novel was first published in 1998 with the original title *Sprängaren*.

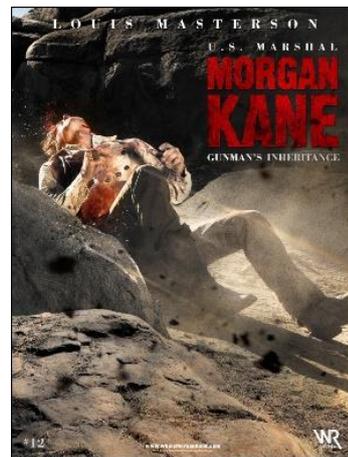
of those international editions of Masterson’s books which have been published thus far (2018) have been given fresh new cover art which matches international expectations of how a Nordic production should be. According to Bergman, Nordic fiction has gained an international reputation for containing excessive violence and graphic sex-scenes, a preconception that she believes to be somewhat exaggerated, but which nonetheless adds to the allure of Nordic Noir. Among the likely origins of this image she mentions the infamous depictions of rape in Larsson’s novel *Män som hatar kvinnor*, which she describes as one of “the most widely discussed scenes of Nordic crime fiction” (Bergman, “The Captivating Chill” 82, 87). Suitable to this image of Nordic literature, graphic scenes of excessive violence and sex are promised on the cover art of new international editions of such Morgan Kane titles as *The Claw of the Dragon*, *Gunman’s Inheritance*, and *Revenge*:



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Rather than an image of the Western hero in action, which characterized the original editions, these covers reflect the dark, cold and brutal atmosphere of Masterson’s Western universe. What is more, all these images also tell a story which contrasts with the norms of the traditional Western. As noted through the example of Sackett, the classic Western hero is known for exercising knightly virtue in his encounters with women, and abides by strict norms of honor and fair-play in his use of violent force. However, the cover of *Revenge* speaks of sex, darkness and looming danger, the cover

<sup>184</sup> Wide Release’s 2011 edition of *Revenge* (*Hevn!* 1967). Image copyright belongs to WR Films Entertainment Group, inc.

<sup>185</sup> Wide Release’s 2011 edition of *The Claw of the Dragon* (*I dragens klør*, 1966). Image copyright belongs to WR Films Entertainment Group, inc.

<sup>186</sup> Wide Release’s 2011 edition of *A Gunman’s Inheritance* (*Revolvermanns arv*, 1967). Image copyright belongs to WR Films Entertainment Group, inc.

of *The Claw of the Dragon* has replaced the traditional gunfight with a hand to hand struggle which is dirty, aggressive and messy (and thus contrasts with the clean, professional and clinical duel which is the norm for a formula-based Western hero), and the cover image of *Gunman's Inheritance* shows the killing of a man who is unarmed and already laying on the ground – an obvious breach of the knightly code of honor.

In this project I have examined the Nordic traits of Masterson's Morgan Kane series. In this I have faced the challenge of defining concrete aspects which "belongs" to, or are typical of, American and Norwegian culture. Transcultural scholarship problematizes the notion that a culture has permanent features and definite borders, and a central issue in the work with this project has been to define boundaries between what is "American" and what is "Nordic." Many aspects of the Morgan Kane series would qualify equally well as either, which is illustrative of both the fact that the books are transcultural and the notion that cultural boundaries can be shifting and illusive. My solution has been to use genre features and historical patterns as markers to define what is American and what is Nordic in Morgan Kane. Nonetheless, such classifications are a matter of perspective, and are meant to be regarded as suggestions and interpretations more than rigid classifications.

Wide Release Entertainment's production of the first Morgan Kane film and subsequent promotion of Masterson's books in the US is not yet completed, and it remains to be seen how the American audience will receive Morgan Kane. It appears that in the Morgan Kane series' first encounters with the international and/or American popular market, its Nordic aspects have not just survived, but are also emphasized and exploited. It will be interesting to see if this will become a continued trend in Morgan Kane's international future.



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