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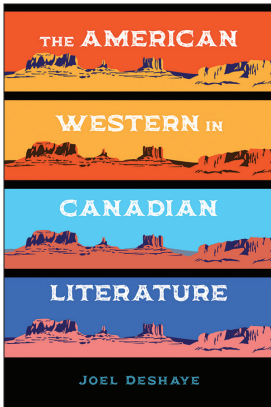
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## THE AMERICAN WESTERN IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

by Joel Deshayé

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# Introduction

## *Signposts and Scales*

The Western genre is about dry land, the dusty expanses of the American Southwest or the grassy plains of North America—and yet when the poet Don McKay alluded to the Lone Ranger in his 2010 Pratt Lecture in St. John's, he was nearly within sight of the Atlantic Ocean. In the same year, the popular television program *Republic of Doyle* went on the air, the first episode about two Albertan cowboys causing trouble in Newfoundland. The hero Doyle—like the Lone Ranger in taking the law into his own hands—paddles both of the interloping Albertans with the lid of a toilet tank, telling them to “saddle up.” He then threatens to electrocute one of them with a gun-like hair dryer in a bathtub full of water, the man in a tub being a motif of the Western (Gaines and Herzog 180).<sup>1</sup> In his parting words he exhorts them to “ride off into the sunset together.” Meanwhile, on Water Street, not far from some of the typical filming locations for *Republic of Doyle*, the Rocket café displays old coffee tins newly decorated with an imaginary brand called NFLD MOON and featuring the image of a silhouetted cowboy with the sunset behind him. Next door, the awning above an out-of-business restaurant advertises the Stetson lounge upstairs. A few blocks north is an abandoned store, the First Western Boutique (relocated elsewhere), with an awning depicting cacti, the sunset over the cordillera, and another cowboy in silhouette. Some signs of the Western in easternmost St. John's imply a ghost town, when in fact the city sometimes

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1 See also Aritha van Herk's 2004 historical work in “Washtub Westerns.”

booms with oil—not from Alberta, but from under the sea.<sup>2</sup> Terrestrial oil and gas companies have been known to use Western imagery to suggest that the roughneck is the new cowboy, even if his landscape is ecologically damaged rather than pastoral (Hitt); offshore oil companies have done something similar with frontier narratives (Polack and Farquharson 252–3). So, too, with the Newfoundland fishery, as seen in the documentary TV series *Cold Water Cowboys* (2014–17), about the long aftermath of over-fishing and the 1993 cod moratorium. Partly in the context of a cultural refusal to see land and water holistically, as an ecosystem, McKay speaks out against the “either/or” reductionism that arguably underlies the desperate commitment here to oil or cod. Still, his passing reference to the Lone Ranger invokes several binaries. The Lone Ranger is typically seen as a “hero” despite (or because of) his position of privilege over his Native American “sidekick,” Tonto; he is lone, but in a duo; a Texas Ranger, but also an outlaw, a wearer of a white hat and black mask. Similarly rife with dichotomies and paradoxes, the Western itself has nevertheless gained new complexities and dimensions, moving farther and farther from the American West, into the East, over water, and around the world.<sup>3</sup>

The Western is not only an American genre now. This claim might once have elicited objections (and maybe it still would in some corners); now it might elicit nostalgia for a time when the United States appeared to be both the origin and the only true custodian of the genre—when the Western was the work of American literature and film par excellence (Bazin 141, 145, 148). A primary contention of this book is that it is Canadian too, as demonstrated by the many Canadian books that inform this study, even if a lot of them depart from the formula enough that “Canadian literature”

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2 The vagaries of resource economies in relation to the Canadian Western are also evident in Dayle Furlong’s *Saltwater Cowboys* (2015), which I consider in the book’s conclusion; it is a post-Western (in Neil Campbell’s conception of it) about Newfoundland miners who move to northern Alberta. Resettlement in Newfoundland has also created ghost towns around the bays. For some suggestive reflections on ghost towns and nostalgia, see Carlton Smith’s *Coyote Kills John Wayne* (2000, 7–8).

3 As Sherrill E. Grace does in *Canada and the Idea of North* (2001), I capitalize the term “the North” “as a small reminder *passim* of [the North’s] fundamentally *created* status” (15); I capitalize “the West” partly for this reason, and sometimes to distinguish it from the cardinal directions, which is why the genre of the Western gets a capital *W* while film noir gets no capital *F* or *N*.

was a better phrase in my title than “the Canadian Western.”<sup>4</sup> Katherine Ann Roberts pinpoints the genre as “*imported but not foreign*” (14, original emphasis—a remark to which I will later return). Although Owen Wister’s paradigmatic Western novel *The Virginian* (1902) was American and based on a historical figure, this same Virginian, Everett Johnson, had already moved to Canada by the time of the novel’s publication (Jennings 200–1). Alberta’s famous Black cowboy, John Ware, had also already moved from the United States to Canada and met Johnson there (Jennings 201), and much later he inspired the Canadian novelist Bill Gallaher’s *High Rider* (2015). But American precedence for Canadian derivation is not quite a satisfactory explanation for the development of the genre in either country; in fact, its development is multifarious and often simultaneous across nations and geographies (and, in fact, within them), and these real and imagined spaces have far more nuance than implied in the singularity of the name “the Western.” Although genre studies are beset with the problems of being able to seek “infinite” precedents and to define genres “retrospective[ly]” (Altman, *Film/Genre* 30, 36) and with “retrospective coherence” (Mitchell, *Late* 5), you might say that the first major literary Western in Canada was written by a Far Easterner, Michael Ondaatje, whose *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) contains a photograph of Ondaatje as a boy in Ceylon costumed as a gunslinger.<sup>5</sup> It is an ironically nostalgic image, now, when we think of how geographically close Ondaatje was to being a “real Indian”—an Indian from India rather than the mistakenly named “Indian” of the continent colonized as North America.<sup>6</sup>

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4 A parallel contention appears in Christopher Conway’s *Heroes of the Borderlands* (2019), a book that “corrects the dismissal of Mexican Westerns as derivative and unworthy of deeper reflection. What matters about Mexican Westerns is not that they are exotic or weird but that they are deeply connected to both Mexican and US cultural history” (23). Canadian Westerns are “connected” too, if not as “deeply.” The Canada-US border is less fraught, historically, than the Mexico-US border, but Canadian Westerns are a point of interest for any Mexican, American, or Indigenous reader or scholar of the frontier narratives of North America.

5 Admittedly, my use of the term “literary” here amounts to a value judgment, one that coincides with the related designation of “major,” both of which judge once popular but now forgotten Westerns such as those of Ralph Connor or H. A. Cody as less literary and, by association, less major. Literary (or high) and popular (or low) cultures have much in common, but readers looking for entertainment in the Western in 1970 probably did not start with Ondaatje’s book about Billy the Kid or even bpNichol’s ribald riff on the same figure.

6 Even for real Indians, and Indian writers elsewhere in the world, “[t]his word ‘Indian’ is getting to be a pretty scattered concept” (Rushdie, “Imaginary” 17), for the simple reason that

These remarks might seem facetious, but geography, authenticity, and nostalgia are precisely the issues with Eastern, Northern, and otherwise foreign appropriations of and coincidences with the American Western. Nostalgia refers to *nostos* (Greek for “return home”) and *algos* (“pain”)—the pain of being separated from a home inevitably idealized by the heart that grows fonder. Citing Fredric Jameson’s 1989 notion of “nostalgia for the present” and an example of Filipino popular music that reproduces American classics, Arjun Appadurai states that “[t]his is one of the central ironies of the politics of global cultural flows, especially in the arena of entertainment and leisure. It plays havoc with the hegemony of Eurochronology. . . . Here, we have nostalgia without memory” (30). With a similar example, Svetlana Boym describes the temporal paradox of a tourist listening to local music: “It is this living presence [i.e., of folk song], outside the vagaries of modern history, that becomes the object of nostalgic longing” (12). This nostalgia is not very different from that of Brewster Higley, the man who in 1872 probably wrote the poem that soon became the famous song “Home on the Range” (Catherine Cooper 154), which has been called “the national anthem of the cowboy” (165). He asks in the lyrics, “give me a home / where the buffalo roam / where the deer and the antelope play.” He most likely would not have seen the ever symbolic buffalo at “home” in Kansas around the time he wrote the lyrics (157), the buffalo having been almost exterminated in that decade, the 1870s, but he might have remembered them from before.<sup>7</sup> Curiously, when my partner and I bought a house in St. John’s some years ago, she was digging holes for perennials and found two buried pistols—each a tin toy gun, its rusty barrel packed with dirt and inscribed beneath the cylinder with “Young Buffalo Bill.” They had belonged to the twin boys who had grown up in the house a generation earlier. Unlike Higley with his buffalo, the boys probably had no memory of Buffalo Bill; they probably knew him instead as a generic cowboy, and I imagine that the nostalgia of their role-playing with his name was the nostalgia of their father remembering *his* youth, as if once upon a time *he* had been a Buffalo Bill in

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India is comprised of a huge population with enormous diversity magnified by global connections.

7 A brief but haunting description of the buffalo slaughter appears in Cormac McCarthy’s 1985 novel *Blood Meridian* (316–17).

another country—and, indeed, he would probably have been old enough to remember Newfoundland before it joined Confederation in 1949. For many Newfoundlanders, for Ondaatje in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and for Americans as leaders in twentieth- and even twenty-first-century globalization, “the past is usually another country” (Appadurai 31).<sup>8</sup> This nostalgia can now seem old-fashioned, which is one reason why Appadurai believes that some cultures “have entered a postnostalgic phase” (31). But because it is almost always premature to argue that something cultural has reached an absolute end, regardless of the trend of imagining postness, I would rather stand on Appadurai’s firmer ground: “The crucial point . . . is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (31), such as a fondly “remembered” West full of Buffalo Bills.

It is another contention of this book that the Westerns studied herein describe “imaginary landscapes” that are themselves “complex” and “transnational,” and that map onto Appadurai’s explanation of modernity and globalization through what he calls “scalar dynamic[s]” (32). For Appadurai, globalization must be understood as a movement through social and geographic strata—for example, in the now commonly heard invocation to “think locally, act globally,” or in the inversion of “top-down” and “grassroots-up,” strata that are also dispersed through time at a historical moment when both temporal and spatial dimensions can be instantly (if only partly) collapsed through media.<sup>9</sup> I will remark upon the “mapping” metaphor shortly, which has been a tendency in cultural theory since the spatial turn led by thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Gaston Bachelard, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Edward Soja. But the related ideas of “scaling” and “rescaling” a liter-

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8 The line can be traced back at least as far as L. P. Hartley’s *The Go-Between* (1953), as Salman Rushdie points out. Writing partly about his life away from Bombay/Mumbai, Rushdie remarks that “my present . . . is foreign, and . . . the past is home” (“Imaginary” 9). In the more general context of the West, Eli Mandel claims that “regional literature is . . . a literature of the past” (206), but all of Canada can be described as regional. In “Journey through the Past,” Neil Young sings, “Now I’m going back to Canada / On a journey through the past.” Later in this introduction and especially in chapter 1, regionalism is another concern.

9 I also want to acknowledge Susan Stewart’s *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993) for its theorizing of scalar relationships between space and time—for example, in the experience of time while playing with a doll’s house. More explicitly critical than Arjun Appadurai and Svetlana Boym, Stewart calls nostalgia a “social disease” (ix).

ature have gained and regained prominence in Canada in the past decade or so thanks to Kit Dobson's *Transnational Canadas* (2009) and a 2019 issue of *Canadian Literature*, guest-edited by Eva Darias-Beautell.<sup>10</sup> These and related studies show how the transnational movements of Canadian writers and texts can expand markets and spheres of influence but also further complicate national identities. My book does the same, while suggesting that in the case of the Canadian Western the markets and influences have been limited, partly because of the strength of the American Western here in Canada, in the United States, and elsewhere in the world. So, as a guide, the first chapter of this book will duly proceed in a scalar fashion—globe, country, region—to help show how the Western was a synecdoche for not only the United States but also Canada and now at least parts of the world (or the whole world, according to Jon Favreau's 2011 film *Cowboys & Aliens*). We get a hint of the synecdoche in Higley's "national anthem of the cowboy," in which a single member of society stands in for the country. Sometimes that member stands in for other countries too. I recall pictures of most American presidents and Canadian prime ministers (and at least one Mexican president) of recent decades in cowboy hats or buckskin jackets (with canoe, if you are Pierre Elliott Trudeau); these symbols also make a show of lessening class distinctions so that the wealthy governing elite can be seen to pay at least a token of respect to "the rest of us," imagined here as honest, hard-working, and grass-rooted if not grass-fed. And in playing this game of national identification, the makers of the Western have also turned the cardinal directions around, spinning a compass so that getting lost on a frontier can still happen—even after the vaunted closing of the American frontier—if the new frontier can be Canada, Mexico, or outer space.<sup>11</sup>

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10 These studies owe a debt to the conferences organized and the books assembled by Smaro Kamboureli, whose *TransCanadas* conferences and her leadership therein produced, among other outcomes, her and Roy Miki's co-edited collection *Trans.Can.Lit* (2007). These studies are also related, beyond the Canadian context (though the first of its editors is at the University of Calgary), to Michael Tavel Clarke and David Wittenberg's *Scale in Literature and Culture* (2017), which I consider briefly in chapter 1.

11 After Edward McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1949), Wilfrid Eggleston's *The Frontier and Canadian Letters* (1957) seems to be the earliest book-length study to entertain ideas of the frontier in Canada, and it was published in the same year as the Soviet launch of Sputnik 1 and thus the beginning of the space age. Instead of a conceptual reflection on its contemporary moment or the ethical ramifications of frontierism, Eggleston's book is mainly a cultural-material



Strictly, one can assert a border, a property line, by saying that the Western is American. In claiming that it is Canadian too, in the face of occasional objections to this claim, I do not mean to perpetuate literature's nationalistic complicity in supposedly justifying the colonization of Indigenous lands, as explained in Margery Fee's *Literary Land Claims* (2015), which begins with the premise that "a national literature constitutes a land claim" (1). The existence of the Canadian Western should not elicit the claim that American soil is somehow Canadian; more to the point, it should not affirm that Indigenous lands taken by the British Empire should forever be held by Canada. I would hope quite the opposite, in fact: that anyone convinced that there is a Canadian Western would reopen the question of settled land and consider, as Fee does, how "the formation of a Canadian literature [has] been complicit in the colonial process of occupying and claiming land" (4). In this context of questioning nationalism, and in looking transnationally at American and Canadian literatures (and cinemas), I am adopting a perspective that remains meaningful partly because the study of literature and culture remains bordered by nations, even as nations—especially Indigenous nations in North America—cross borders and make different claims to land and nationhood. The interplay of multiple nations within one nation-state suggests that nationality will always be contested and debated before being resolved (if it ever is). Roberts's *West/Border/Road: Nation and Genre in Contemporary Canadian Narrative* (2018) is presently the only other book on the Western in Canada, and she offers a crucial nuance: "the oppositional aspects of Canadian national culture . . . must, in my view, constantly negotiate its relationship with cultural forms that are *imported but not foreign*, that is to say, that come from elsewhere, yet are read, consumed, digested, and interpreted as only partially 'other'" (14, original emphasis).<sup>12</sup> Kathy-Ann Tan's

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history. Although it conceives of the West in the then familiar pioneering terms of the garden and the hearth, its preoccupation is social Darwinist: the survival of an environment that can be adapted through colonization until a market for literature and "great" authors could appear to define that environment nationalistically. Partly because of this approach, it does not serve as a source or study of genre fiction, though it does briefly consider the situation of Ralph Connor (e.g., 144)—but as a Prairie writer alongside Frederick Philip Grove and Sinclair Ross, not a writer of Westerns (or Northerns or Northwesterns).

12 Johannes Fehrle's dissertation is another book-length study. Both Fehrle's and Roberts's studies focus on postmodern and contemporary Canadian Westerns with greater emphasis on American literature than readers will find here.

*Reconfiguring Citizenship and National Identity in the North American Literary Imagination* (2015) is another recent example of a book-length study of the literatures of both nation-states; her thesis is “that prevailing notions of citizenship and national identity are, in periods of emergence and crisis, reimagined along transnational and post-national lines of social, political, cultural, sexual belonging” (11). Tan’s work is aligned partly with “the recent ‘turn’ to hemispheric methodologies of analysis and inquiry” (252) articulated by writers such as Colin Woodard, Joel Garreau, and Dante Chinni and James Gimpel. She sees, too, “the limitations of nation-based models of liberal and civic republican citizenship” (253).<sup>13</sup> These limitations will not become less pronounced in the future. In spite of what isolationists say, the world is not becoming any smaller. Our sense of it only grows bigger as we come to recognize that problems such as climate crisis and environmental racism are global in scope. They require proportionate solutions. But partly because of the often manufactured sense of danger on our doorstep, we frequently feel the political influence of wanting to make claims on a national scale.

So, even among settler-colonists in the United States there is debate over where the West belongs. Displaying both entrepreneurial and folk-cultural ideals, various interests from around the United States claimed copyright to the song “Home on the Range”; many people in the 1930s and ’40s said they had written it, or that their fathers had written the song, which they had sung to their kids, thereby fostering a “sense of ownership” over aspects of the fundamentally acquisitive frontier myth (Catherine Cooper 148–9). This “sense” is also a sense of home, and it was imagined all over the place, in both real and symbolic Wests.<sup>14</sup> Douglas Brode, for example, argues that the John Wayne movie *The Alamo* (Wayne, 1960) failed commercially not only because John F. Kennedy pre-empted its Republicanism with his Democratic “New Frontier” message, but also because it reminded audiences that America had failed to beat Russia to the new frontier of outer space (176). The crossover genre of the space

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13 See also Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* (2003) for her term “planetarity” as an alternative to “globalization.”

14 For related scholarship on the variable symbolic values of home in the regional fiction of the West, see Deborah Keahey’s chapter on “Relative Geographies” in her book *Making It Home: Place in Canadian Prairie Literature* (1998).

Western proposes a new colonial vision for humanity, one sometimes defined by non-American interests—as with Sean Connery’s *Outland* (Hyams, 1981), which was one of the sources of the title for Gil Adamson’s *The Outlander* (2007)—but more often defined by the American television and movie industries, as with Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* series (2002–3) and *Cowboys & Aliens* (Favreau, 2011). In that vision, the frontier is always in motion, whether in orbit or space travel. “Home” is not only this new frontier. It is also the result of a race *to* the new frontier—a frontier defined by *agōn*, or contest, in which the prize might always be a little out of reach.

The *agōn* here is also between two political extremes—a world order associated with the regulatory Left, and the individual associated with the libertarian Right—in spite of macroeconomic and personal complications that defy the simplification of a left-right/liberal-conservative spectrum. I will not attempt to define these shifting terms rigorously, because a basic definition of the word “conservative,” such as “favouring free enterprise, private ownership, and socially conservative ideas,” as per the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reveals significant overlap with “liberal,” which describes those “favouring individual liberty, free trade, and moderate political and social reform.” Both positions privilege freedom but neglect the “freedom to” and “freedom from” nuances of Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958/1969). The *OED*’s definitions differ mainly in the “social” dimensions that partly relate to Berlin’s concepts, and in my experience people who identify as conservative often assume that the people they call “liberal” are socialist and overly sensitive (i.e., “bleeding hearts”), while people who identify as liberal often assume that the people they call “conservative” are libertarian and too comfortable with violence as a solution to problems. These assumptions about others underlie the simplified spectrum, but something like the Nolan chart might be required to illustrate a multi-dimensionality, even in Westerns, because many Westerns or their writers can occupy both positions, if they are only described by way of a binary.<sup>15</sup> For one example, skip ahead to Luke Price’s

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15 In a master’s thesis that proposes an alternative “culture cube,” David Bruce Hollis MacKenzie surveys models of the political spectrum that add another axis or dimension—for example, Brendon Swedlow and Mikel L. Wickoff, James Devine, David Nolan (the “Nolan chart” being probably the most familiar of these examples), and D. O. Miles (the Miles model being a sphere).

*Dynamic Western* storyline in chapter 4.<sup>16</sup> Even in this case—formulaic pulp fiction from the 1940s—we can discern preferences for local business over big business, white people over brown people, empowered women over acquisitive men, and individualized or community-based law over a broader justice system. I can imagine that, today at least, a self-styled liberal and a self-styled conservative would debate each other’s attributions of an ideology to Price’s stories.

I mentioned Kennedy to invoke the political contexts of the Western in mid-century—contexts that still help to explain the surprising popularity of the Western in Canada since the 1990s. The short explanation for that popularity is that Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) and Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *The Englishman’s Boy* (1996) appeared in the mid-1990s, but the longer explanation involves events outside of literature. A potted history of the shared political contexts of the genre would show that American and Canadian Westerns in the first three decades of the twentieth century were almost uniformly conservative, albeit sometimes in the “compassionate conservative” mould of a Zane Grey or a Ralph Connor.<sup>17</sup> I look to Steve Neale to sketch out the increasing liberalism of the Western resulting from the Great Depression and subsequent American milestones of the New Deal and the anti-fascist campaigns of the 1930s (“Vanishing” 15). By the end of that decade, the ideological jockeying was made visible in a series of A-list American Westerns—*Dodge City* (Curtiz, 1939), *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939), *Jesse James* (King, 1939), and *Destry Rides Again* (Marshall, 1939). In Canada in those years, domestic film production of fictional narratives was marginal, and not many Westerns were being published; they were not among “the most popular types of escape literature” (Pacey 660). The latest on Desmond Pacey’s list was A. M. Chisholm’s *Red Bill* (1929); Chisholm had established what we now think of as conservative themes of patriarchy, industry, and resulting progress in *The Land of Strong Men* (1919).<sup>18</sup> Later wartime comics and pulps (the

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16 Admittedly, there is a chance that the probably pseudonymous “Luke Price” is a collective of authors, but ideological complexity, even incoherence, is simply a feature of pop culture and its genres—a result of trying to appeal to people broadly.

17 See Patrick McGee for commentary on the typical conservatism of the classic Westerns (xiv).

18 Pacey’s list of Canadian Westerns includes Luke Allan’s *Blue Pete: Half Breed* (1921), which is part of the dataset informing this study; Harwood Steele’s *Spirit of Iron* (1923) and *The*

latter being the subject of chapter 4) did not yet register a significant response to early manifestations of conservatism here. Then came, in the United States, “the advent of the Cold War, the initial post-war activities of HUAC [the House Un-American Activities Committee], and the consequent attack on liberal values,” which led in turn to “the cycle [of liberal, pro-Indian Westerns] that emerged in 1949” (Neale, “Vanishing” 15). Even if the Second World War and its Cold War aftermath created boom-time socio-economic aspirations and chauvinism that the Western served very well (Corkin, “Cowboys” 66–7), they also cannot be underestimated as reasons why the Western soon became more politically diverse, reflecting a diversifying society, its different visions of moral responsibility in national and international arenas, and a troubling introspection about global power and imperialism. As liberal Westerns in the United States were published and screened in the 1960s and ’70s, thereby questioning—from within—one of America’s most conservative cultural trends, the Canadian writers Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and bpNichol (and very few others that I know of until the 1980s) saw an opportunity to join the critique while bolstering their own new product, CanLit. They were outliers driven in part by youthful insouciance: in 1970 bpNichol was subjecting an American anti-hero to a short-dick joke in *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*. And being “anti” to “anti” is complicated, like the word “antidisestablishmentarianism.”

The complexity has much to do with how Canada’s underdog status disguises its own imperial, or at least colonial, history, one that mid-century liberalism in Canada—badly flawed in the first Trudeau government’s notorious White Paper (1969) but mitigated, imperfectly, in the official multiculturalism of the 1980s—helped to gloss over.<sup>19</sup> In Canada, from the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were only two prime ministers from the Conservative Party who held power for any length of time (John Diefenbaker and Brian Mulroney), and from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s the spirit of the times was especially liberal and Liberal. Coupled with the nationalist symbolism of 1967 in Canada

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*Ninth Circle* (1928); and Chisholm’s *Prospectin’ Fools* (1927), in addition to the aforementioned *The Land of Strong Men* and *Red Bill*. Each of these writers wrote several genre fictions in short order.

<sup>19</sup> In a different context, a helpful overview of the White Paper’s effects is available from Kevin FitzMaurice (2011).

(its centennial), for a while it was retrograde to appeal too much to the United States. Bruce C. Daniels explains:

In the twentieth century, as everywhere in the western world, . . . conservatives and liberals reversed their historic nineteenth century positions on basic values. By the 1960s, being a conservative in Canada meant essentially that one embraced a free-market entrepreneurial system: this inclined the Conservative Party to look more favorably at the United States . . . [and] an unregulated economy . . . [and] the free flow of goods across the border. Add to this . . . the conservative fear of international communism and their support of American foreign policy, plus the political necessity of opposing the Liberals, and one finds the Conservative Party of the mid-1960s portraying the Liberal government as the saboteur of good relations with Canada's closest friend and ally. (96–7)

For the up-and-coming Canadian writers of the 1960s, that “sabotage” was probably fine with them. They had internalized or were internalizing the modernist and especially the postmodernist imperatives of re-making or breaking the system, including politics (as seen in chapter 5). But there was still not much motivation for Canadian writers to produce many Westerns, probably because in that somewhat liberalizing moment there was distaste for the genre's earlier tendencies toward conservatism; a stronger motivation was required.

As the ground shifted in the United States and Canada with the election of leaders such as Ronald Reagan—the “cowboy president” who had acted in several Westerns from the 1930s to the 1950s—and then Brian Mulroney, a new conservatism or neoconservatism emerged that tipped its cowboy hat to the American Western.<sup>20</sup> Again within the limitations of a potted history, the late twentieth-century liberalism of Canadian

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20 Reagan gained the moniker “cowboy president” because of his prior appearances in films such as *Santa Fe Trail* (Curtiz, 1940), *The Last Outpost* (Foster, 1951), and *Law and Order* (Juran, 1953), and he was a guest star on the television series *Wagon Train* (1957–62).

prime ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin seemed to approach conservatism via neoliberalism—an economically driven politics promoted by Reaganomics and the supposedly inevitable capitalism espoused by Margaret Thatcher.<sup>21</sup> As with the liberal-conservative spectrum, neoliberalism and neoconservatism conjoin in valuing the economy above almost everything else, but the latter justifies its economics with social views derived partly from religion (Wendy Brown 691–2; Worden, “Neo-Liberalism” 223). Thus far, the ultimate manifestation of neoconservatism in Canadian federal leadership has been Stephen Harper, Conservative prime minister from 2006 to 2015 and a Westerner (or mid-Westerner).<sup>22</sup> During the Harper years, a related rhetoric intensified as military historians and conservative politicians worked toward “rebranding” Canada (a rancher’s metaphor) as both a Western and a “warrior nation” (McKay and Swift 9). The cover of Ian McKay and Jamie Swift’s *Warrior Nation* (2012) displays an intriguing photograph by Jeff McIntosh. It features General Walter Natynczyk, the chief of the Defence Staff in Canada, posing astride a torpedo or missile, as did Major “King” Kong (Slim Pickens) in Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), cowboy hat waving in the air as General David Petraeus, of the United States Army, looks on laughing. Is that a parody of a satire, or just missing the point to endear Canada to the American military with another image of the “cherished anti-intellectual cowboy” (Pitts 14)? The federal government’s 2009 *Discover Canada* promotional publication includes a photograph of former Governor General John Buchan, a Briton who had been involved in the Second Boer War (1899–1902), in a feathered headdress that marks him as an “Indian,” suggesting both that he had “gone Indian” by adventuring in the far reaches of the empire—and that he had dispossessed “‘real’ Indians.” Not long before *Discover Canada*, Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan had been overheard

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21 As liberals and Liberals in the context of what was called the “compassionate conservatism” of the American president George W. Bush, perhaps the term for Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin is “compassionate neo-liberalism,” which implies that these ideologies are more similar than they appear. The coinage is not mine but apparently Jason Hackworth’s in a 2010 issue of *Studies in Political Economy*.

22 Perhaps “mid-Westerner” would be more accurate, given that in Canada as in the United States the often conservative West is bordered by the often more liberal West Coast, but for now the suggestion that the national East-West dynamic changed is enough. Harper, incidentally, was often called “neoliberal” in the discourse of federal politics, even if “neoconservative” was a slightly more accurate term for him.

describing the battleground as “Indian country” (McKay and Swift 234). Significantly, Buchan had been in South Africa at the same time as Robert Baden-Powell, who founded the Boy Scouts. Buchan wrote a series of adventure novels aligned in their imperialist spirit with the early Canadian Westerns of Ralph Connor and H. A. Cody, the latter of whom wrote *Rod of the Lone Patrol* (1916) to promote the Boy Scouts and an image of the Western hero that depended on appropriation and adaptation of the “Indian scout” into an imperial role (as seen in chapter 3). My book, then, is partly a response to a Canadian culture that has circled back to the 1900s and 1910s in some aspects of its militarizing conservatism. Fred Stenson, for example, moves the frontier from Alberta to the Second Boer War in his cavalry Western *The Great Karoo* (2008). There in Stenson’s imagined South Africa, the “big and fenceless prairie” of the “wide open” (107) Karoo becomes the setting for his transplanted “dime-novel heroes” (67) and his war game of “cowboys and Indians” (326). These military and political contexts, of a diversifying left-leaning globalization and attenuating right-wing countercurrents, are a major reason why Canadian writers have turned their words to the West and the Western again.

As per my earlier remarks, I do not mean to imply that Canadian writers of Westerns are necessarily conservative or liberal; any one of them could probably be identified (by others, at least) as both, depending on the contexts and the full range of the Nolan chart. And I hope that readers of this book will be of various political persuasions. What I mean to do, however, is to call attention to some of the more extreme political currents in the Western world, and their identity politics, as informed by the Western genre. Shortly before Harper and his Conservatives were elected in 2006, William H. Katerberg accurately described the moment just before conservatism in Canada—and its West—started drawing everyone’s attention again; however, he underestimated the power that was building in the West under leaders such as Harper and Stockwell Day. Following Benedict Anderson’s keywords for the definition of nation, Katerberg explains that

images of the frontier and mythic narratives of the West continue to represent something larger than a specific region, and still define key aspects of the “imagined” American nation. The same does not seem to be true in Canada,



where Western identities have become “limited” ones. Indeed, it is not clear that even Northern identities unify Canadians as they once did, however loosely and inconsistently. In part, this situation may be so because regional identities have weakened national visions even within English Canada. It may also reflect the effort of many Canadians (and their governments) to distance themselves from the negative aspects of classic myths of Northernness (e.g., racism and imperialism) by appealing to multicultural definitions of Canadian citizenship. Despite similar dynamics south of the border, classic Western frontier myths continue to play a powerful role in American popular culture and politics. (555–6)

Since the publication of Katerberg’s essay, of course, not only did Harper come and go in Canada, but Donald Trump came and went (at least temporarily) at the end of his presidency (2016–21) in the United States.<sup>23</sup> And the messages of these national leaders are unusually complex, if indeed “regional identities have weakened national visions.” I should say outright that I do not think that Trump and Harper are exactly comparable; one’s style was much more reasonable and competent than the other’s. Nevertheless, Harper was elected partly because of Western alienation and nostalgia for the good old days before transfer payments and other national (read: Central Canadian) projects. Trump’s 2016 electoral campaign succeeded partly because of regional appeals in the midwestern

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23 Notably, when Trump was on the campaign trail in 2016 in Winterset, Iowa, at the John Wayne Birthplace Museum, he accepted Wayne’s daughter’s endorsement and said, “I was such a fan of John Wayne, and the one meeting I had with him was just an amazing meeting. John Wayne represented strength, he represented power, he represented what the people are looking [for] today, because we have exactly the opposite from John Wayne right now in this country. But I think . . . having a John Wayne and John Wayne family endorsement means a lot” (“Trump Receives”). Behind Trump, against the museum’s backdrop of Monument Valley, was a wax figure of Wayne. Later, echoing Trump’s admiration of “strength” and “power,” the Cowboys for Trump organization publicized its support for his policies of “securing our border, protecting our second Amendment, and protecting the lives of the unborn” (“Cowboys for Trump”). Partly because the Western has these sorts of political connotations, Westerns rise and fall in popularity in the United States. In Canada, the appearance of clusters of new Westerns is far less frequent, and they come to attention less obviously because of the lesser power and money in Canadian marketing and politics.

Rust Belt, and partly because of his so oft-repeated calls for a wall between Mexico and the United States. The wall in particular has called attention and focused the international media on the Southwest, where what Trump repeatedly called an “invasion” of migrants is altering the American imagination of the frontier. Although I have seen Trump photographed in front of a wax figure of John Wayne and a Monument Valley backdrop, his vision of the frontier is both Western and anti-Western: it idealizes a border, but a closed one rather than an open frontier, contrary to earlier international views of the border—for example, when “[b]oth [Zane Grey’s *Lone Star Ranger* and Ralph Connor’s *Corporal Cameron*] celebrate what the authors see as the democratizing influence of the frontier, an influence important to the North American experience” (Tranquilla 73). Trump’s wall stokes fears and hatreds of un-American, non-anglophone, brown-skinned Others—but Central and South Americans more than Native Americans. The “America first” agenda—and to a lesser extent the West-oriented neoconservatism or neoliberalism under Harper—is in effect *a strategy of folding the world back into a region*, of remaking a small world in which a nation can be proportionally great.

And so, because the Western is closely associated with quintessential Americana (not Canadiana), it sometimes rallies its defenders when foreign Westernness is under consideration. Frayling explains that “[i]t was generally considered [by English and American film critics] that *any* Westerns which were not made in Hollywood, using American desert locations and based on American literature or history, had by definition to be rootless parodies” (118). Some Americans have even assumed that American myths remain at home and that other nationalities can identify them but cannot identify *with* them, as when the leading scholar Lee Clark Mitchell muses,

whatever history is invoked to explain why the American myth of the West did not extend much above the 49th parallel or below the 42nd and the Rio Grande—whether broad imperialist aspirations, or the quality of prairie soil, or even more immediate resonances of the cattle trade—these are rarely touted as the explanation for what makes the overall Western myth so powerful that for countless people it

would define Americans as American. The image that is always invoked is the land itself, and the implications of that image in the construction of the myth of the American West are what concern me here. For it is the very capacity of the American western landscape to become metaphorized that contrasts with the Mexican South's and Canadian North's apparent resistance to this process, and thereby helps to explain the role of myth in making the West American. ("Whose West" 498–9)

Although in the same piece Mitchell subsequently states that "it is precisely the imperializing aspect of the Western American myth that lends it a quality overwhelming the more nuanced, historically-informed, attentive view of the West that both Mexican and Canadian writers have provided" ("Whose West" 506), he names not one Mexican or Canadian creative writer or scholar (notably, in the *American Review of Canadian Studies*), and he sometimes relies on the same exceptionalist assumption that he briefly attributes to Frederick Jackson Turner and his ideas about the frontier.<sup>24</sup> I doubt that the Mexican landscape resists metaphor (partly because to think it does would be to attribute a lack of imagination to Mexicans and others), but the Canadian North certainly does not. Any invocation of "the true North strong and free" is a personification of the North, and personification is a type of metaphor. In H. A. Cody's *The Frontiersman* (1910), which I interpret in chapter 3, "the North was gripping her hard" (316); "Chains had been forged which were binding her to the land" (316). In Cody's *The Long Patrol* (1912), the North is metaphorically a "complete blank" (6) on a policeman's map, signifying its lawlessness but also its semblance of openness to colonization. Jack Warwick believes that the North in French and English Canadian literature signifies a "rebel spir-

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24 Although Neil Campbell's *Post-Westerns* (2013) has helped to expand our understanding of Westerns transmedially and transnationally (Fehrle 4), Stephen Teo notices a blind spot in Campbell's work: "It contains homilies of the post-West as a veritable movement towards a configuration that is non-American but it remains strictly obsessed with the U.S.-centricity of the form albeit as a more critical overview of American history beyond the classical framework of the frontier" (2). On the topic of American exceptionalism, Robert Warrior argues that "transnationality has become an alternative to the exceptionalism that has been a preoccupation in these related fields [such as American literary studies] for generations" (123).

it” and “the feeling of the artist as non-conformist” (qtd. in Wood 19). Similarly, Aritha van Herk thinks of it as a metaphor of escape and remoteness (qtd. in Grace 199). William Westfall claims that the North as a metaphor “proclaim[s] national values at the expense of regional ones” (qtd. in Grace 67). Sherrill E. Grace herself explains that the North is so meaningful—through metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche—that it sustains “nordicity,” an existential regionalism that expands personal experience into national consciousness; Northern texts imply that their region “is a part of/a synecdoche for Canada: from metaphor to metonymy” (264). And one of my main arguments in my writing on the idea of West and the Northwestern is that the North is metaphorically the West, partly because Canadian writers saw in American culture of the West an already familiar and expedient rationale for their own inklings about vast “unexplored” lands; Katerberg explains that “in Canada the North has played a mythic role like that of the West in the US, as a frontier producing a ‘new world’ people,” and “[i]n the culture of Canadian nationhood, then, the West is ‘Northwest,’ West of the Old World and North of the US” (553). Upon reflection, I, too, am a defender—not of Canada to its inhabitants, nor even of Canada to the world (however much we are one of the least worst countries), but of the idea that Canada has a West and a Western, and shares these or a version of them with the United States and much of the world.

So I admit to feeling rankled when someone assumes that there are no Canadian Westerns, or ignores Canadian Westerns (and their implications for Indigenous points of view), or asserts that they are mere “parody,” when parody is in fact quite serious (as chapters 4 and 5 suggest). Although he is indeed serious about the Canadian Western, Robert Thacker asserts that “[c]haracter and caricature—that is the difference between American and Canadian western heroes” (“Mountie” 166). In fact, however, non-American Westerns are often homage, or a way of reminding Americans of shared values that some feel to be exclusively or exceptionally American. Even if, according to Thacker, the Mountie is presented “for juveniles and tourists” (166), at least “tourists” from the United States would see a version of their sheriff.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Thacker later implies that we

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25 The inverse is also true. In 2014, police officers in Quebec dressed as sheriffs, complete with star badges and cowboy hats and boots, to protest pension reforms (“Old-West”). In other

need more international or transnational dialogue: “extended thoroughgoing examinations of historically or structurally relevant US parallels just have not happened: Canadian Literature is *here*, American Literature is *there*” (“Reading North” 409–10).<sup>26</sup> Although the existing scholarship on the American Western is so vast that this book cannot survey it without excluding the Canadian Western and displacing Canadian voices, I offer here a partial response to Thacker’s concern about isolationist and exceptionalist readings. When Mitchell claims that “something about the myth requires American citizens to imagine it as intrinsically American” (“Whose West” 498), that “something” is not as much in the myth as in the Americans *and others* who identify with it. For homage, one might start with Ondaatje’s *Billy the Kid*, or Fred Stenson’s *Karoo cowboys*, or Patrick deWitt’s *The Sisters Brothers* (2011); these authors treat their characters fondly, and their plots too. Franco Moretti has remarked that transnational literature often features a triad: “foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*” (qtd. in Nir 228, original emphasis), the last of which may criticize the foreignness but also adapt itself to it, and then incorporate it. Frayling, cataloguing national variants of the Western, notices how so many of them are stereotyped as touristy and therefore inauthentic (and I would add Othered and perhaps even domesticated and feminized) by being nicknamed according to food (118) (something to incorporate, to bring into the body): the “Spaghetti” Western, the Curry, the Borscht, and the Meat Pie.<sup>27</sup> There have been many parodies of the Western here and abroad *and* in the United States; my favourite cinematic Canadian example is the movie *Gunless* (Phillips, 2010), which derives in part from the television series *Due South* (1994–9), both of which star Paul Gross and Callum Keith Rennie. Gross, in both roles, is a fish out of water who adapts and endears himself in a foreign country by showing qualities that

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words, police officers in Canada sometimes imagine themselves as American.

26 Thacker’s own work, and the work of Dick Harrison, might count among exceptions to the lack of transnational studies.

27 The Meat Pie Western needs clarification as Australian, because some Canadians would locate it in Quebec—the home of the meat pie known as *tourtière* and the Festival Western de Saint-Tite, the large rodeo and Western music festival. See Aritha van Herk’s *Stampede and the Westness of West* (2016) for a great many reflections on food and the Western at the Calgary Stampede. For more on Australia and Samoa, look to Sarina Pearson’s “Cowboy Contradictions: Westerns in the Postcolonial Pacific” (2013).

others in his environment can appreciate as familiar and real. His performances are a foreign/national rapprochement.

Foreign examples simply cannot be dismissed as inauthentic, especially when the genre's iconography comes from the essentially touristic and performative travelling Wild West shows popularized in the mid-1880s by Buffalo Bill Cody and others.<sup>28</sup> The iconic American Western has never been "authentic" in the sense of natural and not performative, so van Herk suggests that "authenticity" can only "measure . . . its own imitation" (*Stampede* 58).<sup>29</sup> The power of American Westerns derives to some extent from the generic but also ideological repetition that enables such stories to seem natural and right (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 5–6). The presumed authenticity of the Western is a major aspect of the myth of the West that Richard Slotkin indirectly exposes by examining the "myth-production" (*Gunfighter* 10) by the mass media in his trilogy concluding with *Gunfighter Nation* (1992).<sup>30</sup> An American fan's appreciation for the Western is an appreciation partly for a myth, partly for a nostalgic and homey feeling that had to be created in the United States as much as it had to be created in Canada—and not only for fans but also for the pioneers who had to be attracted to the West. In chapter 1, drawing on the scholarship of Herb Wyile and others, I suggest that—then and now—movements between regions depend sometimes on persuasion or interpellation (in the Althusserian sense of hailing ideological allies). The pioneers were not necessarily duped, because the colonial enterprise in general profited enormously; what I mean is that their own transformations from "foreign" to "national" were being produced, as in a performance, as they moved across oceans and lands.

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28 The phrase "Wild West" was popularized by Cody and his vaudevillian performances, certainly, but also by Henry David Thoreau and his more philosophical entertainments: "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild" (qtd. in Marovitz 97). In other words, for Thoreau it is associated with wilderness. Today, however, "wild" often connotes libertarianism, an anything-goes ethos, which is usually associated with conservatism (but not necessarily, as per the Nolan chart).

29 Rushdie, in an essay that happens to mention van Herk and his memory of her description of "the great emptinesses of Canada" ("Commonwealth" 62), calls authenticity "the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism" (67).

30 Slotkin also recently proposed, rather directly, that the "cumulative genre effect" is life imitating art (Slotkin and Desmarais 147).

As I will also illustrate in chapter 1, through a quick survey, the Western Hemisphere has produced and continues to produce many Western-like texts in addition to Westerns, alongside related cultural production from places such as Europe, Asia, and Australia. The Western travels far, farther than the (North American) West is wide. One might argue that the chauvinistic failure of imagination when someone asserts that the Western is only American is also a hypocritical denial of the idealized borderlessness of the West. Reflecting on the idealization of the West, the aptly named Elliott West puts his namesake in the context of utopia, which means “no place” (qtd. in Catherine Cooper 153). A rootlessness, a drifting, is part of it. Perhaps the most significant contribution of a reading of the Western in Canadian literature is to recognize the Western and the West as synecdoche—as a part of the whole, of the continent if not the Western world, a world that has not been isolated from the East (an equally complex “place”) for centuries. It is not a symbol of a fenced-in or fenced-off grassland of pure Americana. If anything, the westward expansion and moving target or moveable frontier of American history attests not to isolationism but exploration—to the drive to see (and sometimes problematically conquer) new places, even when such places are or were wildernesses or tribal lands that deserve to be defended, renegotiated, and reclaimed.

The new places reimagined and re-placed by the books in my study are not merely replicas of entirely familiar Western backdrops and main streets, and so they are not always immediately recognizable as Westerns, or they are called literary Westerns or literary fiction. Christopher Conway, while he proposes that the Western is “the most important and instantly recognizable US cultural export” (13), acknowledges that it is “versatile and adaptable enough to be used by Europeans and Latin Americans [and Canadians, I would add] to explore national identity or challenge US myths” (13). (I would also add “archetypes” to “myths” here, to invoke Northrop Frye’s influence on the parallel discourse in Canadian literature and its criticism.) Being “adaptable” is a tenet of genre theory. Such theory, and the received wisdom of comparative literature, suggest that any genre is not only “generic” but also “genetic” (a metaphor that the comparatist Claudio Guillén often uses), coming as it does from a lineage of precursors that cannot always be immediately recognized. The face of a great-grandfather is not always familiar in that of the great-granddaughter; there is

always the ambiguity of what Ludwig Wittgenstein called “family resemblance” (qtd. in Mitchell, *Late* 3).<sup>31</sup> Neil Campbell and the currently expanding University of Nebraska Press series on “post-Westerns,” which includes books by Campbell, Mitchell, and others, have repeatedly shown how easily contemporary urban texts can be understood as Westerns that have outlived and transplanted themselves.<sup>32</sup> The prefix “post” has of course been debated ad nauseam in theories of postmodernism and post-colonialism, among others; I like Thomas King’s oft-repeated insight that we are not “past” colonialism.<sup>33</sup> In his 2018 book *Late Westerns*, Mitchell offers the explanation that new genres emerge through a “backward glance” (5) at older genres whose histories evince our changing assumptions about which examples are classic (4);<sup>34</sup> thus, if we can recognize them only retrospectively, “the Western has been effectively ‘post-’ all along” (5). Indeed, the Western in its historical trappings comes after the epic (and its quasi-history), the parent of many a genre, and Mitchell cites the examples of Owen Wister and Zane Grey, both of whom were recognized initially as writers of romances, which are also related to epics.<sup>35</sup> Mitchell’s theme in *Late Westerns* of the “persistence” of the genre is not surprising if we think of the Western as one child of the epic. In fact, I would suggest that, unlike the genetic metaphor of people’s lineages, genres almost never come to

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31 Notably, Rick Altman criticizes the “family resemblance” analogy (*Film/Genre* 64–8), partly because it assumes that something like a DNA test could be used to identify, accurately, members of the same genetic line—whereas genre as a family is more like a result of births, yes, but also adoptions, marriages and divorces, deaths, faked deaths, and false identifications (as I imagine it after Altman). For a more recent consideration of the pros and cons of this metaphor, see John Rieder (194–6). With less evolutionary terminology, Robert C. Post defines genre simply as a set of “common aesthetic attributes” (370). Relatedly, John Frow defines genre in terms of conventions and constraints (10). I return to Post and Frow later in this book.

32 I have written elsewhere about Clint Eastwood’s transition from Westerns to post-Western or Westernesque cop movies, demonstrating the theory of post-Westerns from a different perspective. See my 2017 article, “Do I Feel Lucky?: Moral Luck, Bluffing, and the Ethics of Eastwood’s Outlaw-Lawman in *Coogan’s Bluff* and the Dirty Harry Films.”

33 Kit Dobson explains: “Theorists of transnational economics and cultures have repeatedly argued that the contemporary moment can no longer be seen as one of decolonization or postcolonialism, but rather as one of brutal recolonization or neo-imperialism” (75).

34 Susan Sontag, in her 1965 essay “On Style,” makes a similar observation about the related concept of style: “our perception of the style of a given work of art is always charged with an awareness of the work’s historicity, its place in a chronology” (23).

35 Generally, while epics have historical and geographic residue spread thin across their fictionalizations, romances are less grounded, more “nowhere and anywhere,” as a medievalist friend of mine explained. Westerns, as I understand them, are both epic and romantic.



the end of the line. They go through phases of change intermittently and thereby persist or, as Robert Scholes puts it, “reincarnat[e]” (“On Realism” 271). But Mitchell also asserts that Westerns are “always recognizable” (*Late 2*), which implies a litmus test: Could we ever miss or misrecognize a Western? (Does everyone see the cowboy in Clint Eastwood’s Dirty Harry movies?) If we missed it, what did we call it instead? And what happens when someone disputes the recognition?

I agree with a lot of Mitchell’s statements, but here I beg again to discuss. The *sine qua non* of the Western, what it cannot live without, is arguably a more archetypal than realistic story in which an outsider figured as a cowboy fights for a social order (not necessarily law) somewhere along a frontier.<sup>36</sup> But it depends. Mitchell’s own circumspection about how to define a classic testifies to the difficulties that we face as interpreters of genre. The Western is perhaps the most recognizable of American genres, but this recognizability depends partly on the audience. And the audience’s recognition has major consequences: “an interpreter’s preliminary generic conception of a text is constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands” (E.D. Hirsch qtd. in Scholes, “Towards” 103). At an American conference I attended, an American scholar once asserted to the audience that if it’s not American, it’s not a Western—but even in the American context, some audiences might watch Eastwood perform in Italian Westerns and not realize that they are not American films. Most audiences would be familiar enough with the genre to pick out a Western from the wide variety of Western sub-genres that Slotkin identifies in his trilogy of studies. Slotkin organizes them by figures such as the town-tamer, the cattle driver, the rancher, the railroader, the outlaw, the cavalry, and the “Indian” (*Gunfighter* 352).<sup>37</sup> But what about films that

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36 I have already footnoted definitions of genre that are based more on aesthetics than contents, but defining the Western would probably be impossible without reference to conventions—for example, cowboys and frontiers—as “content” of the genre. It might be impossible anyway, to everyone’s satisfaction. I return to questions of aesthetics in relation to genre and mode in chapter 1.

37 See also the typology in which Frank Gruber includes the “empire story,” the “outlaw story,” and the “Marshal story” (qtd. in Yates 7), which for Canadians means “Mountie story.” In both Gruber’s and Slotkin’s typologies, except for in the “empire story,” most of examples are set later than the fur-trading and pioneering Westerns. Unlike the “cavalry Western,” too, with its earlier Indian Wars settings, the empire, town-tamer, outlaw, and “pro-Indian” Westerns tend to happen during or after the American Civil War of the 1860s, when conflicts between isolated

audiences identify as Westerns even if they do not contain cowboy hats or American locales? Scholes, in a different context, argues that genres are a “spectrum [that] cannot be turned into a set of pigeonholes, but must be seen as a system of shades” (“Towards” 106). A friend of mine, an ocean scientist, reflected on the recognizability of Westerns and post-Westerns with a key question: “So, James Cameron’s [2009] movie *Avatar*—is that sci-fi or Western?”<sup>38</sup> The question raises the issue of endless similarity between genres, an issue grappled with in the field of comparative literature. In effect, according to Jie Lu, over-generalization in comparative literature is a problem accentuated by “the cultural turn and pan-cultural study” (2) of related discourses and other cultural products. According to Scholes, however, a genre undergoes “modifications . . . [that are] most noticeable when it crosses temporal or cultural barriers” (“On Realism” 271). In other words, a genre’s essences and variations can become clearer through comparison.

My study’s transnationalism is not quite “pan-cultural,” but it certainly moves in that direction; however, it also minimizes some of the problems because of the obvious cultural and geographic closeness of the United States and Canada. What can’t the *Canadian* Western live without? Here the answer is a little clearer: the American Western. As soon as we add a nationality, a (trans)nationally comparative relationship appears necessary, even if the Western was always already part of folk traditions in other countries, as I will explain in the following chapter. Although we might guess today that the Canadian Western must be oppositional or anti-imperial, it was actually fairly consistent with the historical development of the American Western, only with a later start; and today’s revisionist Westerns and post-Westerns are often parodies or critiques, whether they are to the north of the border, as in the already mentioned Canadian film *Gunless*, with its lovingly critical portrait of a hapless, gunless gunslinger, or to the south of the border, as in the American film *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (Coen and Coen, 2018), with the sudden death of its smarmy titular

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pre-modern individuals (especially postwar drifters and outlaws) and a newly settled society (including representatives of the law) were at their height. These categories generally map onto Canadian Westerns. For other, less immediately recognizable typologies, see Will Wright’s *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (1975).

38 In fact, M. Elise Marubbio argues that, yes, *Avatar* is a “revisionist Western” (167).

duellist.<sup>39</sup> The problem is that the number of Canadian Westerns is small compared to the very big number of American Westerns,<sup>40</sup> with various consequences. (Why small, incidentally? One answer is that, because the most recognizable genre of Canadian literature is societal, social, or conventional realism, Canadian writers are ushered away from unrealistic genres such as the Western—even though many of its most prominent writers seek to comment on the Western with a Western or post-Western of their own, sometimes thereby gaining or maintaining said prominence.)<sup>41</sup> One consequence is that the plethora of American Westerns makes room for greater diversity, so contemporary pro-American Westerns are served alongside less patriotic fare. The perceived need to differentiate from American Westerns means that contemporary Canadian Westerns tend to be at least subtly critical of American culture, while also reinscribing most of the definitive elements of the American Western. Furthermore, possibly because of the difficulty in marketing such a Western, very few people in Canada or the United States are familiar with Canadian Westerns, but many Canadians know American Westerns.

As a result, when necessary, I have chosen Canadian books that acknowledge the Western most obviously, as with Dayle Furlong's *Saltwater Cowboys* (2015), over equally post-Western but less explicitly Western texts such as Nadia Bozak's *El Niño* (2014). The nuance here is that post-Westerns can be located on a spectrum of Westernness, from more subtle, like the American television series *Breaking Bad* (2008–13), to more obvious, as in an American (but pointed toward Canada) hybrid or cross-over film such as *Logan* (Mangold, 2017). At one pole of the spectrum, the Westernness is no longer a question—take, for example, the television series *Deadwood* (2004–6) and *Deadwood: The Movie* (Minahan, 2019).

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39 A pair more contemporary with each other at the historical emergence of oppositional, anti-imperial, parodic, and critical Westerns would be the Canadian bpNichol's *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (1970) and the American *Blazing Saddles* (Brooks, 1974).

40 The numbers of Mexican Westerns are big too: "in the 1950s when the Mexican film industry was in decline after its so-called Golden Age . . . at least 20 percent of Mexican-made films were Westerns" (Conway 3).

41 The interest in the Western genre shown by "prominent" or "major" Canadian writers might be a reflection of the American context: "It is remarkable how many major American authors wrote at least one revisionist Western attempting to target the formula from within in the second half of the 20th century, yet such works are seldom the source of extended critical study" (Fehrle 6).

In a Canadian example such as Furlong's *Saltwater Cowboys*, the Western might not occur to readers as a cypher of her novel without its title (which she borrows from the 1981 folk-country album by Simani, who used it to critique the influence of Alberta on Newfoundland identity), whereas Bozak's novel and its Canadianness are still less obvious, resonating as a Western primarily when readers are familiar with American borderland narratives and post-Westerns such as Cormac McCarthy's border trilogy or his novels *Blood Meridian* (1985) and *No Country for Old Men* (2005).<sup>42</sup> Bozak's novel could certainly be studied in depth in this book, as could several others that are mentioned only in passing, and I hope that this book will call further attention to them.

While I excluded several recent novels, I have included early Canadian "outliers" such as Ralph Connor's *Corporal Cameron* (1912) and H. A. Cody's *Rod of the Lone Patrol* (1916) despite their being less familiar today as Westerns, mainly because they predate John Wayne and Clint Eastwood and the still-iconic mid-century Westerns that crystallized some versions of the outlaw-lawman while occluding others.<sup>43</sup> The latter examples corroborate Mitchell's emphasis on the "backwards glance." Indeed, looking backwards in Canada became a trend around the same time that New Historicism was developing toward Stephen Greenblatt's coinage of the term in the 1980s. In that decade, it was partly the legitimization of genre fiction in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a speculative fiction, that laid the groundwork for the Westerns by George Bowering and Paulette Jiles that soon followed. Then more generally there was the boom during the late 1980s and early 1990s in acclaimed genre fiction in other media (Howell 35–6). And finally, there was a series of Westerns in the early 1990s that all responded in their own way to changing views of American history (in tandem with the changing political contexts that I have already outlined), including *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990), *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992), *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann, 1992), and *Geronimo: An American Legend* (Hill, 1993). These films set the stage for

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42 The border trilogy is *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998).

43 I have written elsewhere that "the Western outlaw and the renegade policeman . . . are symmetrical and easily reversible figures—two sides of a coin that might be thought of as the outlaw-lawman" ("Do I Feel Lucky?" 20).

the Western to ride out in Canada in the mid-1990s with Thomas King and Guy Vanderhaeghe. By the 1990s, with New Historicism gaining popularity in the academy, Vanderhaeghe was turning toward the trilogy of historical Westerns that he would begin with *The Englishman's Boy*—the book that, with King's less historical and more mythic *Green Grass, Running Water*, turned serious attention to the Western in Canada.<sup>44</sup> There was a resulting surge in Canadian Westerns and post-Westerns, such as Brad Smith's *All Hat* (2001) and *The Return of Kid Cooper* (2018), Garry Gottfriedson's *Whiskey Bullets* (2006), Gil Adamson's *The Outlander* (2007) and its sequel *Ridgerunner* (2020), Patrick deWitt's *The Sisters Brothers* (2011), Sean Johnston's *Listen All You Bullets* (2013), Natalee Caple's *In Calamity's Wake* (2013), Nadia Bozak's *El Niño* (2014), Dayle Furlong's *Saltwater Cowboys* (2015), Alix Hawley's *All True Not a Lie In It* (2015) and its sequel *My Name Is a Knife* (2018), Clifford Jackman's *The Winter Family* (2015), Bill Gallaher's *High Rider* (2015), Jordan Abel's *Un/inhabited* (2015) and *Injun* (2016), Emily Ursuliak's *Throwing the Diamond Hitch* (2017), Tyler Enfield's *Like Rum-Drunk Angels* (2020), and most recently Gary Barwin's *Nothing the Same, Everything Haunted: The Ballad of Motl the Cowboy* (2021) and Bob Armstrong's *Prodigies* (2021), plus a small set of Canadian films, television series, and at least one play.<sup>45</sup> These authors are a big group for a small span of time in the small Canadian market for Westerns and post-Westerns. Unfortunately, the chapter-by-chapter historical arc of this book, after chapter 2, might superficially diminish the relatively high degree of activity since the turn of the millennium, but the trade-off is a better historical scope, which is helpful in a study that is one of the first. If my selection may be described as idiosyncratic, it is partly a result of the challenges of ex-centric genre studies over time, and, relatedly, because

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44 Lee Clark Mitchell affirms this timeline in the American context too, stating that the Western on film “had been put out to pasture, [but] it reemerged in the 1990s with a vengeance” (“Who” 260).

45 This list does not include self-published Westerns, for example, by Arthur C. Eastly, nor Western romances in the Harlequin tradition, like those by C. J. Carmichael, nor Christian Westerns, like Janette Oke's. Although later chapters think through crossover genres, I must also manage the scope of this book. In chapter 3, I include Westerns in the earlier mode of Muscular Christianity because, at that time, Christian ideals were more central than they are now to the social and cultural vision that was shaping Canadian literature.

no canon of Canadian Westerns exists in the relative absence of dedicated fans and critics of the genre here.<sup>46</sup>

My selection is skewed for another reason implied in the title, *The American Western in Canadian Literature*. Although this book refers to a few classics of American literature, it usually compares Canadian literature to American film, a case of apples and oranges with several ramifications. This book is not quite a study in comparative literature and culture, mainly because it is almost entirely English, but partly because its relatively few American sources are mostly films, and its much more numerous Canadian sources are mostly books. My specialization in Canadian literary sources means that I am not one of the pure comparatists that Claudio Guillén idealizes in *The Challenge of Comparative Literature* (1993) who “refuse . . . specialization in one nation or one nationality” because it is not “practical” (6). Actually, it is eminently “practical” to minimize the huge corpus of American Westerns and to seek a comparatively manageable body of work elsewhere, though there are risks. Guillén explains that “a culture consists of different levels, and often what is brought along by a stronger economic and military power may be the most elementary or utilitarian level of its culture, serving only to spread over the host country a visible but superficial glaze of predominance, without any intellectual substance” (243–4). Hollywood has this effect around the world, but it also creates its own “intellectual substance” as filmmakers think through America’s foreign relations and influences. And Canadians have to think through these all the time. Even my friends and colleagues who are Canadianists and literary scholars in Canada probably have more lifetime exposure to American film and television than their Canadian equivalents. Most members of the public, including most creative writers here, are probably in the same situation. American film and television influence all manner of Canadian art. They are practically inescapable.<sup>47</sup> So, demanding the study to compare only literature to literature would

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46 This adjective, “ex-centric,” appears occasionally in Canadian literary studies, such as Dobson’s, and it can playfully confirm Appadurai’s explanation of globalization extending through space *and* time: something once central, such as the Western, becomes ex-centric, even as it extends beyond its American centres to other locations, whether margins or otherwise.

47 Richard Slotkin and Mary-Dailey Desmarais wrote the same thing of Westerns themselves in his American context; they were “inescapable” and “everywhere” (Slotkin and Desmarais 147). They add: “From 1946 to 1960, Westerns were the most popular and widely

not respect the real channels of influence and inspiration-seeking across media and national borders. One reward of acknowledging these channels is that the literature serves as if it were film criticism, or at least intertextually self-aware creative writing. The literature therefore becomes what we sometimes now call the “knowledge base,” a doubling of nouns that needlessly implies that “knowledge” on its own is insufficient (even “debased”—some additional metaphorical power being required). One risk is that I am also comparing *well-known* films, such as Clint Eastwood’s *Pale Rider* (1985), to *lesser-known* books, such as Paulette Jiles’s *The Jesse James Poems* (1988), potentially re-inscribing the canonization of a select few texts and their national contexts. However, it matters that well-known American Westerns are truly but a handful of the works considered in this study. They loom large, but mainly as shadows or ghosts, as I will explain in chapter 5. Undoubtedly, because of the smaller number of American Westerns included here, readers will notice many connections to other American Westerns—both in film and literature—that I have neglected. In genre studies, connections can never be exhausted, and half the fun is adding nodes to connections noted by others.

Another risk is in the expectations surrounding the mismatch between high-cultural and low-cultural products (to invoke a Bourdieuan difference in fields of cultural production).<sup>48</sup> In a study of the Western, we might expect B movies, pulp fiction, and comics to be more prominent. The fact is that there was, historically, very little of the Canadian Western in these media, in contrast to the Mexican Western that Christopher Conway examines in *Heroes of the Borderlands* (2019). I have written elsewhere of the Canadian Western in comics, which mirrors the history of the Canadian Western in pulp fiction that I assemble around Luke Price’s probably pseudonymous contributions to *Dynamic Western* magazine in chapter 4. I have not yet read about or found any “slicks” among the pulps in the Canadian Western-related archival studies and materials (slicks being glossy magazines that were a step up from the pulps in quality). The

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produced film genre” (147). Further details on this popularity are available through Slotkin’s various publications.

48 I am thinking, of course, of Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993 in English), which builds on his previous book, *Distinction* (1984 in English), to theorize literature’s various roles in the power dynamics of culture-defining economies.

American counterparts of these media were not to my knowledge imported into Canada to anywhere near the same degree as A-list Hollywood films, partly because they were banned for most of the 1940s, as I explain in chapter 4. Most of the Canadian literature in this book is arguably a high-cultural product—literary fiction and poetry—which I first began to consider through Ondaatje’s reflections on the materials that make legends in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, published in 1970 by the now very chic Anansi Press. The exceptions are Ondaatje’s friend bpNichol’s simultaneous publication of *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* in a slyly pornographic pamphlet; others are in the early years of the twentieth century, when almost all Canadian production was a fly-by-night operation; and especially when Canadian pulp fiction and comics came to the fore in the 1940s. Nevertheless, despite the high-cultural scarcity of Canadian Westerns compared to American or Mexican Westerns, not all the books and films included here are what I would describe as great literature or film. Many of them are dated; some of them are not especially well-made; some of them appear to have paid homage to pulp fiction and B movies without fully embracing the slapdash, careless love of genre evident in pulpy, B-list styles.

Given the already prominent occurrences of my opinions and anecdotes above, I think it essential to rationalize their presence a little more. In this introduction, with its emphasis on nostalgia and our felt experience of nationalized space, it would feel irresponsible not to situate myself according to the principles of post-colonial theory that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak made familiar to me. Spivak engages with deconstruction throughout *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) to acknowledge and assess our own critical limits and blind spots. She unpacks the West as “the Northwestern European tradition (codename ‘West’)” (6). Thinking of the *Western* as such helps us to see that it is not merely a light entertainment for teenage boys; it is also the aforementioned synecdoche for the West, a microcosm of the Western world with serious implications for literature and culture more generally. Given the coded strength of this tradition, Spivak argues that to attempt to reverse, invert, or upset colonial power will be ineffective. Rather, our studies “require a persistent attempt to displace the reversal [and] to show the complicity between” (37) the powers at home in our countries and the powers that impress from our neighbours and elsewhere



abroad.<sup>49</sup> The Derridean aporia that Spivak accentuates is highly applicable to the problems of being (and caused by acting as) a white, cisgender man, and a settler-colonist by birth, one who has inherited privileges that came and still come at a cost to others. This land is “home on Native land,” as the twist on the Canadian national anthem goes—but our singing of even this one ironic line can be interpreted as a celebration of dispossession. In referring *unironically* to Canada Day and “this home on my native land,” Susana Deranger, of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, also mentions “the birth of a nation that stole my land” (40), an allusion to D. W. Griffith’s white-supremacist epic, *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Deranger furthermore provides a set of reasons why we should think of colonization in Canada as an act of genocide—which I, too, have written about, on the occasion of the report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2019.<sup>50</sup> In these contexts, and in spite of its complicities, this book is subversively anti-colonial in spirit, especially in chapter 2, where I attempt to orient us toward Thomas King’s, Jordan Abel’s, and Zacharias Kunuk’s Indigenous perspectives on the Western (among others), while also following a settler-colonial tradition of “unsettling” Canadian literature that goes back at least as far as Gary Geddes’s *The Unsettling of the West* (1986) and continuing with important studies by Dee Horne, Laura Moss, Alison Calder, Owen Percy, and their counterparts elsewhere in Canada and the United States.<sup>51</sup> My occasional critiques of the American Western and its scholarship do not mean that I uncritically promote the Canadian Western or Canadian studies, nor do I consider myself a nationalist, except when under pressure from other, stronger powers.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Here I am eliding Spivak’s use of her coinage, “the native informant” (4, 6), which she borrows from ethnography. The risk for me and anyone from the West in attempting to be self-conscious about our Westernness is “the cover story . . . of a fully self-present voice-consciousness” embodied as “the self-marginalizing [not in my case] or self-consolidating [perhaps] migrant or postcolonial [more likely] masquerading as a ‘native informant’ ” (6). My purpose here is simply to admit, again, certain limits of my critique.

50 See my blog post, “The Word ‘Genocide’ in Canada,” *Publicly Interested*, 18 June 2019, <http://www.publiclyinterested.ca/blog/the-word-genocide-in-canada>.

51 For more contributors to the tradition, see also the essays collected in Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte’s *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* (2009).

52 I do believe that national democratic government is the only organizational alternative to the much less accountable transnational corporation, whose hierarchies and efficiencies are

One such power is empire, which can make other nations appear minuscule in contrast—but imperialism as it helped to define Canada is also patriarchal. This book as a whole does not concentrate on patriarchy or its effect on women in Canadian Westerns or Westerns more generally,<sup>53</sup> but substantial portions of it are devoted to critical examinations of gender in the Western. This theme emerges with the proposal that the problematic masculinity of “Muscular Christianity” (in chapter 3) is a gendering sometimes meant to prepare boys for war, and it echoes later in the parodies of the cowboy that begin with Luke Price’s *Smokey Carmain* (in chapter 4) and develop into bpNichol’s *Billy the Kid* (in chapter 5). More contemporary concerns are prominent in the feminist reimagining and reframing of the figure of the cowboy, especially through the cowgirl in George Bowering’s 1987 novel *Caprice* and the cowboy’s (or outlaw’s) mother in Jiles’s *The Jesse James Poems*, which appeared the next year (also in chapter 5). Masculinity and violence come under scrutiny again, alongside the possibility of genderless post-human existence, in my readings of historical Westerns by Guy Vanderhaeghe and to a lesser extent Fred Stenson (in chapter 6). Finally, the book’s conclusion involves feminist and post-humanist theorizing of gendered landscapes and industrial violence against them in books such as Gil Adamson’s 2007 novel *The Outlander*. With the exceptions of Margaret Atwood’s poem “Backdrop Addresses Cowboy” (1968) and of Price’s serialized short stories, which are herein assembled as a novelistic arc, I have focused almost entirely on books, with the unfortunate result of not including the several Western-related short stories by Aritha van Herk that Katherine Ann Roberts considers in *West/Border/Road*, though I do quote from her *Stampede and the Westness of West* (2016) on occasion. Although the enthusiasm for rodeo in van Herk’s *Stampede* is an endorsement of values such as competition that might

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powerful, and whose transnationality frustrates national law. For more on this topic, see Frank Davey’s *Post-National Arguments* (1993) and Kit Dobson’s *Transnational Canadas* (2009), the latter of which explains “how Canadian texts have debated the national as a means of resisting transnational capitalism” (71).

53 The perennially relevant statement on gender by Judith Butler is entirely consonant with the Western: “That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character” (141). A statement by Katherine Ann Roberts makes the link to Butler: “Westerns involve dress-up; it is impossible to completely renounce the aesthetic power of costuming” (128).

seem conservative, her project of “explor[ing] . . . the difficulties women writers face in writing themselves into the West” (Roberts 85) might seem liberal (another example of the inadequacy of the left-right binary), and Jiles, Adamson, Dayle Furlong, Nadia Bozak, Natalee Caple, and Alix Hawley have responded with books that figure into this one. Following van Herk’s critiques of Clint Eastwood, and echoing Spivak’s call for “persistent attempt[s]” to question and resist imperial-patriarchal powers, Roberts acknowledges “the impossibility of pronouncing the death of the western (since he [Eastwood] is very much alive), only the possibility of subjecting it to an ongoing critique” (129). I have already footnoted my own research on Eastwood, who appears again, spectrally, in chapter 5. This book’s “ongoing critique” partly examines the extension of supposedly heroic figures such as Eastwood and his characters through popular culture and into conceptions of history, where patriarchal attitudes become dangerous precepts that affect how we treat other individuals, other nations, and the land.

Relatedly, trying to reflect on my own “postcolonial reason(s)” in this book, I need to comment on my modes of thinking and writing, which I would describe as leaning toward induction and inquiry from training in deduction and theory.<sup>54</sup> Although the deduction and theory are mainly here and in the first chapter, more theory unfolds inductively, as needed by inquiry, in the chapters that read the Westerns. There will probably be some surprises. Most readers want clear expectations and a certain efficiency, and I do not want to hamper them without cause, but our academic habits of “signposting,” “flagging,” and “foregrounding” throughout our texts are obvious metaphors of settler colonialism and extractive industries such as those for oil and gas: naming spaces, planting flags, and parcelling them dimensionally with fences and roads. So are the metaphors of “surveying” and then “staking a claim” to an “area of inquiry,” and of “mapping” a theory onto an unfamiliar situation or a puzzle; so, too, is the comparatively inductive metaphor of “intellectual exploration.”<sup>55</sup> In her readings of Canadian literature in *Mapping with Words* (2018), Sarah

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54 Robert Scholes describes deduction and induction as two different, but “complementary,” approaches to genre (“Towards” 104).

55 With a focus on allegory instead of metaphor, Fredric Jameson explains “cognitive mapping” as the way in which an individual thinks through a world that capitalism has served to

Wylie Krotz identifies “cartographic aesthetics and strategies . . . in the discursive claiming of settler space” (167). Although Krotz also shows how some settlers produced “counter-maps” (153) that acknowledged Indigenous lands and people, among other complexities, the mapping metaphors are in my experience one of the commonest ways in which scholars talk to each other about their writing, along with related scalar metaphors such as “weighing an argument.” In the scholarly discourse on genre, we sometimes hear people talk of how a genre signposts itself to be marked or identified as that genre.<sup>56</sup> More relevantly, these signposting-related metaphors also refer to the modernizing activities that the Western nostalgically rejects but also tacitly and pragmatically accepts as inevitable. As I reflected on this sense of inevitability, I was reminded of how my training and my colleagues romanticized a bygone era of contemplation and “slow professors” while pushing many of us toward intellectual shorthand for systemic processes of imperialism and capitalism. Susan Stewart, in *On Longing* (1993), has suggested that a collection of essays or chapters, such as this one, pulls together threads of narrative and becomes “the place where [such narratives are] transformed into space, into property” (xii). How different was I from the frackers seeking new oil reserves? Yes, quite different, except that I sometimes drive a car that still runs on gasoline. How different was I from settlers, then and now, who could find new opportunities on lands made available by the destruction of the population (e.g., the Beothuk in Newfoundland) or the establishment of “Indian reserves”? Less different, still complicit. I am from the West, once felt “settled” on the grasslands and wetlands of the Prairies, but the petro-cultural narrative of the West’s modernization—driven by precisely the same metaphors—is no longer responsible when cultural imperialism can flow through oil pipelines, and we are engineering and capitalizing on an environmental disaster of global proportions.

Partly for this reason, and because almost all of the chapters in this book were road-tested at conferences across Canada and the United States, the tone of this book is usually more personal, public-facing, risk-taking,

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us as a figure and a product but that we might not experience directly (“Cognitive” 349–50). See Oded Nir for how this “mapping” signifies in other work by Jameson and by other spatial theorists.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Tessa Dwyer’s chapter on the *Mad Max* movies in *Locating the Voice in Film* (2016), p. 142.

and energetic than that of my previous book, *The Metaphor of Celebrity* (2013). That project happened to become my transition from literary and celebrity studies through film studies to genre studies. Celebrity as a system depends on the disposability of most stars alongside the recycling of a select few into sacred objects of resilience and renewal. It is wasteful but produces illusions of durability through the classics and the canons. Celebrity obviously cannot be ignored if we want to understand the dominant cultures of the West, and it is also important to the once-dominant Western, as the genre shifted cultural registers from pulps and B movies to Wister's *The Virginian* and A-list stars such as John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, and Clint Eastwood (and, in Canada, eventually Paul Gross). Intentionally or not, these and other stars regenerated unsustainable eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American ideas of panoramic natural resources, personal and cultural independence, and moral clarity in a century of (un)natural depletion, growing international interdependence, and ethical dilemmas. Although the Western affirms a conservatism toward nature that derives from sources such as American transcendentalism and ranch-oriented land management, it also suggests that this conservatism is obsolete, and that the new conservatism seeks not to conserve nature so much as the right to exploit nature's products, whether raw, refined, or synthesized. I mean gold, oil, and gunpowder. As I wrote this book and imagined my future studies, I realized that my research and teaching needed to confront social and environmental problems more directly if I wanted to help solve these problems, and I wanted more keenly to show how reading and writing literature and film are processes that can help too. Hence the change of tone. In *The Metaphor of Celebrity*, I had tried to strip my own language of metaphor because I had theorized that some writers ultimately lose control to metaphor—an inevitability for almost all of us, actually, but still I did not want to be one of those writers.

This concern is esoteric to most people, but how we think and talk about our environments and sources of energy is not. They are now far more ethically significant than ever. Reading for *The Metaphor of Celebrity* introduced me to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's indispensable *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), which evokes the Jungian archetypes that William Indick considers in *The Psychology of the Western* (2008)—archetypes being akin to the deeply rooted, profoundly ideological conceptual

metaphors that underpin our thinking and acting. Immediately after Lakoff and Johnson's book, in 1981 Fredric Jameson rebranded "ideology" as the "the political unconscious" with his book of that title.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, some of the conceptual metaphors that Lakoff and Johnson identify are also orientational: *happy is up*; *sad is down* and *conscious is up*; *unconscious is down* (16). Their related metaphors of centres and margins might be superficially more explanatory when it comes to the Western's expansionist drive, especially given the prevalence of these metaphors in Canadian literature and criticism, but the affect of *happy is up* seems better. It offers implicit relief from ethical dilemmas: *heaven is up*; *hell is down*—it's that simple.<sup>58</sup> On the one hand, in the context of the Western the vertical orientation of *heaven is up*; *hell is down* is a pillar of the anti-intellectualism of this anti-modern(ist) genre, compelling us not to over-think whatever is unconscious or that derives from the unconscious.<sup>59</sup> (The genre's supposed "moral clarity" means that we don't have to think about it.) On the other, the Western is deeply informed by the Freudian model of the psyche, revelling in power struggles and identity formation, and especially the id's greed and lust, its spasmodic satisfaction of desire, and its snap judgments. Nowhere has this been better illustrated than in the film adaptation of Upton Sinclair's *Oil* (1926–7), Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007), in Daniel Day-Lewis's famous "I drink your milkshake" scene. Derisively bragging about his success in

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57 Slotkin agrees: metaphors can be "masked by the traditional form of narrative [e.g., a genre such as the epic], its conformity to habits of thought, generic conventions, and literary expectations so deeply engrained that we are unconscious of them" (*Fatal Environment* 22).

58 It's also about the same in Canada as in the United States, though I have not devoted much time or space in this book to national differentiations of the Western in the context of the ethical turns in criticism in the past fifty years, with some exceptions from other comparatists a little later on. I do, however, devote part of chapter 6 to a critical reversal of Slotkin's regeneration-through-violence theory that is probably similar to some American Westerns that were also becoming critical of the genre—for example, Robert Altman's wintry and hardly regenerative 1971 film *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, which would be countered by major regenerative and revivalist texts such as McCarthy's 1985 novel *Blood Meridian* and Eastwood's 1992 film *Unforgiven*. Lee Clark Mitchell appears to disagree about *Unforgiven*, in which "violence represents nothing more than itself . . . [and] it fails to restore social order" ("Who" 260), in spite of the hero's restoration of the "social order" of capitalism at the site of the brothel. And in the epilogue, according to Patrick McGee's cultural-materialist interpretation of the film, Eastwood's character "discovers that he is not just a man, but a businessman" (197).

59 A notable Western film whose title invokes but also depolarizes this orientational binary is *Hell or High Water* (Mackenzie, 2016).

getting a neighbour's oil, Day-Lewis's character says that it was easy to "drain it . . . just like that," and he strikes upon a milkshake metaphor to explain how he got the oil: "My straw reaches acraahsss . . . and starts to drink your milkshake. I . . . drink . . . your . . . milkshake! *Shuuurp!* I drink it up!" Although I have not crystallized the Western's "metaphors we live by" into an aphorism quite so memorable, such an aphorism would need to account for the orientational dynamics of *crossing* the West but *digging down* for the resources of power and desire, chiefly oil and gold.

This need is another reason that this book is scalar in some places, though I regret the signposting. After this introduction, it starts big (a lot of the planet) then goes small (the nation) and smaller (the region) before expanding outward again through the historical arc of Canadian Westerns. Conceptually, I adhere to Michel de Certeau's maxim in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) that "[s]pace is a practised place" (117). This introduction and the first chapter focus on "space" as a set of constructions of ideology tethered to land, such as nationalism and regionalism, and the later chapters focus on "time" as a line of chronological development. Chapters 3 to 6 are linear because this book amounts to a brief history of the Western in Canadian literature, from its turn-of-the-century beginnings (ca. 1898) to its post-millennial present (the early 2020s)—about a hundred and twenty-five years. Although the American Western is older, it is not older because it had a more original national vision, though you could argue that it did; it is older because of the continuity between earlier literature such as the accounts of Daniel Boone (most recently fictionalized in Canada by Alix Hawley in her 2015 novel *All True Not a Lie in It* and its 2018 sequel, *My Name Is a Knife*) and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), which Thomas King re-framed as Western in 1993 in *Green Grass, Running Water*. American society in the later nineteenth century needed a genre whose fictionalized violence was rationalizing an earlier and more sustained colonial violence, which itself was rationalized as a temporary and ultimately more benign civilizing feat than the ancient history of supposed savagery. Meanwhile, and more banal as a claim, the Canadian publishing industry did not exist in its legally protected form until the late nineteenth century (a situation illustrated by Ralph Connor's experience with the piracy of his first book, one of the first Canadian

Westerns, *Black Rock* [1898]), so it could not “have” an earlier Western.<sup>60</sup> And almost all the Westerns in this book are set around that time, with major national initiatives and power fluctuations in the background: the two transcontinental railroads, the American Civil War, the North-West Resistance, the North-West Mounted Police, and the American purchase of Alaska from Russia.

Although American acquisition and imperialism are frequently a straw man in Canadian literature and criticism, this book begins by finding many ways in which Canadian movement through the West is imperialistic, from its railways to its missionaries. After the reflections on scalar global, national, and regional relationships pertaining to the West and the Western in chapter 1, and building on my previous book, *The Metaphor of Celebrity*, chapter 2 presents “Tom King’s John Wayne”—in other words, some of the views that Indigenous writers have made public on the effects of celebrity and Hollywood’s cultural and economic imperialism abroad. I focus on the fictionalized death of the historical movie star John Wayne in King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*, a (Canadian) response to the American Western and the West (in Spivak’s conception) in general. In a magic-realist scene, the mythic ancestors of the Blackfoot rewrite a John Wayne movie so that the “Indians” defeat the whites and kill the celebrity. Wayne was not a historical cavalryman, like George Custer, or a historical outlaw who became infamous, like Billy the Kid, and so King’s “Indians” are symbolically attacking popular culture because it can be more harmful than history. King directs his critique not toward what has been called “‘history-history’ [but] the history made up by movies” (Slotkin and Desmarais 148). Drawing attention to the imperialism of popular culture, King’s novel recasts earlier Canadian Westerns in which the fictionalized historical figure is killed, such as Paulette Jiles’s *The Jesse James Poems* (1988), bpNichol’s *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (1970), and Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), as a collective fantasy of the death of American celebrity—and as a rebuttal to the arguments implied in the Western. I also highlight the significance of other Indigenous perspectives. Writers such as Thomas King and Jordan Abel have produced major works in this vein, and the

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60 See the various references to the work of Eli MacLaren in chapter 3.



filmmakers Zacharias Kunuk and Natar Ungalaaq answered John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) sixty years later with *Maliglutit* (2016). The primary insight that I derive from these Indigenous perspectives is that the effect of popular culture can be as pernicious as that of colonial history, and that Indigenous writers and filmmakers—rather than “vanishing” according to the very doctrines (e.g., Manifest Destiny) underlying the reservation systems—have made concerted and creative efforts to subvert or at least resist the Western and its ideological manifestations in national policies in North America.

When going west brought settlers and then the railroad to the West Coast, the idea of the West had to turn, and this turn was conceptualized in the early variant of the Western that I will consider in chapter 3, “The Northwestern Cross.” One “crossing” of this chapter is that of the East–West and North–South axes, a geographical turning of the cardinal directions that helps to explain the American interest in the North as a new frontier. (The implied senses of direction and spatial relationship also raise questions about the terms “transnational,” “international,” and “global” in this chapter, especially in the biographical and historical contexts of the authors.) The sub-genre called the Northern or Northwestern was often set in the Yukon or Alaska—the Northwest. It originated with American authors and was popularized in American novels such as John Mackie's *Sinners Twain* (1895) and Jack London's *Son of the Wolf* (1902) and, from a year later, *Call of the Wild*, but it had Canadian proponents such as H. A. Cody and Ralph Connor. Cody and Connor were Christian ministers, and the physically imposing and morally assertive heroes in Cody's *The Frontiersman* (1910) and Connor's *Corporal Cameron of the North West Mounted Police* (1912) exemplify what Candida Rifkind, Daniel Coleman, and others have referred to as “Muscular Christianity.” This style of Christianity is part of Western ideology in general—an indefensible rationale for thinking of Indigenous “heathens” as savages to be “civilized” through religious colonization and the accompanying imposition of Western-world patriarchy, government, and economy. Connor's and Cody's fictional minister-lawmen are genuine and not especially hateful, but they have serious failings that became anti-heroic in subsequent generations of writers. But at a time of generic instability and imminent cohesion, even if their principles were otherwise socially conservative, they

experimented almost liberally with crossover genres to appeal to readers of different ages.

In chapter 4, we see the (mostly) morally upright heroes of Cody and Connor set in partial contrast with the anti-heroes of the Westerns of the 1940s pulp fiction industry in Canada. The “industry’s” very temporary growth and limited range cast some doubt on the term, but the wartime laws of the 1940s limiting American imports had the effect of creating a market in Canada, even if writers of the Western tended to imitate American models with their national markers and settings. In fact, the increasing strength or saturation of Westerns in the American market from the late 1930s through to the early 1950s is one reason why the scope of this chapter is limited to only one author’s series of short stories rather than a set of books. It appears that so many American Westerns were circulating during this period that Canadian Westerns could not emerge here, or at least have not stood the test of time. And so it also appears that the Canadian Western skipped ahead from turn-of-the-century models to postmodernism, just as Robert Kroetsch proposed that Canadian literature in general had done (qtd. in Nischik 303). In both American and Canadian contexts, we usually think of anti-heroes as figures that emerged alongside postmodernism in the rebellious 1960s, but Luke Price’s short stories in Toronto’s *Dynamic Western* magazine in the 1940s suggest that the Western had significantly earlier, and significantly self-conscious, experiments of this type. Price’s main character, Smokey Carmain, is fundamentally stereotypical, but the wordplay around his name and his allusions to gun smoke create a self-consciousness that is almost meta-fictional, anticipating postmodern developments—from as early as the 1940s—in literature and politics in Canada and abroad. This revised timeline of conventional wisdom calls for further study of the Western’s anti-intellectual challenge to its contemporary high modernism, whether inter- or postwar.

In chapter 5, “CanLit’s Postmodern Westerns,” we see that not until the post-1960s flourish of postmodernism was the heteronormative masculinity of the Western hero often called into question (with exceptions from the United States such as the arguably queer Shane in George Stevens’s 1953 film of that name), and we reflect on various deaths and hauntings as literalizations of what would come to be known as

“post-Western” commentaries on American cultural influences. Partly because of the emerging postmodernist trends, and partly for nationalistic reasons associated with the perception of foreign threats and undefended cultural borders, the Western in Canadian literature after the 1967 centennial is usually a critical response to American power—as are many American Westerns from this era. Through texts such as Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), Frank Davey’s *The Louis Riel Organ and Piano Co.* (1985), George Bowering’s *Caprice* (1987), and Paulette Jiles’s *The Jesse James Poems* (1988), I further develop many of the aforementioned themes while engaging with current models of the post-Western alongside Sylvia Söderlind’s 2010 coinage of “ghostmodernism,” a concept that helps to literalize some of the “cowboys and Indians” who metaphorically haunt postmodern and contemporary literature and, again, lend credence to Neil Campbell’s concept of the post-Western as a contemporary text haunted by the Western.<sup>61</sup> In brief, the genre begins to be more obvious about the death and obsolescence of the cowboy (as such), even if the genre had been implying it for years.

Chapter 6, “Degeneration through Violence,” speaks especially to the work of the American cultural historian Richard Slotkin, who argues in his 1992 book *Gunfighter Nation* that the Western promotes a myth: that American society was established and must be perpetuated through violence (10)—an echo of his *Regeneration through Violence* (1973). In response to Slotkin, this chapter proposes that the Western in Canadian literature tends to counter the American Western with its own myth: that *degeneration* is the result of violence, and that society should be peaceable. Developing this argument, I focus on the first two (and most conventional) of Guy Vanderhaeghe’s unofficial trilogy of Westerns, *The Englishman’s Boy* (1996), *The Last Crossing* (2002), and *A Good Man* (2011). Putting *The Englishman’s Boy* in the context of postmodernism and other historical moments to which it refers, I look at some of its scenes of what might be called degenerate violence, which reappears symbolically in the syphilitic and brutal aspiring hero in *The Last Crossing* and in other Canadian

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61 Although I see the contemporary as an adjacent to postmodernism, or as the envelope that postmodernism pushes, they seem to be treated as equivalents in Josh Toth’s *The Passing of Postmodernism: A Spectroanalysis of the Contemporary* (2010).

Westerns. I also focus especially on horses in this chapter—the Western being also known as “horse opera,” in a coinage widely attributed to the early film star William S. Hart. The close, familial, even intimate feelings and relationships between horses and humans raise questions about whether our rapprochement with non-humans is degenerative or regenerative. The contrastive motif of degeneration and regeneration also calls up the concept of the post-human, which develops into the ecocritical concerns of the end of the book.

So, finally, in the conclusion, I look to millennial and post-millennial Canadian Westerns, such as Robert Kroetsch’s *The Man from the Creeks* (1998), Gil Adamson’s *The Outlander* (2007), Patrick deWitt’s *The Sisters Brothers* (2011), and Dayle Furlong’s *Saltwater Cowboys* (2015). Mainly, I examine their representations of extractive industries, as when I interpret barrels of whisky as symbolic barrels of oil in *The Man from the Creeks*, or when I read the ore-related accidents in *The Outlander* and *The Sisters Brothers* as natural defences against patriarchal-industrial extractions. Although the writers in this conclusion might not agree with me entirely, I view these Westerns as deeply concerned about mining, if not other big businesses, because of its externalities, such as the damage done to human bodies and to nature, especially wilderness. Partly as a result, I join in the call for a rapid energy transition based ideally on a changing world view of human progress, or at least pragmatically on the recognition of the unwise insistence on still fuelling industrial and social development primarily with oil and gas—the black gold of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that seems more and more regressive now.