

THE VEHICLES OF FORTUNE: THE WAY THEY TRAVELLED AND TOLD US ABOUT IT

UDC 821.111(73)-992.09

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Abstract. *The paper is an excerpt from a much larger work dealing with the American "wheels of fortune" or, rather, vehicles or means of transport as icons of American cultural experience. Usually, gently put aside, as either not-so-significant 'stage props' of American historical narrative or too easily decoded symbols of the society-on-the-move, they have, in time, slowly surfaced the American cultural mythology. One of the reasons for this probably lies in the fact they have been upstaged in many popular genres as the firm link tying them up to respective epochs of American cultural history. As such, they themselves have been exposed to the (at least) two-part process of signification, i. e., they are preserved in static "frozen images" or descriptive narrative texture as well as in the fable or dynamics of narrative line(s) or plot(s). This proves to be sufficient to provide for their wide-ranging presence not only in voluminous collections of stories, poems, novels or in films, but also on the book cover(s) and many other accompanying "trivia" which as such ensure our remembrance of the stories we once read and loved. Always made to be less or more than they factually are, the "wheels" or means of travel have turned into "vehicles of fortune" if by "fortune" we do not mean whimsical old "fates" of "the days of yore" but a carefully thought-out and even more carefully promoted and carried out ideological program. If so, then the wheels or vehicles, once subjected to textual analysis (in its diverse forms such as psychoanalysis, metaphoric analysis, structuralist criticism, genre study, semiotics, and others) stressing any aspect of the given work, can prove to have been objects of successful ideologization.*

An example of successfully effected ideological strategy can be found in the popular Western novel. In this case, it is applied, among many, to the myth of the "covered wagon" which symbolically represents a vehicle, as well as a catalyst of American values, both "old" and "new." The concrete novel under study is of the same title written by Emerson Hough in 1922.

Key Words: *Icon, American Mythology, Western Novel, Ideolect*

INTRODUCTION

Americans are great travelers.

To doubt this is not recommendable; it is a well-known truth. It is not even fair to quote one of the American leading intellectuals, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who once said that the "soul is no traveler," advising his American compatriots who, if inclined to build a civilization to match that of classical Greece, should stay at home and do it, the way the ancients did.

Neither would it be *decent* to add a few words about other great traveling nations. Even more so since some Americans themselves, in the popular short novel that we are to discuss here,¹ like to see themselves as descendants of many nomadic tribes and nations whose migrations have left an indelible mark on the history of the whole world.²

Neither would it be "enlightening" here to discuss the very concept of travel in any of its numerous implications. Yet, in a nutshell, and for the purpose of this paper, it is enough to say how, from the times immemorial, the idea of travel, within the Homeric and other literary/cultural frameworks, has been closely linked with that of change, growth, progress (which is life) as well as that of decline, regress or diminution (which is death). Life is itself a great journey for so many oral and written cultures, for Christians and non-Christians alike, while the travel itself, especially in the seafaring (biblical) times, on the "sea of life" or "sea of troubles" (the latter famously pointed out by one of the first American fathers, governor and chroniclers William Bradford) is an inviting literary/cultural concept for all nations, of all times.

What makes Americans, then, a slightly more "travelous" than others is not only a shared or "spiritual" or "symbolic" aspect of their journey of planting a civilization in the wilderness. Soon after the first "drudgery" of settling the virgin coastal land was done, as Benjamin Franklin put it, there was another journey to take. This time, Americans, as a medley of nomads or immigrants from all over the world, had a continent to cross, subdue and settle. This was a serious task requiring many other skills and competences apart from the mere religious or secular/adventurous motivation and perseverance. Hence, their journey turned out to be less spiritual and more physical and technical than those of earlier days.

To illustrate: Ulysses' journey also took part in an extensive (for the times) space; it was a geo-sea that it is very difficult to charter on today's maps. It is just as difficult to reconstruct details concerning the ship he sailed on as well as its technical details, the ship building, navigating and other marine skills of his warrior-sailors. It is an "odyssey" on another ontological level, on a geo-mythological and geo-metaphysical level, above more profound abysses and along more remote shores of human personality: a true "self-journey", indeed.

Centuries later, Melville's Redburn sets out on his "odyssey" of self-exploration, maturation and socialization; yet, upon first seeing the ship he hardly notices anything but the seafaring community. The symbolic ship ("society") experienced as a communal entity is the target of his strivings instead of the factual one. Moreover, when Melville's Ishmael³, gets aboard the "Pequod", he brings along a whole universe of questions preceding his socialization. To this list, the ship itself adds other yet more provoking is-

¹ Emerson Hough, *The Covered Wagon*, New York Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1922, Project Gutenberg

² Examples of "enlargement" by which one particular group is linked to many others, remote in place and time, to suggest a wide variety of ideological interpretations are numerous. Let's take one: commenting on the pioneer travel, at one point, the author remarks, "The west-bound paused at the Missouri, as once they had paused at the Don." (Hough, op. cit.)

³ To name only a few of the best known archetypal travelers

sues.⁴ Some formalist readings, discussing Melville's and akin narratives in terms of their motives and motive-links, would probably regard the kind of attention given to the above mentioned "vehicles" as naturally stemming from philosophical or religious or similar kinds of motivation.

The question to ask, then, is: what motivates the great traveler, the American, in the kind of fiction he produces, well-loved and widely-read, the popular one?

II

When the American pioneers get together in Independence, Missouri, for a rendezvous, wherefrom to start a two-thousand mile journey (or the Oregon Trail) and when the "white sails" of their "covered wagons" start floating like "prairie schooners" on a green sea of American prairie, they have other things to worry about apart from their fears and doubts, signs and omens. They have important choices to make: should they use horses or bulls? Two or four column arrangement of wagons? Bulls before others or the other way round? And the like. Regarding the challenge that the Frontier represents for the physical and technical man, these are not trivial things. Quite the opposite: these are the matters of life and death, defeat or survival.

This requires a different kind of approach to the means of travel. This time it is not their symbolic aspect which is foreground. The issues they raise are not those related to, above all, the religious man.⁵ Neither is it the man of abstract thought who has to provide some answers to these "down-to-earth" questions. The civilization has in itself come down-to-earth. It has to "ford" the rivers and cross the mountains. It has to feed its horses and bulls. It has to feed its people.

Its leader, no longer a philosopher or theologian, must be a man of technology. This is evident, if not anywhere else, then in the well-known fact that the problem with the westward movement was not in finding a road as such but a wide enough passage for the wagon train to pass through. It had to be wide enough, accessible and available for the passage of "families" and not one single individual, be it a mountain man or a fur trader. Its escort and leader, the technical man or rather a technocrat, then, had to have the skill of a good manager able to provide well for such a robust thing as the wagon train/family on the move if the latter is to survive and realize its Manifest Destiny. Thus, to all the traditional epic virtues possessed by the celebrated heroes, the Western travelogue adds the skill, experience and competence in leading, managing and safeguarding the vehicle itself. That is how the vehicle has got to so many book covers: long after the names of enamored heroines and their brave-heart gallants⁶ have sunk into oblivion, the covered

⁴ This paper leaves out the technical parts of *Moby Dick* as a book-within-the-book deserving a separate analysis. Therefore, the remark refers to the narrative parts of the novel. It implies many issues concerning different aspects of the ship in the light of the story such as its possible Indian connotations of its name (Pequot tribe), etc.

⁵ At one point, Father of the family, Jesse Wingate, reproaches his wife for not having the courage of "those Mormon women ahead". To which she resolutely replies, "They've done it for religion, Jess. Oregon ain't no religion for me." (op. cit.)

⁶ The ideological strategy of characterization introducing Major William Banion: "He rode carelessly, a born horseman (...) a gallant figure of the border cavalier" (, Hough, op. cit.) He is a league-bringer to the expanding Empire just like "'many another fighting man (who) had been adding certain thousands of leagues to the soil of this republic." His whole appearance is that of a gallant soldier, "True, in his close-cut leather trousers, his neat boots, his tidy gloves, his rather jaunty broad black hat of felted beaver, he made a somewhat raffish figure of a man as he rode up, weight on his under thigh, sidewise, and hand on his horse's quarters, carelessly; but his

wagon ideograph has survived, its memory cherished, its icon adored, its story told and retold. As it has happened so many times in the history of (not only) science, in this case, too, the Man Forgotten is replaced by his Remembered Invention.

One possible and traditional way of "keeping the memory alive" is by mythologizing it, that is, transferring virtues from the man to the thing and *vice versa* in a form which feeds on this kind of linkage: let's say, this time, popular fiction.

III

Thanks to popular fiction, narratives in literature and media, especially film,⁷ the covered wagon has become an icon of a distinguished epoch in the history of American society and culture (the West, the Frontier, the Gold Rush, the Manifest Destiny, to name only a few well-known myths). It has also become an ideograph or an artifact with more or less overt ideological underpinnings. It has come to imply more than just a symbol (due to the enlargements of its meaning or subsequent ideological gains) or just an icon or carrier of a set of values understood to be generated and cherished in this, as it were, epic stage of American development. (In effect, many of these values are universally-shared, others were added later during the book-writing while the rest are just wishful thinking, in America and elsewhere).

The form in which the values are presented and promoted is a "popular epic", the Western novel. Without going into a more detailed and comprehensive comparison here, it is, for the present purpose, enough to say that, with respect to the traditional epic standard, the mock-epic of the popular fiction is its wondrous Other, in which the play of "smaller than or larger than" is inverted with respect to the traditional tales.

In the sense of "smaller", in popular fiction, gods are exclusively reduced to *deus-ex-machina* (in this case, for example, interventions by comic relief characters, "omnipotent" mountain men or scouts). Heroes are hardly more than common while the standard of commonness is less than a recognizable social norm (that clearly befits the Frontier society, still in the "transition" state). In terms of literary/narrative terms, many-branched and interwoven narrative is reduced to a cocktail of genres, none of which is fully or elaborately developed. Neither is their medley. Thus, a travelogue is clearly divided into two sections, the first detailing the journey, the second detailing everything else. The love story proceeds along the familiar lines: from lovers' initial encounter to a tragic error leading to a tearful and heart-shattering separation (blindness and delusion) to the thanks-God-it-failed wedding to the exchange of vows and final happiness. These are all bits and scraps of the standard love romances, with the purpose to add intrigue and suspense to where dullness (routine) rules. In addition, towards the end of the journey there is a most unexpected ingredient, a treasure hunt which is neither on the Oregon Trail nor of a traveling outlook. Therefore, it cuts short the travelogue while in itself it never goes further than winning enough gold to marry "the king's daughter."

On the other hand, other things are bigger than habituated: above all, emotions are simplified and, to compensate, intensified. They are the driving mechanisms of the story and hence more frequent and more violent. The Indians attack once too often. The vil-

clean cut, unsmiling features, his direct and grave look out of dark eyes, spoke him a gentleman of his day and place, and no mere spectacular pretender assuming a virtue though he had it not" (Hough, op. cit.)

⁷ Just to mention here a famous Hollywood silent movie made after the novel in 1923 and directed by James Cruze. It set the standard, pattern and – finally – Western cliché.

lains are more villainous than ever (Samuel Woodhull tries to kill his rival, William Banion, several times). The good ones are "gooder" than ever (on the contrary, William Banion forgives the attempted assassin several times and as many lets him go free)! The "orations" are more bombastic and pathetic. The injustice is more than unjust and justice, as poetic as Heaven itself, is more than just: it awards the seekers with Arcadia or Northern Paradise: Oregon!

Within this framework, the covered wagon is either less or more than it is: a means of transporting people and goods.

IV

The covered wagon changes its size as if to fit many different purposes, from those dictated by the story itself (and its needs in terms of setting, characterization, main complications, culmination, denouement) to the ideological ones. Likewise, it changes its scope to encompass not only the traditional Frontier values but also those related to the American society of the twenties of the twentieth century, the time when the book reached its audience (1922).

The covered wagon is "less than it is" when it needs a set of human virtues to accomplish its task. Its failure or incapacity as a technical device is compensated for by a brilliant-minded man who knows how to save it from turbulent rivers and prairie fires, from floods and fires, all evoking biblical temptations. No wonder, then, that the last river to cross is the formidable Snake. It is, like its mythological ancestor, the greatest tempter of all, thus guarding the gate of Heaven (Oregon).

Therefore, neither fully "a means to an end" (nor "an end by itself"), the technical or transport device is a stage prop whose very partiality requires a skillful mechanic or a leader or an army commander to push it through its mission. Or, to translate it from the moving "wheels of fortune" into an arranged and strictly controlled "vehicles" of a much different fortune.

Though the wagon may pose as a "home," or a "state", or an "army," it is still, nonetheless, the home or state or army or ship or the very covered wagon that man/leader/manager must muster. In the language of fiction, as Pierre Macherey would say,⁸ it serves to confirm and promote "man's mastery" over nature through his mastery over his own technical invention. It does it through the fable thus adding another much-needed mastery: that over narrative.

The fable, following the morphology of popular fiction and that of Western in particular,⁹ is "the form which organizes and animates" its object, in this case, Frontier values. For this purpose, the form here (comprising, let's say, plot, characterization, etc.) organizes its material to animate, that is, to create tension while observing the rivalry between the already-cliché oppositions. It leads, as expected, to the victory of good over evil, of youth over age, of love over hatred, of true love over blood-boiling passion, of man over himself and his uncontrollable passions and reactions, of man over wilderness, of civilization over wilderness, of the white pioneer over the red native, and the like. This is an ideological program that launches, drives and justifies the movement: to conquer, settle and bless, with its regalia, the rest of the continent.

⁸ Pierre Macherey, "Jules Verne: The Faulty Narrative," in John Storey, ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. A Reader*, Prentice Hall, NY, 2006, p. 320

⁹ For morphology of the Western tale, see Will Wright, "The Structure of Myth & The Structure of the Western Film," in *Ibid*, p. 293

Yet, in addition to all this, there is another set of values that help the pioneer fulfill his destiny. They are to be inferred "between the lines" in a textual analysis that would start from identifying the values and general traits implied in each instance of the fictional discourse, especially character-building or characterization. If two characters are opposed, for instance, then the analysis points to the values they stand for. In this way, the opposition between William Banion and Father (or the "old king" Jesse Wingate)¹⁰ is generalized as that between, on the one hand, an army major, manager and pragmatist, and, on the other hand, an ineffective and incompetent demagogue, blinded by vanity and lust for power. This is further reflected in the triumph of practice versus theory,¹¹ "talent for organization and management"¹² versus rhetoric, technology and brains against ignorance and ineptitude, and the like. Further on, the opposition between William Banion and Samuel Woodhull is generalized as that between the rich and prosperous who never forgets less fortunate ones and, on the other hand, brutality, arrogance and selfishness of the rich as morally corrupt.¹³ Further on, the opposition between William Banion and the mountain men is that of a clever leader *versus* wise yet socially inept and pragmatically ineffective counselors and executives.

The examples as the above-mentioned are numerous but they point to the ideology dominant not at the Frontier but on the eve of the industrial and capitalist burgeoning of America and its turning into a huge military, industrial and technological mega power.

Its fable or diachronic aspect is evident from the start: a young and capable leader whose life is threatened by an dishonest and corrupted competitor strives to find a new place to his liking, to wed a girl of his liking who comes as a reward after a series of successful problem-solving situations including search for gold as a prerequisite for his future social acceptance and career-making.

Is it a story about a frontiersman? Or a businessman? Or Tom Sawyer trying to win Becky? Or Rocky?

To read the ideological program implied in the fable and to delineate its strategy, it is enough to glimpse at one of the leading texts preaching the gospel of wealth and power. The analogy is there: the values as pointed out by the American leading industrialists are already there, in the Frontier book. As early as in the wagon train there is the world of competition, competence and capital, of social stratification and socio-economic heterogeneity, of socio-Darwinism and the survival of the fittest, etc.

Just like the primitive manufacturing society of farmers and herdsmen, the covered wagon society, homogenous at first, turns heterogeneous in time as suggested in Carne-

¹⁰ Even more interesting, at least from the genre studies perspective, is the portrait of Mother, one in a long series of mothers derived from John Steinbeck's *Grape of Wrath*. Since in popular fiction now, Molly senior is more than or less than the other one. Here, she is less because rarely does she act maybe exactly because she is "more than" in the sense of being a "stout-hearted and just-minded mother" and thus unable, except in the very last episode when the unapproved suitor appears in the shape of a wealthy and promising capitalist, to take side with her "suffering daughter". In Steinbeck, mother is a more complex and compassionate woman always siding with her children.

¹¹ It is hard to miss the author's praise of Banion's pragmatism: "'He had brought not speech but action, not theory but facts, and he had not spoken a word" (Hough, op. cit.)

¹² Andrew Carnegie, from *The Gospel of Wealth*, in Breidlid A., and assoc. eds., *American Culture. An Anthology*. 2nd edition, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 163

¹³ Not so much in the beginning of the story where Samuel Woodhull somewhat seems to resemble a gentleman of the Southern cavalier tradition. He is a "man of means" and "at first sight (...) not seemed so ill a figure." In fact, he is "tall, sinewy, well clad for the place and day, even more foppish than Banion in boot and glove" and "would have passed well among the damsels of any courthouse today." Like the aristocratic Southerner, he was "reputed well to do; reputed also to be well skilled at cards, at weapons and women" (Hough, op. cit.) In that sense, William Banion would be a major of the democratic, industrially and technologically winning Northern army.

gie's *Gospel of Wealth*. "Human society loses homogeneity", says he and so does the wagon train.¹⁴ The stratification takes place on the journey in which some never make it, others change their ways for the sake of gold hunt in California, while the rest proceed to Oregon to become solid, prosperous and conservative middle-class, law-abiding citizens. Moreover, human society implies "the survival of the fittest" and so does the wagon train. The fittest have the "talent for organization and management" and so has our hero, William Banion. He fights against unfair competition and wins, as envisioned by Carnegie's businessman. Ultimately, Banion gets the reward and so does the society in terms of its aspirations and wealth. To sum up, he is endowed with all the best character traits of the modern and aspiring young man: a military spirit, a managerial propensity, a resolute outlook, a fearlessness facing competition and the capital to invest into his future standing.¹⁵

This capital, either "spiritual" in the previous epochs or "physical" in the days of the Frontier or "financial and technological" as in the modern times, has its own cycles. Just like the wagon train, says Carnegie, it must not stand still: "It must either go forward or fall behind: to stand still is impossible."

V

The victor is, then, the man who moves. The traveling American, let's say. As constructed in popular culture.

Just like another glorious archetypal American hero, Tom Sawyer, the hero of the novel, William Banion gets his reward for saving the girl he loves (Becky Thatcher or Moly, respectively). In gold.

In saving Becky, Tom is saving himself from the horrors and traumas as well as love and beauties of the free-floating raft life of Huckleberry Finn. He conforms to the society that welcomes his conformism. His fiction companion, Banion, in saving Moly, saves the society whose paragon he has never ceased to be, in "sickness and death." Hence, adamant in his ideology, he saves the potential home she stands for, the home-on-the-wheels (or the typee-on-the-wheels, depending on who is telling the story) and the whole community or civilization in the making.

Both Tom and William are American Dream creations, epitomes of the rags-to-riches pattern. The only difference is that Tom, young as he is, is yet to go to an army school, once the narrative is over, to advance his "organization and management" talents while older William is already an army man.

This leads us to another method of ideologization. If the fable is a rather diachronic one, organizing its material/values in terms of narrative lines, then the synchronic method would refer to an analysis of the material organized and animated in the form of "crystallization in specific images, objects, natural places, or even psychological attitudes."¹⁶ It is expressed in a rich inventory of objects or props or "fund of images"¹⁷.

These striking and panoramic "frozen" images turn the wagon into more than it is.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ What better proof of William Banion's figuration as a new man but his mastery of the "jiu jitsu holds" used to defeat the traditional Southern cavalier. Obviously, the New Era is dawning in the West.

¹⁶ Pierre Macherey, op. cit. 322

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 322

Besides being a home,¹⁸ it is also a community meeting-place place, an early congress, where important decisions are to be made thus serving as a precursor to other state institutions, regulative (legislative), judiciary and executive ones. All the three branches are safeguarded by another function allotted to the moving covered wagon: it is a moveable army.¹⁹

In "The Military –Industrial Complex", Dwight D. Eisenhower, while commenting on the state of American armaments industry in the sixties, also suggests that "American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well".²⁰

The combination of the plows and the swords (rifles) is already in the covered wagon. In one of the descriptions, stating the items of the traveling household, the elements to cover and protect include mother, daughter and wife-to-be, the supplies and the seeds of the roses for a new garden. They are kept in the womb (wagon) throughout the journey to be planted in a new country. The very form of the white cloth covering suggests a round womb-like structure. The same round womb-or-ring-like structure is perceived in the shape that the wagon train takes at its most critical defense moments: it is encirclement. This makes even the "covered wagon" the most suitable title for the story: it implies the key ideograph or the wagon as a female womb protecting the seeds of a new empire as "covered" or safeguarded throughout the journey west. Only to be planted, in marriage, in a virgin soil of Oregon.

This finally completes the ideological imagery of the wagon: it shifts from an "ark"²¹ merely physically resembling it to the "Ark" of the Empire, new Noah's Arc that is to plant the new land with soldiers, teachers, farmers as well as rich elite, managers, technocrats. Just as one of them, of the twentieth century army of brokers and businessmen, remarks in an interview, "Growth – netter – faster. I guess that's my one big vice. I feel a

¹⁸ Its identification with home or family is evident in the very first words of the novel when the voices are announcing the coming of the families. The contiguity of "families" and "wagons" leads to their overlapping.

¹⁹ "It was by no means a solid and compact army, after all, this west-bound wave of the first men with plows." (Hough, op. cit.) But the military ideolect is not exhausted there; more instances are found pointing to the military-invasive aspect of the mission. Such as, e. g., the wagon as a moveable fortress. It says: "With obvious training, the wagons broke apart, alternating right and left, until two long columns were formed. Each of these advanced, curving out, then drawing in, until a long ellipse, closed at front and rear, was formed methodically and without break or flaw. It was the barricade of the Plains, the moving fortresses of our soldiers of fortune, going West, across the Plains, across the Rockies, across the deserts that lay beyond. They did not know all these dangers, but they thus were ready for any that might come" (Hough, op. cit.) Some other examples may include the titles of the team leaders such as lieutenants, sergeants, and the like.

²⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The Military-Industrial Complex" (1961) in Breidlid A., op. cit., p. 430 In *The Covered Wagon*, there are tableaux giving a wide-angled view of the moving home with boys and girls beside the wagon, with chickens at wagon side, with dogs barking "in hostile salutation" and women turning "impassive gaze from the high front seats" with the family rifles hanging behind them "and now, at the tail gate of every wagon, lashed fast for its long journey, hung also the family plough" (Hough, op. cit) (underlined by DM).

²¹ At the onset, we see "the massed arklike wagons"; later on, the narrating voice celebrates "the ark of our covenant with progress (...) Almost it might have been said to have held every living thing, like that other ark of old" (Hough, op. cit.) Finally, the whole procession gets to the destination. It gets its reward for this: from a string of wagons it turns into the mighty "vehicle of fortune": "One winter day, rattling over the icy fords of the road winding down the Sandy from the white Cascades, crossing the Clackamas, threading the intervening fringe of forest, there broke into the clearing at Oregon City the head of the wagon train of 1848. A fourth of the wagons abandoned and broken, a half of the horses and cattle gone since they had left the banks of the Columbia east of the mountains, the cattle leaning one against the other when they halted, the oxen stumbling and limping, the calluses of their necks torn, raw and bleeding from the swaying of the yokes on the rocky trail, their tongues out, their eyes glassy with the unspeakable toil they so long had undergone; the loose wheels wobbling, the thin hounds rattling, the canvas sagged and stained, the bucket under each wagon empty, the plow at each tail gate thumping in its lashings of rope and hide--the train of the covered wagons now had, indeed, won through. Now may the picture of our own Ark of Empire never perish from our minds" (Hough, op. cit.) In the ideolect of the novel, taking on the preaching tone with biblical overtones, it finally becomes an ideograph of the American imperialism.

very heavy sense of compulsion, a sense of urgency. When I get in a car, I also feel it. I drive much too fast. I'm always moving."²²

A vice or a virtue, yet, this endless motion is archetypal while its repetitions bring along new sets of feature traits, some of them tending to impose themselves on others, thus changing the nature of the "Empire." The defeated party as symbolized by Father (incompetence, demagoguery, vanity, egocentrism, blindness) and (partially) by the Mountain Men (old age, executives, radical individualism or non-conformism) gives way before an "always moving" rich capitalist, manager whose presence in the novel is read into thus signaling the new frontiers outdating the old one.

Hence, the covered wagon with its plentiful seeds persists not just as icon of certain historical and traditional values but also as an artifact carrying the message of the more recent technological and military complex and imperialism. Its ideolect comprising both evolving narratives and frozen images completes its signification in terms of a clear ideological message: you have started as 'rags,' farmers and fiddlers but, following this trail, you end up as leaders and winners.

The "initiation into maturity" is complete, both of the individuals involved and the society of the whole. In the ideological terms, the implied maturity is rather conformism, reconciliation, and acceptance along with expansion, militarism and imperialism. As expected, the Ark has survived Noah, the Forgotten Man.

CONCLUSION

Life is a journey. The Western novel progresses in the way life does: with the graduation leading us from less difficult to more and more difficult crossings and sufferings until the hardest, ultimate and decisive battle on the Snake River. Which is death. Followed by the Oregon Paradise. For some. Others, uninitiated, are left behind.

Thus the covered wagon is the body of man who has to learn how to handle and manage it never letting it take up the better part of his personality. This is a very nice reading of the novel. It perfectly justifies some opinions stating that popular fiction, though frowned upon by more serious literati has never given up preaching and instructing. If not a great school of thought, it is still a great school of practice. Of ideology as a daily care.

Yet, the covered wagon is also the body of the society which is born, is growing and is dying on the road to Heaven. It has to die²³ before another one is born whose seeds it has protected till the end. In the womb of its covered wagon.

Ideology dies hard, if ever.

²² Studs Terkel, "Jay Slabaugh, 48" (Interview with a Corporate Executive, 1980), in *Ibid.*, p. 432

²³ What is the America that has to die leaving its seeds well protected under the covered wagon? It is the America of those who set out on a journey west: of all Americans, second, fourth generation Americans. Wild, uncouth, rude, unlettered, many or most of them, none the less there stood among them now and again some tall flower of that culture for which they ever hungered; for which they fought; for which they now adventured yet again" (Hough, *op. cit.*) Already, as the traveling nomads stop to rest, there are changes in their disposition and the organized society begins to develop suppressing the previously disorganized and anarchic one. Here is one example, ""The encampment, scattered up and down the river front, had become more and more congested. Men began to know one another, families became acquainted, the gradual sifting and shifting in social values began. Knots and groups began to talk of some sort of accepted government for the common good" (Hough, *op. cit.*) Thus, the narrating voice celebrates the victory of the common good over individual and the shift in the respective attitudes.

The form it takes may change, in time. And in taste. Whether Andrew Carnegie or William Banion is going to be its spokesman depends on the personal affinity for a particular kid of mask. Just as Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn pretend to be children telling quite an unchildren-like story, so does the "covered wagon" just pretend to be the Old Frontier icon. In its impact, its insistence on competence, competition and capital, it might as well be a car racing across the prairies. And the racing car it is going to become very soon. To conclude, to borrow William Faulkner's phrase, the "covered wagon" was just the beginning, the "grandfather of (them) all."

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VOZILA SUDBINE: KAKO SU ONI PUTOVALI I PRIČALI NAM O TOME

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Rad je odlomak obimnijeg rada koji se bavi američkim "točkovima sudbine" ili, pre bi se reklo, vozilima ili transportnim sredstvima kao ikonama američkog kulturnog iskustva. Obično "nežno" gurnuti u stranu ili kao ne toliko značajni "rekviziti" američke istorijske pripovesti ili prelako dekodirani simboli društva koje se kreće, oni su se, vremenom, probili do površine američke kulturne mitologije. Jedan od razloga je verovatno u činjenici da su izbili u prvi plan kao čvrste spojnice koje ih vezuju za određene odgovarajuće epohe američke kulturne istorije. Kao takvi, oni su sami izloženi barem dvostrukom procesu signifikacije, to jest, sačuvani su u statičkim "fiksiranim slikama" ili deskriptivnoj narativnoj teksturi kao i u priči ili dinamici narativnih linija ili zapleta. To je sasvim dovoljno da osigura njihovu sveprisutnost ne samo u obimnim zbirkama priča, pesma, romana ili na filmu, već i na koricama knjiga i mnogim drugim pratećim "tričarijama" koje kao takve osiguravaju naše sećanje na priče koje smo nekad čitali i voleli. Uvek konstruisani tako da budu manje ili više od onoga što stvarno jesu, "vozila" ili putnička sredstva su postala "vozila sudbine" ako pod njom ne podrazumevamo čudljive stare "suđaje" iz davnina nego pažljivo promišljen i još pažljivije plasiran i ostvaren ideološki program. Ako je to tako, onda se može dokazati da su "točkovi" ili "vozila", ako se izlože analizi teksta (u njenim raznim vidovima poput psihoanalize, metaforske analize, strukturalističke kritike, rodnih studija, semiotike i drugih) koja naglašava bilo koji vid datog dela, predmeti uspešne ideologizacije.

Primer takve uspešno izvedene strategije ideologizacije može se naći u popularnom vesternu. U tom slučaju, strategija je primenjena u mnogim slučajevima a jedan od njih je mit "pokrivenih kola," konestoga vozila koje simbolički predstavlja vozilo ali i katalozator američkih vrednosti, starih i novih. Konkretni roman kao predmet istraživanja je pod nazivom Pokrivena kola a autor je Emerson Hat (Emerson Hough), pisac i konzervativac. Delo je objavljeno 1922.

Zaključak ukazuje da „pokriveni vagon" pripada mnogo široj mitologiji Granice koja, u celini, služi ideološkim ciljevima umesto da bude ono što jeste: priča koju čitamo i volimo.

Ključne reči: ikona, američka mitologija, vestern, ideolekt