



## THE AMERICAN WESTERN IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

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## Scaling and Spacing the Genre

### *Transnationalism, Nationalism, and Regionalism*

In their introduction to *Scale in Literature and Culture* (2017), Michael Tavel Clarke and David Wittenberg begin with a dialogue from Galileo Galilei's *Two New Sciences* (1638). In that book, an allegorical character who represents intelligence—but not expertise—misunderstands “that when one increases the size of an object in one dimension (for instance, length), the cross-sectional area of that object is enlarged by the square of the same increase, and its volume (along with its mass) increases by the cube” (Clarke and Wittenberg 2). This is why some miniatures could never be greatly enlarged in their original proportions without collapsing under their own weight. Clarke and Wittenberg use *Two New Sciences* and Immanuel Kant's notion of the sublime object, among other ideas, to contextualize various theories of globalization and the environment; they point to Timothy Morton's theory of the “hyperobject,” which they describe as “a phenomenon so large that it cannot in principle be perceived by humans, but nonetheless must be conceptualized” (7). As their introduction proceeds, Clarke and Wittenberg suggest that the growth and globalization of literary studies happened “without substantial controversy” (11), with the possible exception of “the controversy over Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading* [2013]” (17), a book that posited the end of close reading. Moretti observed that literature has been expanding as time passes, so a historical scope eventually becomes impossible for even an obsessive and rapid reader to manage (at least without recourse to limiting constructs such as taste). When a reader then wants to increase the

scope of research beyond traditional national boundaries, the problem is magnified, both temporally and spatially. Literature itself does not collapse when it becomes *global* or *literatures*, but categorization and reading processes might, and these might *feel* like collapse; however, genre studies and quantitative methods such as distant reading can offset the limits of other methodologies.<sup>1</sup>

Although there is a distant-reading dataset behind *The American Western in Canadian Literature*, which I intend to publish separately, this book on its own does not offer a satisfactory solution to the problem of scale that Moretti explained and that Clarke and Wittenberg further contextualized. As I rationalized in the introduction, limits such as language and nationality are practical in literary studies. But they can also be compensated for in theory. This chapter is meant to theorize—or, perhaps more accurately, contextualize—the genre of the Western by scaling it down from the globe, through the nation, to the region, while also spacing out different regions in relationship with each other.

Ironically, to justify this study of a national literature, some perspective on transnationalism—on an area of bigger scope—is required. Canadian literature simply cannot be isolated from other national literatures and from other national cultures more generally, and the Western is an ideal example, because the genre is more strongly associated with the United States and Mexico (and even Italy, thanks to Sergio Leone and several others) than Canada. While not what I referred to in the introduction, following Arjun Appadurai, as a “puppeteer,” the United States remains fascinating in a world of devolving superpower, partly because people everywhere in the ostensibly free world, and in aspiring nations, are drawn to the idea of West—imbued with “nostalgia without memory”—that dates from the pre-superpower, even pre-modern, era of America. In those days, the superpower was not a country but an individual—the “superhero” of the late nineteenth-century Western who became the Superman and the

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1 To tease out these implications—of expansion and collapse—in more detail would be quite a thought experiment, but Clarke and Wittenberg include in their collection an essay by Oded Nir that acknowledges various reasons to prevent “world literature” from becoming too theoretical (237–40). For Nir, following Fredric Jameson, “the system [of world literature is] ultimately unrepresentable” (241; see Jameson, “Cognitive” 356), though Nir does assemble a typology that could help. See also Salman Rushdie’s optimistic thoughts on “a new shape of the [English] language in . . . a world literature” (“Commonwealth” 70).

Batman of the 1930s (Wachhorst 15). Much of the thought and feeling cast back to those days is also contextualized by what living people outside the United States *do* remember, such as late-imperial American aggression during the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, which accounts for not only some of the anti-Americanism but also a relieved anxiety of influence in non-American Westerns; we do not have to see the Western as all good, and we do not have to imitate it exactly or feel the pressure of mimicry. Such pressure assumes that the Western is defined as a powerful, only-American frontier story, but I have already found reason to suggest, as I did in the introduction, why that is not the case. In contextualizing the American Western in Alberta, Aritha van Herk succinctly expresses the paradox by claiming that “[w]e yearn to recapture what we have never seen but dreamed” (*Stampede* 82) while admitting that “[n]ostalgia isn’t what it’s cracked up to be, creaking with extinction and / forgetfulness” (91). She summarizes that, when you love something, “you cherish its faults as much as its strengths” (91). Van Herk seems to “cherish” the Calgary Stampede in particular and the West in general, but, in the nostalgic discourses of the Western and the West, there is also an undeniable fondness for the United States—for example, in van Herk’s poem about the Stampede’s American founder—one that might be described as “restorative nostalgia” (Boym 402) in line with Richard Slotkin’s regenerative theme (to which I return in chapter 6). Briefly, what I mean to suggest is that nostalgia is sometimes *more* than “what it’s cracked up to be,” because it scales up; it almost always stretches toward something geographically distant, an Odyssean homeland.

## The Western in the East and Old World

Whether *of* or *in* the East, the homages are especially curious, many of them appearing during a time of cultural revolution in the English-speaking world, some of them part of a cultural feedback loop. One of the classic American Westerns took inspiration from Japan not long after Japan came to matter more to Americans during the Second World War; *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960) was a remake of Akira Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai* (1954), from the genre of samurai cinema, *chanbara*, a type of *jidaigeki* or period drama. In *Eastern Westerns* (2018), Stephen Teo cautions against interpreting *Seven Samurai* as a Western because it

inspired a Western (4, 5), though in chapter 9 of his book he does call *The Magnificent Seven* “the prototype” of specifically Eastern Westerns, suggesting that prototypes were being transnationally exchanged.<sup>2</sup> The final episode of the first season of *Westworld* (2016) shows samurai rehearsing for an American *jidaigeki* too. Sergio Leone’s and Clint Eastwood’s first Italian Western, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), was inspired by Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* (1961) (Smart 19), amplifying resonances between Japan, Italy, and America—hence Quentin Tarantino’s mash-up of cowboys and samurai in the *Kill Bill* movies (2003, 2004); Tarantino later appeared in Takashi Miike’s *Sukiyaki Western Django* (2007), a title that refers partly to the Italian Western cult favourite *Django* (Corbucci, 1966).<sup>3</sup>

These are cases of interplay and not only influence, cases that show how intertextual and interchangeable our “mental models” (Guillén 244) of narrative can be—at the risk of letting similarity slip into assumptions of sameness or identification with an American model. In China, which also has a tradition of regional realism pertaining to its own West, there are also mythic kung fu engagements with American Westerns, such as *Once upon a Time in China and America* (Lau and Hung, 1996), and studies are emerging in the wake of Teo’s *Eastern Westerns* that show strong resemblances between Westerns and *wuxia*, or Chinese martial arts genres. Relatedly, in fact, Ian Teh’s ecocritical photo essay entitled “China’s New Deserts” (2019) happens to include an image from Madoi County in China that could well be the set of a Western, with its deserted small-town main street, its wide dusty sidewalk, its shops with false fronts, and even a man in jeans and a fedora ambling toward the camera from the middle ground. Elsewhere in the relative East, there is the Indo Western, such as the movie *Adima Changala* (Raj, 1981), which was based on an Italian Western called *The Five Man Army* (Taylor and Zingarelli, 1969). The Spaghetti Western in Italy and the Red Western and its Eastern/*Ostern* variant (Hillhouse 221) from Germany, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union gained attention internationally starting around 1966, partly because of the long-standing popularity of Karl May’s turn-of-the-century German Western novels,

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2 Teo is rigorous about terminology related to categories of Asian film throughout his introduction to *Eastern Westerns*.

3 Tarantino later riffed on the title in his own *Django Unchained* (2012).

partly because of their themes related to American freedoms in the context of divided and repressive regimes, and partly because of DEFA's *The Sons of Great Bear* (*Die Söhne der grossen Bärin*, Mach, 1966).<sup>4</sup> In this film, the character Adams (Horst Jonischkan) tells the captured Dakota warrior Tokei-ihto (Gojko Mitić), "When you're free, flee to Canada." The implication is that Canada was a better "model nation" than the United States for Indigenous people, but the model *genre* was still American.

Writing not specifically about Westerns but about American popular culture such as the movie and merchandise of *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993), Svetlana Boym in 2001 offered a related explanation—one that seemed almost quaint during the isolationist Trump administration:

American popular culture has become a common coin for the new globalization. Cultural differences are often masked behind visual similarities. While the availability of American entertainment in Eastern Europe and Asia was greeted at first as a sign of new openness, its expansion and ubiquity became more problematic over time, especially when Western popular culture gradually became synonymous with democratization and supplanted other experiments with democracy. (39)

Because of its ostensible openness to settlement, America's landscape (which was often actually Italy's or Spain's, in Spaghetti Westerns, or Canada's in others) became a metonym for freedom, that glittering generality. For a fistful of years after the mid-1960s, the Europeans released more than six hundred Westerns, especially in Italy, where Westerns accounted for a third of all new films in 1967 (K. Grant 12), including many Italian movies of the *Zapata* variant set during the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Gaberscek 45). According to Christopher Frayling, such films "forced [North American] critics to articulate a basic assumption which

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4 Slightly preceding Karl May, but in Russia, was the late nineteenth-century Irish-American novelist Thomas Mayne Reid, whose novels were translated into Russian and whose idea of "the American West was used to create a territory that we term conceptually the Russian 'West.' . . . The fact that Reid's novels escaped censorship in both communist and pre-revolutionary Russia reflects the 'emptiness' of his American West" (Naughton and Naughton 143–4).

has seldom been made so explicit before—that ‘the Western’ really belonged to a folk culture rather than an entrepreneurial culture; a folk culture which may have contained some Biblical, medieval and European motifs, but which, in the end, was essentially American in character” (118). In this formulation, the Western was partly borrowed and not altogether innovated—and, regardless of the plausibility here, we critics in the West finally admitted that we thought the world was always or eventually going to be American.

We should question this “assumption” before it is essentialized: the Western was not entirely a new and self-made (“entrepreneurial”) American product, and, however true it was (“essentially”) to America, it was also quite worldly. The Spanish director Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent was annoyed with the allegation that Europeans did not understand Westerns, and he and others noted that American filmmakers hardly deserved accolades for their accurate retellings of “Old World legends” (K. Grant 32) or Indigenous myths. The “world Western” was produced by people who thought about elsewhere and how it connected to home, and by people who came from abroad and brought their ideas. So it is about longing for another country, a country of the past (a prime example of nostalgia), and making it new. The implication is in some ways a revelation about the ambivalent capitalism and the nostalgic anti-modernism of so many Westerns around the globalized world, including those from Canada and the United States: they are as much a tradition as an innovation and commodification.<sup>5</sup> Leone sums this up like so: “Several great Western directors come from Europe: Ford is Irish; Zinnemann, Austrian; Lang, German; Wyler and Tourneur, French. . . . It is the Far West re-interpreted by Frankenstein and Disneyland” (qtd. in Frayling 118). In fact, one may claim, as Christine Bold does, that “[a] network of patrician easterners created the western as we now most commonly know it” (*Frontier* xvii), and that these “easterners” (not those mentioned by Leone) cultivated “a club mentality” among unofficial members who “sought to exclude . . . women, African Americans, ‘new’ immigrants [such as those

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5 Examples of Canadian anti-modernism include the nostalgia for the Mountie (Dawson 143). Sharon Wall, in *The Nurture of Nature* (2009), also points to the work of T. J. Jackson Lears in the United States and Donald C. Wright in Canada.

mentioned by Leone, I would think], and Indigenous peoples” (xviii, xix).<sup>6</sup> Bold is referring to figures such as Owen Wister, Frederic Remington, and Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>7</sup> Their vision of the West—to spell out Leone’s mixed metaphors—was hacked up and stitched back together by foreigners (hence “Frankenstein”), then made slick (hence “Disneyland”).

And as with Frankenstein and Disneyland, the subtext is modernity and its dynamics; the Western becomes a vestige of cultural imperialism disguised by cosmopolitan immigrants to appear (counterintuitively) modern—*not* in its settings but by association with the New World and the newness of its frontier, or by nostalgia, which always implies our position in a relatively modern or contemporary time. Nostalgia colours the frontier through rose-tinted lenses that distort hindsight and obscure the frontier’s ethical blind spots. Nostalgia renders it psychological and often immediate, or, as John G. Cawelti explains, not merely “geographical” but also “social and historical.” For Cawelti, the frontier is a moving target, a symbol that speaks for many different particularities: “the Western is a story which takes place on or near a frontier and consequently the Western is generally set at a particular moment in the past” (*Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*, 20). Nostalgia enables a temporally paradoxical symbolism: the frontier is a symbol of promise and, therefore, the future, even while it is a symbol of a past when first contact was still possible.

Both the mythic and historical narratives of American culture and modernization from the nineteenth to early twenty-first centuries have also affected the rest of the West—the close neighbours of the United States, especially Mexico and Canada. In the field of Canadian literature, Northrop Frye explains the national imagination as a garrison mentality—the garrison being a metaphor or myth of a remote society “surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier,’ separated from [its own communities] and from their American and British cultural sources” (“Conclusion” 205). In Chicano literature, “the Anglo American westering experience and all that it precipitated did make a decisive mark” (de Dwyer 212); along with

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6 For a detailed expansion of classic and revisionist Westerns to include African-American and Indigenous works, see Shane Joseph Willis Frankiewicz’s dissertation, *Revisionism and the Subversive Cowboy in the Classic Western* (2017).

7 For the historical details of this “frontier club,” see not only Bold but also Patrick McGee (22–5, 41–2) and his sources.

the transition from hero to anti-hero in the American Western and in American youth culture in the 1950s and '60s, in Chicano literature “[t]he virtuous epic heroes of the frontier *corridos* [or border ballads] have been replaced to a great extent by the antiheroes of modern, urban barrios” (208). In American Westerns that represent Mexicans, “Mexicans have been symbolically trapped in a fairly rigid bandido complex” (Conway 33), but Mexican Westerns include the *vaquero* (the cowboy) and the *charro* (the horseman), the latter a costumed performer, sometimes a local wanderer, a bandit, or a revolutionary (Betz 511), but usually aristocratic rather than working class (Conway 38). As a not-quite cowboy but nonetheless a related symbol, the *charro* “came to represent the traditional and Catholic values in defiance of the leftist, modernizing tendencies emanating from the cities” (Mora 47)—an anti-modern figure who would be at home in the Western as I understand it. Still farther into the South but still in the Western Hemisphere, in Argentina and Uruguay is the *gaucho*, another horseman who appeared in fiction between the 1840s and the 1920s, not in Westerns exactly but in Western-esque plots about law and order, civilization and savagery, and town and country (“Gaucho”). These plots derived in part from well-known tales about the outlaw Martín Fierro and the bandit Juan Moreira (Acree ix). Partly because of their populist inclinations and popular results, these texts are often read as representations of a country’s founding myths.

## Transnationalism and Indigeneity

One such founding myth, however, partly belies the transnational diversity of the previous examples. That myth is suggested by the titles of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Zane Grey’s *The Vanishing American* (1925), later entitled *The Vanishing Indian* (1939). In Canada, “the Vanishing Canadian” was the focus of Paul Kane’s mid-nineteenth-century paintings, inspired by his American contemporary George Catlin (Francis 16–18). Kane’s memoir, *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* (1859), “laments the inevitable disappearance of the Indian, and though the rest of the book does not deal with this subject in any detail, most reviewers took it as their theme” (Francis 23). In the spirit of the times, “Cooper’s ‘last Mohican’ was for many a symbol

of all Indians” (38). The symbolic totalization here is crucial.<sup>8</sup> In the at worst racist and at best romantic symbolism of the “Indian,” the “Indian” is a nostalgic figure: a symbol of nature and of a wild youth who died young—a sort of James Dean whose maturity would always be before him, an influence acceptable to responsible adults as long as he is dead. Dead, he cannot interfere with how others symbolize and generalize him. “The misnomer ‘Indian,’ ironically so, now binds many native peoples, several thousand tribes spread all over the Western Hemisphere . . . first glossed wrongly by Columbus as one mythical subgroup” (Lincoln 8). By locating such diverse peoples in an imagined “India,” the very diversity of their cultures and their movements was reduced. Wolfgang Hochbruck notes that “Europeans are probably a more homogenous lot” (266).

However sympathetic Westerns such as *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990) can be, they have rarely been optimistic toward Indigenous peoples. Even in *Buck and the Preacher* (Poitier, 1972), a Hollywood Western that answered the classics by focusing positively on Black cowboys and their Indigenous allies, the “Indian” chief says through his translator that “tomorrow we will be like ghosts.”<sup>9</sup> And *Dances with Wolves* helped to revive the genre of the Western in the 1990s but without returning the Vanishing “Indian” from the retreat of the Sioux into a snowy forest. In the United States, what Kenneth Lincoln calls the *Native American Renaissance* (1983) in literature began with N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1968), but no Indigenous writer in Canada had similar success until Thomas King’s anti-Western *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) (which I consider in the next chapter) was widely Canadianized in Canadian literature courses, in spite of the view that King “cannot be a Canadian Native writer because the Cherokees [to whom King’s paternal relatives belong] are not ‘native’ to Canada” (Andrews and Walton 605). Born in the United States

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8 It extends even further. Shortly after the American Civil War, a theory of “black extinction” (Interlandi) emerged—a grave misunderstanding of the reasons why African-Americans, with freedom finally theirs, were struggling with epidemics. The reasons were what they tend to be: malnutrition and unsanitary conditions related to poverty, not a racial incompatibility with modernity.

9 Coincidentally, Buck’s nemesis Deshay (no final *e*) has a variation of my rather rare anglicized name, “Deshaye.” Deshay is a white man from the American South who has travelled northward after the Civil War with a posse to coerce African-Americans to return to work (or wage slavery) in the South. Instead of appearing in the climax, Deshay is killed by Buck midway through the film.

but living and writing primarily in Canada, King has travelled and moved from country to country, a paragon of transnationalism, “bound” to the Canadian nation writ large, who has raised doubts about nationalism and its derivatives as appropriate concepts for understanding his work. In *The Inconvenient Indian* (2012), King explains why he felt compelled to write about Canada and the United States as two sides of a border: “I would have found it impossible to talk about the one without talking about the other. For most Aboriginal people, that line doesn’t exist. It’s a figment of someone else’s imagination” (xvi; see also *Truth about Stories* 102).<sup>10</sup> If the continuity of lands here may be paralleled with Indigenous theories, I would add that King has proposed terms such as “interfusional” and “associational” to describe Indigenous writing (“Godzilla” 12). What settlers saw as a vanishing was partly an assumption about their total neutralization of earlier (but also cohabiting) inhabitants, their own Manifest Destiny as landowners, and their superior Darwinian fitness—an assumption probably worsened by their misunderstanding of some Native American and First Nations migratory patterns as nomadic. If “Indians” did not settle, then they were transnational and homeless, transient, *aboriginal* in the sense of “without origins” and thus rootless as a tumble weed: always out of place in, and ultimately gone from, the nation-states that settlers were helping to build in North America.<sup>11</sup>

Such a misunderstanding is one reason why transnationalism, when used alongside “globalization” and “neoliberalism,” is not ideal as a concept that might locate the “Indian” of “cowboys and Indians” in the Western. In fact, it can also suffer as a result of slippage from “misunderstanding” to “misinformation.” As critics such as Richard Slotkin, Alan Trachtenberg, and Christine Bold have explained, the American government and media had a practice of perniciously homogenizing the identities of immigrants

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10 For more on Indigenous views of borders, see the introduction to Carlton Smith’s *Coyote Kills John Wayne* (2000, 3–5).

11 Boym notes: “By the early twentieth century modern experience became identified by George Lukacs as ‘transcendental homelessness’” (22), but King in *The Inconvenient Indian* and Francis in *The Imaginary Indian* argue that the symbol of the “Indian” is not modern but hopelessly primitive and, by the internal logic of the symbol, destined to vanish and never be a force in the modern world. I thank Len Findlay for observing this very problem of being supposedly “without origins” in an honours seminar many years ago—an observation I have never forgotten, and an early touchstone in my education on these matters.

and Indigenous peoples, “repeatedly substitut[ing] the one for the other as a way of demonizing both throughout the second half of the nineteenth century” (Bold, *Frontier* 170). Generally, the assimilationist policies directed at immigrants and Indigenous peoples in both the United States and Canada worked on assumptions of their transience and lack of origins (or the erasure thereof), and this distorted sense of transnationalism has been used as justification for removals and relocations or other forced transportations, especially of Indigenous peoples.

A different transnationalism is required. Robert Warrior argues that transnational theory “has had little impact in Native literary studies” (121) and that “[a] major reason for the lack of engagement with transnationality by Native American scholars is the widespread rejection of postcolonial studies” (122), a rejection that King articulates in his often-quoted essay “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial” (1990): “the term [post-colonial] itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion [about not only oppression but also progress] is the advent of Europeans in North America,” and the term remains “a hostage to nationalism” (11, 12). Warrior in turn asserts that “Native Americans remain colonised peoples rather than people facing post-independence realities and challenges” (122). He is also concerned that transnational theories that focus on globalization are not sufficiently critical of the homogenizing tendencies of both globalization and nationalism (126), and so

Indigenous scholars have contributed to discussions of transnationality specifically by refusing to get with the program, failing to adopt its premises, and continuing to focus on the concerns that have fueled the agenda of their world. In effect our nationalism is born out of native transnationalism, the flow and exchange of ideas and politics across our respective nations’ borders. (125)

The differentiation of not only “nationalism” but also “transnationalism” from “native transnationalism” is Warrior’s tactic for preventing the assimilation of Indigenous scholarship into post-colonial studies. He also seems to suggest, however, that Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island have an unexpected opportunity in an era of globalization because “the effects

of capitalism, which were once contained and constrained by the sovereignty of nations [specifically nation-states], now supersede and trump the power of states. Put in another way, states as opposed to different groupings increasingly are incapable of effectively addressing the needs of people within their borders. Indigenous peoples are among those different groupings” (119). Until the American government under Donald Trump began to look increasingly inward, one could have said that, in an era of neoliberal globalization, “going Indian” is going local, seeking local sovereignties and self-determinations.<sup>12</sup> In *Green Grass, Running Water*, King’s “Indians” fight John Wayne to reclaim their land in parallel with an attempt to stop a massive hydroelectric project that serves national political ends and, often, transnational or multinational corporate ends. In *Un/inhabited* (2015) and *Injun* (2016), both composed of hundreds of excerpts from American Westerns that are now in the public domain, the Nisga’a poet Jordan Abel takes back representations of the Wild West that were once owned by colonial writers and publishing companies, and thereby “prompts a reconsideration of the land ‘found’ by pioneers” (Stefanucci iv). The “native transnationalism” in these examples is microeconomic. Textual lands change hands for decentralization and, more idealistically, decolonization. The result of “native transnationalism” is both an unsettling of the place of the West in the Euro-American mindset (to follow the trend of the unsettling double entendre) and a reclamation. It once more invites the question of where the Western belongs, or to whom.

## National Genres, Myths, and Histories

Having begun big, with the world, we now move into the country.<sup>13</sup>

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12 In the related context of comparative and global Indigenous literary studies in English, Chadwick Allen emphasizes how a huge diversity of so-called “Indigenous” literatures may be considered “together (yet) *distinct*” (xiii). He also thinks that “*trans-* seems the best choice” (xv) among additive and comparative terms: “The point is not to displace the necessary, invigorating study of specific traditions and contexts but rather to complement these by augmenting and expanding broader, globally Indigenous fields of inquiry. . . . Similar to terms like *translation*, *transnational*, and *transform*, *trans-Indigenous* may be able to bear the complex, contingent asymmetry and the potential risks of unequal encounters borne by the preposition *across*” (xiv).

13 The previous section was not truly about “the world,” given that it omitted big places such as Africa, but it was about transnationality as one step up from nationality.

Transnational and national theories and genre theories all have correlations. Although nationalists want to be strict about national borders, transnationalists show the ways in which aspects of culture such as myth move across borders—and the borders themselves can change. Although some genre theorists want to be strict about the borders of genre, others show how these borders are almost always overlapping. In *Film/Genre* (1999), Rick Altman uses the same analogy: “Just as our knowledge of the changing borders of France underlies any current use of the term ‘France,’ so categories like *poetry*, *drama* and *comedy* coexist with *the musical*” (69); furthermore, “the notion of genre parallels that of nation” (86), partly because genres are sometimes thought to have organizational structures akin to that of nation-state > province > city > neighbourhood. Curiously, we might now be in an era where the nation is branded in ways similar to the branding of genres—for example, in the latter case when brightly coloured optimistic superheroes are the brand of Marvel comics in contrast with their dark counterparts in DC. In a coincidental metaphor or cultural echo of Appadurai’s explanation of modernity and globalization through “scalar dynamic[s]” (32), Margaret Cohen states that “[i]n the case of the modern novel, genre is an essential scale for producing a thick history of the novel’s diverse aesthetics” (55). Cohen puts genre alongside poetics and style; indeed, taken together these are ways in which writers practise their art and work to use conventions idiosyncratically. Altman, too, explains that “the constitution of *film* cycles and genres is a never-ceasing process, closely tied to the capitalist need for product differentiation” (*Film/Genre* 64). Broadly speaking, one might say that cultural production of transnational genres is process-oriented not only to differentiate but also to disseminate genres for profit, and that “product differentiation” (e.g., Hollywood’s setting of hundreds of Westerns in Canada) can have the unexpected result of *minimizing national-cultural differentiation* when, for example, consumers internalize the transnational genre as their own—which is arguably the case for Canadian consumption of the American Western, *and* the American consumption of the Canadian Western. For the bigger cultural producer, this internalization is an advantage, because it emboldens cultural producers at home and minimizes cultural resistance abroad. And the minimized national-cultural differentiation is also

a creator of nostalgia—for the country as it once was—that encourages further marketing of the brand.

“The country,” by which I mean “nation” but which I want to use for a moment to connote both the nation-state and the landscapes around its centres, has bearing on the Western because of a shared nationalism or patriotism that is supported in part by myth.<sup>14</sup> According to Leo Braudy, the dynamic is that “[g]enre films essentially ask the audience, ‘Do you still want to believe this?’ Popularity is the audience answering, ‘Yes’ ” (qtd. in Altman 16). This question and its answer, of course, are never stated so simply or explicitly in films or books themselves, but from them we can infer a connection between genre and myth, if myth is a story that people want to believe and affirm. In the context of the Mountie in the Canadian Western, Keith Walden suggests that the production of a myth might begin with what we think to be “a self-evident reality,” but that the “reality” is only “what [we] wanted to see” (11). Myth and genre therefore seem to be related concepts, indispensable to the Western. For Rick Altman in *Film/Genre*,

[l]ikening genre to myth provides clear gains for genre theorists. This strategy provides an organizing principle for genre study, transmuting what might have been a hollow commercial formula into a culturally functioning category. . . . In return for these benefits, however, genre critics have been forced to forego serious historical considerations in favour of the transhistorical model offered by myth. (20)

It would be easy to misunderstand “transhistorical” as “ahistorical,” but in the view that Altman explains here the myth applies universally throughout history. It is not absent from history or without bearing on history. I prefer F. W. Galan’s view that “genre is a historically conditioned concept,

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14 Partly because of the familiarity of the metaphor of centres and margins in Canadian culture and literature, nationalism (of the centre) cannot be separated from regionalism (of the margins). Frank Davey writes that “we would not be here discussing Canadian regionalism were there not also a nation-state called Canada” (“Toward” 3). Although national genres and myths are the main topic of this section, regionalism cannot be entirely relegated to subsequent sections. Colin Hill would seem to agree: “realist portraits of particular locales were a feature of the larger, national movement in Canadian literature” (102).

not a universally valid one” (qtd. in Beebee 270), and so my study compromises between transhistorical and historical models. There are various reasons for the compromise, but the most significant—the one from which the rest extrapolate—is that mythmaking and the appreciation of myth are *ideological* in the Lacanian and Althusserian sense of ideology as a mystifying system of hidden and serial assumptions, desires, values, and differentials of power (Beebee 15; Kellner 10)—what Fredric Jameson means, I think, when he refers to “the political unconscious.” In the 1981 book of that name, Jameson explained that “[g]enres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (106). The reference to a “social contract” is about expectations: the reader’s and the writer’s and what they are supposed to do for each other. Using Janice Radway’s terminology related to romance and Will Wright’s historical positioning of the Western (itself a romance), Thomas O. Beebee in *The Ideology of Genre* (1994) explains that Westerns are “compensatory literature” (4). They compensate for men’s felt lack of individual agency—in an era of “postindustrial capitalism that has de-emphasized the individual” (6)—with the proposition that “[a] man acting alone can solve a collective problem” (6). This explanation is historically situated in economics but is also mythic, partly because of its connotations of the hero, a romantic archetype one step removed from the heaven and hell of gods and demons into the world of human experience (Frye, *Anatomy* 139–40). During the 2016 Democratic National Convention, President Barack Obama said that one person—namely, the Republican nominee, Donald Trump—cannot solve all of America’s problems, contrary to Trump’s assertions (“Barack”); Obama was identifying a myth at work in Trump’s campaign and the popular support for his candidacy. He could have called Trump a cowboy to situate the latter’s self-styled heroism. (I have already footnoted the Cowboys for Trump organization.) In effect, the Western historicizes a myth, a myth closely associated with the hero in transhistorical romances and epics. Beebee’s and Obama’s ideological insights can help us to understand historical attitudes, causes and effects, and (through Beebee and Altman) the phases of genres.

This book is, in fact, a study of the phases of the Western in over a century of Canadian literature, beginning at the turn of the twentieth

century and extending to the present. Consider, for example, how the early Canadian Westerns, such as Ralph Connor's *Black Rock* in 1898 or H. A. Cody's *The Frontiersman* in 1910, might be (mis)recognized as other genres—or unrecognized entirely—unless they are understood in their historical context and seen as precursors. They can be described as sentimental romances, or melodramas, or adventures. Any early example of a genre is easy to associate with similar precursors and contemporaries, contrary to Aristotle's attempt to isolate them, which has ironically had "the effect of narrowing genre theory ever since" (Altman, *Film/Genre* 2). To the contrary, Frye argues that the ur-categories of romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire are "pregeneric elements of literature" (and arguably also film) that can be described as "*mythoi* or generic plots" (*Anatomy* 162). For his part, Frye thus allows for a widening of genre theory. Altman, meanwhile, counters Aristotle by showing that in the late nineteenth century the Western began as Wild West films, Western chase films, Western comedies, Western scenics, Western melodramas, Western romances, Western adventures, and Western epics (*Film/Genre* 36, 52)—the adjective "Western" describing other genres before being christened as its own. As I wondered with less context nearer to the beginning of this book, are Eastwood's Dirty Harry movies Westerns, considering that he used *Coogan's Bluff* (Siegel, 1968) as an obviously self-conscious transition from his penultimate Westerns to his early cop movies? Not quite, but they cannot be fully understood unless their titular rogue cop is compared to the outlaw-lawman of the Western or other heroes. Significantly, the early Canadian Westerns were not "Canadian Westerns" that became a genre called simply "the Canadian." Nor were they labelled with food, as Italian Westerns were—Spaghetti Westerns—or as others that I mentioned in the introduction, possibly because the contiguity of the Canadian and American landscapes enabled directional terms to work perfectly well. They were simply called "Northerns" or "Northwesterns," as Pierre Berton points out in *Hollywood's Canada* (1975) and elsewhere, so that region rather than nation was in the foreground, just as it is with the Western, regardless of its American associations. (Alan Ladd, famous for playing the eponymous hero in the 1953 film *Shane*, also played a Mountie in Raoul Walsh's 1954 film *Saskatchewan*.) Certainly most people, even many scholars, do not know about or recognize the existence of the Canadian Western

as I write this book. Altman asks why “some structures fail to achieve generic recognition” (*Film/Genre* 50) while others are canonized. One answer is that the ideology of nationalism enforces borders, and a genre with strong associations with a nation may be policed by its nationalism so that the borders of the genre become more difficult to cross. Another is that the American Western assimilated the Northwestern into a phase of its development as a renewed and repositioned vision of the frontier, providing variation on a theme—Canada as spinoff—during the increasing popularity of the Western into the 1950s, when overexposure eventually demanded recourse to the new cycle that is now strongly associated with Sergio Leone and Clint Eastwood. In fact, as the genre moved from nearer (Canada and Mexico) to farther countries, Leone’s and Eastwood’s roles in transnationalizing the Western were a widening of the Western’s scope that was already happening in the very early twentieth century with the Northwesterns, as I will show in chapter 3. It also seemed to be happening in the United States in novels such as Pauline Hopkins’s *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902–3) (Frankiewicz 168–9, 174–7), which happens to begin with a line about the Canadian border and the intersection of Black, Indigenous, and white people there.<sup>15</sup>

Presented with the historical arc of the Canadian Western, Canadian as well as American readers will be more likely to accept that Canadian literature is a home of the genre—even if genres themselves are not exclusive homes for texts, and if texts never really feel that sense of “belonging” (Derrida 65) in a single genre. The Canadian Westerns that are most explicit about their lack of belonging only in the genre of the Western are, predictably, the postmodern Canadian Westerns—such as Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, George Bowering’s *Caprice* (1987), Paulette Jiles’s *Jesse James Poems* (1988), and (though he has distanced himself from the colonial implications of the term “postmodern” just as he has with “post-colonial”) Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*. These can also be read as examples of what Linda Hutcheon calls (in various essays and books) “historiographic metafiction,” itself a genre,

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15 Mourning Dove’s (Hum-Ishu-Ma’s) *Cogewea* (1927) might also be included here as a prototype of expanding the Western, but its Westernness is highly debatable and problematic, perhaps more so than with Hopkins’s *Winona*.

one that raises self-conscious questions about the writing of history and about myth. In suggesting that historiographic metafiction is a genre but that it is not the exclusive name for some of these books that should also be called Westerns, and in surveying quite widely to find analogues and mutual influences of the Western, I am obviously not suggesting that all analogues are classic Westerns or that any genre has “clear, stable identities and borders” (Altman, *Film/Genre* 16). Rather, I like Beebee’s focus on “generic instability” (256–67) and the analogies that Beebee finds in use by other scholars, notwithstanding the inaccuracies of the genealogical analogy that Altman debunks (*Film/Genre* 64–8): genre is like a family resemblance; genre is like a colour spectrum; genre is like a Venn diagram, as Beebee himself demonstrates (252, 256–7, 259–60); and so on. These analogies are of continuity. So, I mean to help readers see the genre’s border crossings and crossovers with other genres, such as the literary and historical Western developed by Guy Vanderhaeghe, and such as adventure stories for boys and girls along the lines of Cody’s *Rod of the Lone Patrol* (1916) and *Jess of the Rebel Trail* (1921). And I want us to recognize the temporal continuity between Cody and Vanderhaeghe, separated though they are by seventy-odd years, even if the continuity is debatable. According to Beebee, it is precisely the text whose genre is debatable that will “expos[e] its ideology” (19) when we attempt to classify it. He explains that ideology, as invisible as a dream but all the more effective,

simultaneously holds a society together by allowing it to communicate with itself in shorthand and pushes society apart by conflicting with people’s realities. It is only in the deformations and contradictions of writing and thinking that we can recognize ideology; genre is one of those observable deformations, a pattern . . . that reveals the force of ideology. (18)

The “generic instability” proposed by the “Canadianness” of the Western has the potential to lead to more ideological insightfulness than would a study of the stabilized American Westerns, by which I mean the classics that are the least revisionist and the least revised. In fact, for the same reason, many critics are drawn to complex American Westerns such as

*Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992) because they at least temporarily seem to offer generic alternatives, such as the anti- or post-Western premise of what later becomes the unapologetically pro-Western conclusion of *Unforgiven*. And as we read Westerns through time, a Jamesonian historical method enables us to see how the genre bends according to how commodified it is, whether in the middlebrow phase of Connor's and Cody's 1900s and 1910s, the lowbrow pulp fiction of the 1940s, or the mainly highbrow literary Westerns from the 1970s to the present. According to Ortega y Gasset, "each epoch favors a certain genre" (qtd. and trans. in Beebee 272), as almost any study of popular culture would confirm—were it studying a time before satellite radio and the Internet's on-demand broadcasting, at least.

On the topic of media, this book assumes that genres are mobile not only across the borders of nations but also across the borders of media. The early Canadian Westerns are situated at a phase when comparative exemplars such as Owen Wister's 1902 novel *The Virginian* had already appeared, prior to the imitation of these exemplars and their temporary stabilization into the genre of the Western in film later that decade (Altman, *Film/Genre* 35). One of Altman's perplexing arguments is that the temporary stabilization of the genre in late nineteenth-century fiction was very different from the temporary stabilization of the genre in early twentieth-century film, where it had to be "recreated" (*Film/Genre* 35)—an argument that poses a problem for this book, which is mostly about literature but draws on theories of genre in various media, as Beebee does in *The Ideology of Genre*. Different media, according to Altman, produce different genres even when "the outward trappings" are very similar and they have a "shared name" (*Film/Genre* 36, 35); thus, pre-1910 films that used iconography from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show were not Westerns, because the "Show" was not a film. If this claim is true, what happens when we read Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*? Although Ondaatje integrates a dime-novel cover and narrative into the book, along with other print media such as the newspaper, scholars such as Dennis Cooley and Linda Hutcheon have demonstrated that the cinematic point of view and treatment of sound associate the book with films. Presumably, these associated films are Westerns, given the photograph of Ondaatje as a boy dressed in a cowboy costume that resembles what's worn on film more than what's described in literature. The generic sources of the first major

literary Western in Canada were not only other print media but also the moving pictures. The same is true of so many earlier books.

Why would Altman draw the line at intermedial origins of genres when he connects them intramedially? (What would Altman do with adaptations of novels into movies, or with the effects of fan fiction on producers and directors?<sup>16</sup>) Since the first decade of the twentieth century, novelists have been watching movies, and filmmakers have always been reading novels and other books. Although I agree with the McLuhanism that adaptation into a new medium can fundamentally change the message, this change does not necessarily exclude the new text from the genre(s) of its precursors. Genres are not entirely message-dependent, otherwise a revisionist Western would be impossible, but some genres are obviously better suited to some messages than others. The translation and variation of a genre across media are simply more expressions of the instability of any genre. When Altman asks where genres are located, he finds them not only in texts but also in the intentions, uses, and expectations of the writers, producers, institutions, and readers surrounding those texts. Genre is not a closed system. I also agree with another McLuhanism, which is that new media contain old media, so—like nesting dolls—they can be recursively opened up. Altman's own openness suggests that his closing of the borders between media is a convenience to ensure a manageable scope to his research. Moretti's distant reading is another management of scope.

I have already (in the introduction) rationalized the scope of my book, so here I leave you with a thought experiment. What if we replaced “genre” with “nation” in the previous paragraph?

Nations are not entirely message-dependent, otherwise change would be impossible, but some nations are obviously better suited to some messages than others. The translation and variation of a nation across media are simply more expressions of the instability of any nation. Nations are located not only in texts but also in the intentions, uses, and expectations

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16 Possible inconsistencies in *Film/Genre*, such as Altman's classification of *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, 1903) as a blend of travel and crime genres (35) but his later acceptance of it as a Western (48), may be attributable to his remarkable ability to alternate and compare his critical methods, as in chapter 3, where he interprets genre from the point of view first of the critic and then of the producer.

of the writers, producers, institutions, and readers surrounding those texts. Nation is not a closed system.

## Frontier Theses and Myths

Given the close relationship between the United States and Canada, and their centrality as producers of the Western in English, what are their comparable myths, and how should they be situated historically? William H. Katerberg argues that Canadians did have historians, as the United States had Frederick Jackson Turner, who created a “frontier thesis” that informed Canadian mythopoeia: “Together, the ‘staples thesis’ of Harold A. Innis and the ‘metropolitan-hinterland’ paradigm of J. M. S. Careless [based in part on Innis’s centre-margin dichotomy] provide the basis for a Canadian frontier thesis” (548).<sup>17</sup> Basically, Innis recognized Canada as a resource economy that sent staples or basic goods such as pulp and wheat back to Britain and, without other economies of its own, would remain a frontier. Careless developed the idea to suggest that centres are needed to spread civilization outward. Katerberg further explains that “the frontier West in American culture typically is a land all its own, with its own logic and dynamic, where people go to escape the burdens of the civilized world. But in the Canadian imagination, frontiers usually are tied to the larger world, as peripheries shaped and controlled by distant cities and capitols” (545). This view agrees with that of Brian Dippie, who raises the possibility that there is “one West, two myths” (509); he uses Daniel Francis’s terms to differentiate “the Mild West north of the border, and the Wild West south of it” (510). Dippie also acknowledges that historians have often demanded that the sensational histories of the Indian Wars and Custer’s Last Stand be considered alongside the usually peaceful social history of the American West; however, in terms of myths rather than history, Francis’s Mild/Wild distinction seems to stand. It also supports the Frygian theory of the garrison mentality in which a Canadian society bands together in a centre for protection against an extreme wilderness at the margins, rather than going it alone the more American way.

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17 A preceding and often parallel study is that of D. M. R. Bentley, “The Mower and the Boneless Acrobat: Notes on the Stances of Baseland and Hinterland in Canadian Poetry.” *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1983, pp. 5-48.

Katerberg's view also indirectly affirms that of Dick Harrison, one of the significant regionalists whose work during Canada's nationalistic 1970s was meaningfully comparative, and I want to focus on Harrison partly because he was not a historian but a literary scholar whose breadth of reading in *Unnamed Country* (1977) is a major contribution to genre studies. Harrison looked mainly at Prairie fiction but also reflected on some examples of the "formula Western" ("Across" 52; *Unnamed* 157) in the United States and Canada. He claims that the myths made in Canada were just not quite the same myths as in the United States:

The Canadian West was not, of course, a frontier in the sense that the American West was, and this was not merely because order usually preceded settlement. It had much to do with what the West represented to the country as a whole. The prairies were not thought of as the leading edge of a continuously expanding nation but as a colony developed separately which had to be tied in to confederation with a railroad and two armies. Canada itself was not an Atlantic seaboard nation seeking cultural independence from Europe but a landlocked nation struggling to maintain its British character. Canadians were not looking to an advancing frontier to provide their identity or mature their national character, and western writers could not think of themselves as at the centre of forces which were shaping their nation's ideals. The fact that the Canadian fictional prairie is not a frontier in the usual sense and does not yield to the application of Turner's thesis remains the most salient and the most consistent distinction between the literary fictions of the two Wests as it was between popular fictions. ("Across" 51; for echoes, see also *Unnamed* 74)

Although Harrison's diction here does suggest that he is thinking not of history but of literature (i.e., "represented," "thought of," "fictional prairie," "literary fictions"), he also explains several historical facts, possibly over-emphasizing history because of an assumption that Canada had not only *different* myths but simply not enough of them. In "Across the Medicine

Line': Problems in Comparing Canadian and American Western Fiction" (1977), Harrison concludes that Canada's "under-mythicized West" and America's "over-mythicized West" (55) conceptualize subtly divergent national identities. Katerberg's view of the independence of the American Western aligns with Harrison's perspective on the interdependency of Canadian and British identities, and this binary of independent and inter/dependent nationalities is a theme in the scholarship that echoes throughout this book too.

The North complicates this binary, however. In " 'Across the Medicine Line,' " Harrison compares Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) to Connor's *Corporal Cameron* ten years later (1912) but does not reflect on the widespread popularity of other examples of the Northwestern and how, in hundreds of stories, novels, and movies set in Canada, it could have "under-mythicized" the region—a mistake that we have already seen with Mitchell's comparative views. Still, in *Unnamed Country* he counts at least "150 volumes of fiction in which Mounties play a prominent part" (157). *Corporal Cameron* (as Harrison's gold standard) is one such example of Mountie fiction, but its geographical range in the latter half (after Cameron's movement from Scotland through Canada) is mainly Northern or Northwestern. The novel is set partly around southwestern Alberta while invoking the midlands of Saskatchewan and the North-West Resistance of 1885 when, in Canada, the West was synonymous with the Northwest. The North-West Resistance concluded at Batoche, Saskatchewan, which is about as far to the north as North Battleford—still a long way south of the midpoint of the province that demarcates the beginning of Northern Saskatchewan at La Ronge. Furthermore, today we still talk of "Northern Ontario" when referring to locations as far south and west as Lake of the Woods, barely north of the 49th parallel, or even Sudbury, which is around the 46th. The relativity of these terms helps me and others to suggest that Canada has a North that is conceptually parallel to the West (Grace 12). We simply cannot underemphasize nordicity when we accept that Mountie fiction and other Northwesterns create "the nearest approach we have to a popular art form of the Canadian West analogous to the American Western" (Harrison, *Unnamed* 156)—with the exception, I would add, of "Canadian" books set in the United States that feature fictionalized American historical figures such as Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and Calamity Jane. Significantly,

in the many movies that Berton reflects upon in *Hollywood's Canada*, the geography is always Northern and almost always historically inaccurate, and the compulsion to reproduce a fantasy (not merely a falsehood) is a defining trait of mythmaking (Walden 8–11). Harrison does not neglect the North, but he underemphasizes its relevance to the Western.

The only other dispute I have with Harrison's perceptive explanation is that the Canadian West *does* seem to have been a continuous expansion, an "advancing frontier," an "edge." Surely Connor's *Black Rock* and Cody's *The Frontiersman* attest to expanding settlements in their representations of the hard labour, isolation, and associated intemperance of early industrial towns in the Northwest, and *Corporal Cameron* attests to the North-West Mounted Police's role in protecting that expansion. Surely the gaining of the North-West Territories and the spanning of the continent from east to west also played a part in defining a national consciousness, even if "Canadians were not looking" for one. If for Britain it was only another colony, people in Canada must surely have understood that it was special because of its vast size, as with Australia, and that the also considerable size of the United States and its potentially related independence would create similar possibilities for Canada. (The United States' population was much bigger too, and so Canada's sense of possibility might have been disproportionate in terms of that metric.) Harrison elsewhere admits that by 1870 "romantic traditions" (*Unnamed* 5) in the depiction of the American West, and possibly already the Canadian West, were influencing perceptions of the actual West, and this, too, is a point that deserves more emphasis. The Canadian West was sometimes following American "romantic traditions" of the West rather than its own history.

The fact of Canada's longer existence as a British colony informs Harrison's related statements about an alternative to the frontier myth. Remember Harrison's view that, in Canada, "order usually preceded settlement." He also claims that the alternative to the frontier myth is an Edenic garden myth based on an idea of order:<sup>18</sup>

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18 See also Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) for a theory of the pastoral American landscape marked by technology, and Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1984) for a vision of the landscape as a feminine entity cultivated into "a maternal 'garden'" (5). In Canada, see Shelley Boyd's *Garden Plots: Canadian Women Writers and Their Literary Gardens* (2013).

The West to be found in English Canadian fiction is rarely a “frontier.” If a “frontier” is taken to be that meeting point of advancing civilization and untamed nature, *where civilized order confronts unordered wilderness*, then there is no reason to expect one, since the frontier era was virtually over by the time the literature began. . . . When most of the early novelists began to come west with the bulk of settlement from Ontario, Great Britain, and the American Middle West, they came into incredibly rigorous pioneer conditions, but not to the edge of a trackless wilderness. (*Unnamed* 73, emphasis added)

Although Harrison might have read Connor’s description of the Northwest as “God’s own open country” (*Corporal* 187) and inferred that, with God in it, it has the orderliness not only of an English garden but also of Eden, it is nevertheless “open” (not walled as in Andrew Marvell’s English garden). In Cody’s *The Frontiersman* (one of Harrison’s few meaningful omissions but one that demands to be considered partly because of its title) there are only two tracks: one behind the heroic Keith Steadman, whose trek into “the great white silence” (9) of the snowy North leaves a trail for a dog thought to be a wolf to follow (10); the second “an Indian trail which wound its devious way through the wilderness” (311) that is also described as “a roadless wilderness” (30). These examples from the genre suggest that, in fact, Canadian literature has its own “trackless wilderness.” But then there is that idea of order, as Harrison continues:

One could say that the conception of order in Wister’s West is inductive—order is generated from the immediate particulars of experience—while that of Connor’s West is deductive—order descends logically from higher precepts to which the individual has no access. . . . This willingness to see the encompassing *order as in some way sacred* is a strong element in the Garden Myth of the early fiction. (*Unnamed* 79, emphasis added)

These are indeed appropriate inferences based on the comparison of Wister's style of hero (à la outlaw) and Connor's (à la Mountie). For Connor, these "higher precepts" were British authority and Christian ethics brought together through imperialism. In the "Northwestern Cross" chapter, my reading of Connor and Cody—both of whom were ministers and missionaries— shows that Christianity and related aspects of the theory of Manifest Destiny are a part of the idea of West. Katerberg explains that, "[t]o be sure, Anglo-Canadian dreams of the Dominion as an equal partner with Britain differed from American notions of manifest destiny, but they did so in the details more than in scope" (547); "both re-envisioned the region as marvelously endowed by the Creator" (546) with a "unique vitality" (547). Doug Owsram in *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856–1900* (1980) links the parts of Manifest Destiny in his title: Eden, expansion, West. The syllogistic logic of Owsram's title makes it almost commonsensical.

If you recall from the introduction of this book that the political contexts of leftward and rightward swings are relevant to the Canadian Western, my conclusion here is that Canada and the United States both had conservative dimensions in their different frontier theses and Manifest Destinies. There was not yet a leftward swing, but there was a different baseline for shared conservatism. In Canada, the frontier destiny was both less and more conservative than in the United States: less conservative because it was imagined as less violent and less chaotic; more conservative because writers of the Canadian Western did not yet want to break with the authority of Christianity and the British Empire. American writers wanted to build the next big thing, and for it to be new. In this era, Canadian writers wanted that thing to be suitable to the old.

## The Individual in Myth

Eventually we scale down to the individual, the atom of the nuclear family, but the mythic resonance of the individual is so strong that it arcs between region and nation. The so-called myth of the West depends largely on the individual in both countries, and this individual is strongly associated with the nation and the land. One of the most memorable visual examples (also American) is when the namesake of the movie *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) rides out of the background of plains and mountains in the opening sequence,

sighted along a toy gun and associated through his rawhide jacket with the dun colours of both the deer and the prairie. When Canadian regionalist scholarship came of age in the 1960s and '70s, it argued that the land and the landscape were defining features of the individual in the West. Henry Kreisel's "The Prairie: A State of Mind" (1968), Laurie Ricou's *Vertical Man / Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1973), and Harrison's *Unnamed Country* all have this focus, to different degrees. Harrison states that he wanted to correct Edward McCourt's neglect of Prairie uniqueness in *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1949) and Ricou's lack of concentration on "the influence of culture on man's reaction to the landscape" (*Unnamed* xiii). According to Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh, however, the studies that predate *Unnamed Country*, and that study too, "constructed a category of 'Canadian prairie writing' in which landscape dominates culture and geography effaces history" (8). According to Calder, Wardhaugh, and other critics, the corrective was in the writing of Robert Kroetsch and an associated set of authors who were trying to show how mythic the landscape was—how created by the imagination, how historiographic, and yet how independently influential. Not until Robert Thacker's *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (1989) did regionalism become transnationally mythic as an exploration of the psychological frontier in both Canada and the United States.

Although the notion of the land as one's own mind is compelling, partly because it would entail the formation of self and the revelation of self-knowledge, the individual's association with the land may never be assumed to be friendly. The Western needs to be acknowledged as Western fiction that depends on violence, usually individual acts of violence that are trigger-happily protective or retributive, but sometimes the more general cultural violence involved in the engagement with First Nations, Native Americans, Mexicans, and—crucially—the land itself, or "Indians" as metonyms of the land. Following Harrison, and Frye's concept of the garrison mentality, Ronald Tranquilla explains that "the myth of the Western developed part of [the garrison mentality]. Here, the hero is in combat with nature—'knowing it, measuring it, controlling it, and, if need be, fighting it'" (74). The series of gerunds Tranquilla quotes here is from Connor's *Corporal Cameron*, a novel in which the Mountie usually reserves "fighting" for the last resort and whose knowledge is power: to

know is to control. Knowing nature, we can “measure” out our own defences against it. Tranquilla notices that Harrison describes the symbol of the house as a defence against the environment (74), and this observation I think deserves emphasis; preoccupied with the garrison mentality, a defensive concept (the shield), we might forget that the Western almost always prominently involves aggression and violence: “combat,” usually involving firearms (the sword). The garrison mentality is thus anti-Western, a mentality that might have been created by the myth of the West or, perhaps more accurately, to counter that myth. Explanations of the Western would be incomplete if they did not consider the emphatic, morally charged human violence that drives and resolves almost all stories in the Western and its spinoffs. In my chapter on “Degeneration through Violence,” I offer an interpretation of Canadian Westerns that seem to suggest, contrary to Slotkin’s theory of American regeneration through violence, that violence irreparably damages the individual. For fictional violence to be cathartic and vicarious in its effects depends in part on a viewer’s identification with an ideology of individualism that has heroic potential: me against the world, or more accurately, me against society.

Harrison suggests that in the United States there is “a fascination with individualism which makes the hero unable to submit to the social contract even when he has helped to draft it,” whereas in Canada “the isolation of characters . . . results from a life of self-abnegation” (“Across” 52). Here he, too, echoes Frye, whose concept of the garrison mentality suggests that Canadians faced with the frontier tended to become less individualistic and more socially responsible. Frye explains: “A garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable. In a perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter. . . . The real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group” (“Conclusion” 226). In other words, you fight alongside your comrades or you leave them and face the wilderness alone, whether to triumph over it or to run back to some other home. I wonder about this idea; it is questionable as an explanation of ideology that is specifically Canadian. Some prominent Canadian writers of the Western were and are highly individualistic in temperament and interests, such as Connor and Ondaatje, and though Connor with his loyalties and wartime experience

may never really be described as a “deserter,” Ondaatje is a radical individualist in his fascination for characters with strong social connections who become anti-social, such as Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, and Buddy Bolden (the latter from the 1976 novel *Coming Through Slaughter*). With similar reservations, D. M. R. Bentley argues that the garrison mentality is useless as a concept, partly because American literature is no less concerned with the threat of the wilderness than Canadian literature is:

Frye attributes the emergence of the “garrison mentality” in “the Canadian imagination” to the existence of “[s]mall and isolated communities surrounded by a physical or psychological ‘frontier,’ [and] separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources.” . . . Since the concept of “frontier” is at least as suggestive of American as of Canadian culture, it is not at all surprising to find a parallel (and possible source) of the “garrison mentality” in Oscar Handlin’s *Race and Nationality in American Life* (1957), where early European migrants to what became the United States are envisaged as “living in clearings” in the “dark forest, the secret home of unknown beings,” and attempting in a “circumscribed area . . . [to] keep out the wilderness that ever threatened to break them.” Whatever its origins, sources, and evidential basis, the “garrison mentality” is at best an idiosyncratic, limited, and reductive notion that has little explanatory power. (6–7)

Unless, of course, it applies not only to Canada but also to other countries that have a frontier or had one during their formative phases. Frye himself acknowledges this possibility when he writes, in the same text, that “many Canadian cultural phenomena are not peculiarly Canadian at all, but are typical of their wider North American and Western contexts” (214). For younger countries, the formative phases might still be a recent memory that continues to influence their sense of national identity, as may be the case in both Canada and the United States. On the theme of youth, Harrison argues that the search for self is a basic drive of Western fiction in Canada—and this search, too, must in some way be individualistic.

But no one except a hermit or a survivalist is equipped to live as a true self-reliant and self-sufficient being, and so a pure individualism is mostly a myth. Frye argues that “the Canadian literary mind, beginning as it did so late in the cultural history of the West, was established on a basis, not of myth, but of history” (“Conclusion” 231). I do not quite agree, but we can look to the history and present of our laws and institutions, which do in fact reveal Canada to be substantively less individualistic—less capitalist, more socialist—than the United States. But the Western usually places less emphasis on interdependence than on self-reliance, and themes of interdependence in the Canadian Western are more noticeable in the literary Westerns after the 1960s, which are as close to “anti-Westerns” as there are in Canada.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, the Western as a national genre is transnational and even interdependent, insofar as some American Westerns look to the North as a new frontier. The Western yokes together in North America the United States and Canada (and almost certainly Mexico, though that is beyond the scope of this study). The overlap is extraordinarily significant, and figures such as the Mountie that are supposed to differentiate national temperaments are not as consistently special as we tend to assume. Even nordicity is relative, partly because all of these figures and tropes are made to suit our fictions. Scholars such as Thacker and Harrison are better-read than I am, but I am skeptical of the notion that Canada’s West or North is somehow truer and less mythic than that of the United States, or vice versa. Myths are essential to the genre of the Western, as they are to literature in general, and these myths seep out of fiction into our political water supplies. It is our expectations of genre, including national genre, that allow us as readers to find more differences than similarities, so that most Canadians and Americans (I would bet) want to think that they are really very different from each other. Genre theory and its focus on adaptability and overlap produce its own kind of readers who read things transnationally. Meanwhile, theories of ideology expose national difference (in terms of the nation-state) in North America as a symptom of trying to force categories upon national identities and tendencies. I know that there

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19 The historical placement of this shift is corroborated by Ronald Sutherland in *The New Hero* (1977) (7–8, 10, 16).

is a difference, but not in most Westerns, partly because—as its name implies—it is a regional genre that can stand in for a national one.

## Regionalism and the Canadian West

Although the beginning of this book might seem to have opened up an anything-goes frontier for the Western to justify a study of the Canadian Western, I have commented in the preceding pages on the genre's historical scope and limits related to national myths. However, according to Ronald Sutherland in *The New Hero* (1977), “[i]n Canada, what myths did develop . . . were generally regional . . . [in] the absence of all-embracing positive myths . . . of ‘Canadianism’ ” (5).<sup>20</sup> In Canada, “[p]revious to [the latter 1840s] there had been very little attention paid to the West” (Owram 36), but soon thereafter a concern over American expansionism inspired further attempts—now with the railway in mind—of “an overland route to Asia” (32) that would economically support British imperialism and protect Canada from the United States. The railway would not be completed until 1885, but the intervening years did much to inspire national dreams and the associated myth of the West. (The North-Western Territory was transferred to Canada in 1870, when it became officially known as the North-West Territories.) Although Canadians now pay more attention to the Canadian West, regionalism is still essential to this book because book-length studies of the Canadian *Western* are few and far between (e.g., those of Katherine Ann Roberts and Johannes Fehrle), and a critical framework that was closer to home than American frameworks was necessary even to my equivocating nationalism.

In terms of my own borders, I draw as boundaries my own experience of writing in the early twenty-first century (and in the Atlantic East) about a West associated with late nineteenth-century visions of the Prairies, from Manitoba to the Rockies, where “the far West” of Alberta becomes “the near East” of British Columbia (McCourt, qtd. in Harrison, *Unnamed* xv) or “the West beyond the West” (Katerberg 554). On the other axis, my boundaries begin south of the Far North: from the Yukon down to the Medicine Line (the 49th parallel) and into the northwestern United

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20 Sutherland's “positive myths” of America are “‘Manifest Destiny’ and ‘Garden of the World’ [and] ‘American Dream’ ” (5).

States, sometimes as far as the Southwest (the likely setting of the Luke Price Westerns in my chapter on the '40s pulps) because of its favoured position as a setting in so many American Westerns. Occasionally I draw on Westerns or Western-like texts from Eastern Canada, such as Cody's 1916 novel *Rod of the Lone Patrol*, as evidence that the West was, especially early on, seen by " 'Eastern' eyes" (Harrison, *Unnamed* 1; see also Bold, *Frontier* xviii, and Bowering, *Caprice* 34). Generally, the Westerns in this book are set in Western Canada or the Western United States, and sometimes both. Sometimes, the West is represented generically enough that readers must watch for telling details to distinguish state from state, province from province, or state from province.

Any region, however, is not strictly delimited. Aritha van Herk refers to an "unlimited and undefinable space, the westness of west" (*Stampede* 97) that is "a real place" only in "story" (92). Relatedly, using keywords of "imagination" and "community" from Benedict Anderson, Herb Wyile explains that, "[i]n more recent theorizing about the concept [of region] in various disciplines from geography to political science to literary criticism, region is increasingly being viewed not as a geographical/cultural/political given but as a construct, a kind of imagined and at times strategic sense of cohesion and community, projected usually from without but also from within . . . as an assumed or imposed homogeneity and/or unity" (*Anne* 8). I return to this view of region soon, in the section entitled "The West Turns North." Of course, the North and West have to be considered too—for example, as the compound North-West. Sherrill E. Grace estimates that "at first glance it seems that, perhaps since [the] Meech Lake [Accord] (1987), there has been a rush of voices struggling to create and enter a debate about Canada and the North. However, a closer look reveals that Canadians have been attempting to define themselves and Canada by invoking the North or their nordicity for a very long time" (31). Indeed, when political summits and Olympics make their way to Canada, the staging of nordicity is obvious, it, too, projecting Wyile's "cohesion and community"—regions staged for national gains.

Whereas in thinking through region Henri Lefebvre focuses on sites of production, and Edward Soja focuses on the uneven production, concentration, and redistribution of resources, Wyile brings together their economic definitions of regions, arguing that regional literature is now

characterized by the frustration that the (Eastern) region's compact with the nation is no longer a *fair deal*. The reason is that the deal depends on trapping the East in the same tourist trap that was supposed to capture the imaginations and dollars of seasonal visitors: the idea of the East as “an unspoiled, authentic, pre-modern culture” and “quaint pastoral retreat” (22). Almost the same can be said of ranchland in the West, where the theme of Western alienation comes from a frustration with the unfair deal of national energy programs and transfer payments that redistribute Alberta's wealth. One difference is that Alberta, for at least fifty years—Gordon Pitts claiming in 2010 that “[t]his westward push of power has been the story of Canada over the past one hundred years” (10)—has been a consistent leader in the Canadian economy in spite of the nation, unlike Newfoundland or the Maritimes. The East can be seen as “reduced to selling back to the rest of the country a very stylized and romanticized version of the underdevelopment in which those more powerful regions have played a large part” (Wyile, *Anne* 23). Janice Kulyk Keefer suggests in *Under Eastern Eyes* (1985) that a Canadian version of Turner's frontier thesis is at work when we assume that the East is the place of tradition and the West of adventurous experimentation (qtd. in Wyile, *Anne* 23), and yet to me the movement to the West and “the idea of West”—to echo Glenn Gould's radio documentary entitled “Idea of North” (1967)—are at least as conservative, partly because they depend on (or else comment liberally upon) theories of ever-expanding property and capital, and the myth of an Eden that can still be, temporarily, exploited. In this book on Westerns, the region like the frontier is a moving target, ideational as well as real, lost in time and found not only in its place but in many of the places where its ideas have travelled.

## Regions of the Past

In some ways, Alison Calder has the same concern about the West as Herb Wyile has about the East, insofar as both regions have had to remain timelessly and idealistically rural or become generically urban, to gain from readers who buy books for a spectrum of reasons such as nostalgia, on the one hand, and as a confirmation of their globalized sensibilities on the other. In *History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies* (2005), one of Calder and Robert Wardhaugh's most significant questions

about the West is more temporal than spatial: “When is the prairie?” (3) The question echoes, of course, one that is familiar to Canadianists but just as enigmatic, Frye’s “Where is here?” (“Conclusion” 220). Frye’s question was already an adaptation of “Who am I?” By removing the first-person pronoun, Frye points away from the individual toward the “where,” the place that is also the “here,” which becomes a self-effacing but nation-defining landscape consistent with his theory of the garrison mentality. There are remarks upon the limitations of this theory elsewhere in this chapter, but it also questionable here in terms of regionalism; Donald G. Stephens claims that “[the West] is a land of optimism, of hope, for everyone knows that the cycle will go on, and that some year, sometime, it will be the best year yet. The ‘garrison mentality’ so obvious in the writing of Eastern Canada . . . is not prominent in that of Western Canada” (2). For Stephens, the West is a place of looking forward to the future (“the best year yet”), even if the writing of the West is so often nostalgic (the best future being the past). Calder and Wardhaugh’s alternative to Frye is in the same tradition but privileges the temporal dimension to redress the balance between spatial and temporal terms—especially because the balance often tips toward the past in our imagination of regions, and might need to be tipped to the present.

Why would Canadians want to indulge in Westerns when these Westerns encourage people to think that, in the West, everyone is stuck in the past? Nostalgia, of course, and its rose-coloured glasses, but the answer requires more than that. Sue Sorensen writes that “[t]o get the wheels of your snazzy new SUV stuck in the ruts of the old dirt track of *rural versus urban* is to demonstrate that you haven’t been reading your Kroetsch” (18, emphasis added) or, as she also suggests, your Vanderhaeghe. Sorensen reports that Guy Vanderhaeghe complained that cities are ignored in Prairie fiction (15), and yet she observes that “Vanderhaeghe’s most recent novels, *The Englishman’s Boy* and *The Last Crossing* [and then *A Good Man*] are, for the most part, forays back into prairie history and into the countryside” (16). Why? I have already answered the question by suggesting that Westerns respond to a contemporary but anti-modernist shift back to the conservatism of the turn of the century to the 1920s (see also Brégent-Heald, “James” 692), when cities were not yet where most Canadians lived; however, there is a related, more specific, answer.

To set up this answer, I want to digress for a moment into Calder's essay, "Why Shoot the Gopher?" Therein, Calder identifies the gopher as "a prairie icon" that, when viewed positively, has "an underdog quality . . . that fits well into ideas of western alienation" (254). This positive view disguises an ambivalence. Calder also quotes Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* (1986) and its answer to the question of how to grow a Prairie town: "Stand up straight" but then "[v]anish suddenly: the / gopher was the model" (qtd. in Calder, "Why" 243). Perhaps the gopher offers insight into the "rural versus urban" rut, especially when we think of town versus city in the context of Appadurai's "scalar dynamics" of globalization.<sup>21</sup> Kroetsch's association of the iconic gopher with the town, a small version of the city, raises the question of whether the gopher is a small version of a related and even more iconic animal—such as the buffalo. Indeed, why shoot the buffalo? In the 1870s, when settlers and complicit Native Americans and First Nations almost entirely destroyed the buffalo (Jennings 61), the extermination was for the same reason as with the gopher, which was "an obstacle [to settlement and agriculture] that must be eradicated or controlled" (Calder, "Why" 245). Calder also links the gopher to its historical "use-value" as a source of food and a narrative figure for some First Nations (245), a "use-value" that the buffalo had too—yet presumably in far greater concentration of biomass—and she concludes in part that "[i]mplicit in this representation is the belief that the prairies belong to the farmer; it is the gophers, not the settlers, who are invaders" (247). Like the gopher and like the buffalo, the town has to "vanish" as the "Indians" have to "vanish" to make way for the next phase of civilization—the next *big* thing—which is the city and capital-C Country, Canada. During a shift to the right in politics, then, the Western is a nationalistic reminder of progress or, more accurately, the renewal of a myth of progress. Instead of cowboys on horses, we have cowboys in sport-utility vehicles: progress. Same hat, different ride. Same hat, different time.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Mark Jackson, following Dipesh Chakrabarty and others, has continued the thinking about micro/macro and universal/particular dynamics in *Coloniality, Ontology, and the Question of the Posthuman* (2018).

22 After the Dirty Harry movies, one of the most obvious representations of this mixture of progress and anti-modernism in the American context is *Justified* (2010–15), the Graham Yost television adaptation of an Elmore Leonard story.

Time and the periodizations of the Canadian Western cannot be neglected, partly because of the “postnostalgic phase” that Appadurai theorizes. While an American who is nostalgic for America might recover it in the present in the Philippines, thereby alleviating nostalgia (to the extent that it survives defamiliarization), a Canadian nostalgic for a bygone West can don a Stetson and go to the Calgary Stampede, seemingly recovering a shared North American history of the West and laying claim to Western iconography that is sometimes thought to be only American (i.e., of the United States) or fawningly American.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the term “stampeder” referred to prospectors rushing to the West *and North* for gold, as Kroetsch claims in *The Man from the Creeks* (1998), and the precursor to the Stampede was “a reasonably sedate agricultural fair with limited cowboy elements” until an American, Guy Weadick, founded the modern Stampede in 1912, “a borderless affair, with American contestants and bucking horses . . . , a contingent of vaqueros brought all expenses paid from Mexico, an encampment of 2,000 costumed Indians from the Blackfoot, Blood, Stoney and Sarcee reserves, a reunion of . . . the 1874 Mounted Police attired in period uniform, and a replica of Fort Whoop-up” (Dippie 514)—all pan-American. In *Stampede and the Westness of West* (2016), van Herk implies that something essential, the “ness” of “Westness,” can be rediscovered at the Stampede—the “unlimited and undefinable space” already quoted—and this Westness does not appear to map onto only one nation-state. Sociologically, however, the Stampede’s nostalgia does map onto colonial nation-building anachronisms, as when twentieth-century Stampede ads depict bare-chested Indigenous men who align with Victorian codes of savagery rather than Victorian codes of modesty and civility (Joudrey 27). And Calgary today is a city of big trucks and long, wide highways, so the Stampede also evokes the transition into “the post-equine era in North America (1910–1930)” (Nance 12). Surrounded by car culture and the businesses that fuel it, the Stampede has historically used horses for “nostalgia entertainment purposes” (13). Susan Nance suggests that “the collective fiction” of the Stampede “came

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23 The cowboy hat, as one possible souvenir of the Stampede, “contracts the world in order to expand the personal” (S. Stewart xii). It reminds you of where you have been, somewhere in the distance, and reifies your memory in an object of nostalgia.

to symbolize the city's modern business brand, perhaps because [competitive rodeo] performed a . . . moment symbolizing infinite possibility" (13). Again, the region expands: it is "unlimited" and "infinite," partly because the timeline points both forward and backwards, and partly because the Stampede annually renews the past-future dynamic.<sup>24</sup>

For Calder, however, the past-future dynamic manifests itself in the West as a limit, not the lack of one, and the problem is that of living vicariously in the past through the regionalism of the West. Writing specifically about the Prairies and not precisely the West of the Western, though I want to call attention to the connections, Calder argues that

here [on the prairie], place = rural = past, and the present is a kind of unrooted urban space that is radically disconnected from this past. The construction of this urban prairie present as post-prairie [in the titles of two earlier anthologies] is plausible only if we allow the prairie to be defined within these terms: as incompatible with either modernity or postmodernity, as irretrievably located in a vanished and obsolete rural landscape. Why we would accept these limitations is puzzling. But if the history of the agricultural prairie is the history of colonialism, does it then follow that, in the post-prairie, colonialism is over, and we are now all starting fresh, on a field that is as level as, well, the now-vanished prairie? ("Importance" 173)

The answer, she implies, is "no." Colonialism is not over, which is why the prairie is still here and now. Rushing into "postness" in various fields is so often theoretical or wishful, and wishful thinking is one of the operations that enable us to enjoy the Stampede or any Western (some of these cultural texts being enjoyable even for some Native Americans and First

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24 Ironically, however, the Stampede might help to expand the region symbolically, but the Stampede itself has supposedly shrunk according to one (proportional, not absolute) metric: "there has been a steep relative decline [in attendance] compared to population growth. Between 1976 and 2009, Stampede attendance grew by just 17 percent. During the same period Calgary's population grew 127 percent and Alberta's population grew by 90 percent" (Peter Fricker of the Vancouver Humane Society qtd. in Killingsworth 9).

Nations, as scholar JoEllen Shively and novelist Thomas King, through his character Lionel in *Green Grass, Running Water*, have suggested; see the chapter on “Tom King’s John Wayne” for more). In those moments, there is the conservative impulse to be “incompatible with either modernity or postmodernity,” and thereby to remain on stable, settled ground, surrounded by horses and acceptably isolated from the modernizing and progressive East.

At the same time, however, Stampedeers do refuse “these limitations.” They drive to the rodeo in shiny twenty-first-century trucks, live more often in suburbia than on ranches, and have in recent memory elected in Calgary a Muslim mayor of South Asian and African descent (Nasheed Nenshi, three times) instead of a white man from a European background. A problem of condescending chauvinism emerges if the Stampede, like other expressions of multiculturalism, is seen as only a ritual re-enactment of a culture that is “over” or elsewhere, such as Montana or Wyoming.

For Wylie in *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature* (2011), this is a problem for Atlantic Canada in much the same way that I pose it for the West: “tourist promotion of the region . . . has had a pronounced impact on how the region is seen from outside and, indeed, how it sees itself” (4). For the Stampede to be understood as an authentic expression of a culture of the West that is alive and well, it must be accepted as a performance of a way of life or set of values that remains meaningfully a part of people’s everyday lives. For me, the prime example of a real life playing a part in the spectacle of the Western’s iconography is Gabriel Dumont, the Métis ally of Louis Riel who, after participating in the North-West Resistance of 1885, fled as an outlaw to the United States and joined Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show, “enjoy[ing] minor celebrity” as a “rebel leader and wanted man” (Gaudry). Already by 1885, with the railway-enacted closures of the frontiers in the United States (1869) and Canada (1885), the West had become a myth, a thing of the past that had to be remembered in Westerns. An acceptably earlier beginning for the Western as such is in the *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–41) of James Fenimore Cooper, including *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827), which are all set in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. I tend to prefer that the Western begins a little later, when—especially in the

Western regions of the United States and Canada—the West had become a show for others and for itself.

## Regionalism, Realism, and Genre

When I refer to “people’s everyday lives” and a “past-present dynamic” in regionalism, these phrases are also coded references to realism, which developed in literature when the Western was emerging or re-emerging in the late nineteenth century, alongside modern and modernist literatures. (The cultural coincidence of modernism and the Western deserves further study.) Then, in the final quarter of the twentieth century, realism contributed to redefining the Western as “revisionist” or “historical,” terms that partly meant “more realistic” and sometimes “less mythic.” The topic of realism is too complex for a thorough consideration here, but it puts (other) genres into perspective; it helps us to position the (often mythic) Western relative to (often realistic) Prairie fiction.

Realism is also one of the most obvious ideological and aesthetic engagements with both nationalism and regionalism, regionalism being the suffusion of “local colour” that imparts believability on a text.<sup>25</sup> According to Colin Hill, modern (more or less twentieth-century) realism in Canada was at times quite regional, as demonstrated by his choice of writers who are strongly identified with the West but also skeptical of its promises, such as Sinclair Ross. Regionalism can thus be “incompatible with an idealistic nationalism” (Hill 34).<sup>26</sup> And yet, in spite of exceptions such as wartime propaganda, nationalism “usually privileges [realist forms]” (51; see also 129). For Robert Lecker, nationalism is “displaced into” (5) or “morphs into” (10) realism; “literature has always been seen as a vehicle through which authors bore witness to the country [i.e., the nation]. In this context, mimetic literature was a kind of testimony; it provided

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25 Situating local colour as a late nineteenth-century development in realism that was later perfected, in the early twentieth century, as regionalism, Jonathan David Shelly Schroeder states that “regionalism . . . redefined local-color fiction as its failed precursor” (552–3). Regionalism can also be defined as “cultural rather than geographic . . . not geography itself but a strategically resistant mapping of geography” (Davey, “Toward” 4). For Frank Davey, regionalism is often defined against nationalism.

26 Hill gives another reason: realism was sometimes also “incompatible” with nationalism because realism was meant to represent psychology and the mind, an inner world that was not necessarily shaped by or preoccupied by the nation (21).

evidence that the country was real” (304). This “testimony” or “test” was and is all the more relevant to a nation-state often assumed to be “really” or “basically” American or, in the past, British. Realism probably helped to put “Canada” on the map in Canada before the regions were there (even literally as “Canada West”), at least initially, because Canada had a greater need for nationalism; it hadn’t attempted to break away from its European heritage with a revolution as the United States had. In the United States, which had a stronger national identity at the end of the nineteenth century, realism and even regionalism could serve a more local purpose, helping to put up-and-coming states such as California on the map of places that had to be dealt with and not merely imagined as distant sites of no political consequence (Mexal 189). In literature and film, realism arguably also promoted a modern (if not modernist) idea of order—of things as they are—and this idea neatly rationalized national-industrial social hierarchies (Corkin, *Realism* 54).<sup>27</sup> Today, however, these hierarchies are points of contention that regions raise to their nations, and the debates often seem painfully informed by the differences between the idealism of nation and the pragmatism of region.

Again, it is a question of scale related to genre: how big ideas are too general or generic and superimpose imperfectly onto smaller constituents. Harrison, Thacker, and others quoted earlier in this chapter seem to think of the Western as a sub-genre of regional literature—i.e., Prairie fiction and usually Prairie realism—while more and more I invert the paradigm, thinking of so much literature as a sub-genre or at least reflection of the Western, especially if the Western is an exemplar of today’s epic (superseded recently by the superhero genre). The Western’s relationship to epic helps to distinguish it from the literature of the West by calling attention to its heroic, larger-than-life qualities, which imply that the Western is not realism (or at least not usually in a realistic mode), unlike so much Prairie fiction.<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, this distinction can be construed as a straw

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27 While I am offering these comparative glosses, I might add that regionalism in the United States was arguably integrated in the melting pot on a national level; in Canada, it was more geographically discrete (Roger Gibbins qtd. in Davey, “Toward” 1).

28 Beyond Harrison and Thacker and in an almost strictly American context, Sanford Marovitz explains prevailing preferences to realism in the literature of the West as a moral imperative galvanized against the violence of the Western. Marovitz quotes Jay Gurian’s *Western American Writing* (1975): “The real cowboy . . . does not require fiction to announce him; history

man if you believe that realism is defined as an accurate view of reality—one of the views that Robert C. Post calls “naive” (368). There are simply too many dimensions of reality to reflect adequately even in realism. And, for Post and the philosophical tradition leading to John Dewey (and the post-structuralism coincident with Post’s essay), reality itself is an idea. But Prairie fiction and the Western are not equidistant from that idea. Prairie fiction often distinguishes itself from the Western by insisting on being unpretentious or simply not flashy in its representation of ordinary lives and times, while the Western tends to be more noticeably stylish in its representation of exceptional heroes and the definitiveness of their decisions and actions. Westerns, especially revisionist Westerns, are sometimes presumed to be realistic because of their vague historicity and regional grounding—usually identifiable American states in the late nineteenth-century West—but epics are vaguely historical and sometimes regional too. And even especially mythic Westerns can be presumed to be realistic because they tend to be not only historical (in being set at a mine site that once existed, or after the American Civil War, or in a Western town recently linked to telegraphs and rail lines) but also gritty.<sup>29</sup> In the context of the “true grit” of the Western,<sup>30</sup> Patrick McGee argues that we “need to be careful about imagining that ‘realism’ of any sort ever truly transcends the conventions of the Western” (202), conventions being too powerful, and the Western being less interested in the accuracy of realism than in the supreme determination and resilience of its heroes (qualities that might be inverted in revisionist Westerns but that continue to exist, in the subtext, as standards of comparison).

Realism itself, however, is either a genre or a mode, depending on whom or what you are reading.<sup>31</sup> There is critical confusion because these

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can do that” (99). He also quotes Jack Brenner, whose view of the realism in the literature of the West was intentionally narrow, because the West was mythologized and stereotyped “almost before it was settled” (103), leaving little room for realism.

29 These references to grit in the context of realism may evoke the concept of “dirty realism,” which was theorized as the next phase after postmodernism as early as 1983 in an issue of *Granta* introduced by Bill Buford (Toth 3).

30 I am alluding of course to Charles Portis’s novel *True Grit* (1968), adapted to film with the same title in 1969 by Henry Hathaway, and in 2010 by the Coen brothers, Joel and Ethan. Patrick McGee himself is not alluding to any of these texts.

31 See for example Sanford E. Marovitz’s “Myth and Realism in Recent Criticism of the American Literary West” (1981) (109).

“terms are used in so many different ways” (Scholes, “Towards” 105). I will not attempt to differentiate them as laboriously as do Northrop Frye, Robert Scholes, and others. I think of genre as a set of conventions in the content of a book or film, conventions such as the Stetson hats worn by so many cowboys, and this genre can be stylized through different modes or ways of communicating the genre—modes that can become so readily recognizable as to become genres of their own. Seemingly in the inverse, Alastair Fowler simplifies it as “genre tends to mode” (qtd. in Whetter 36), because he thinks of modes as less strict than genre, as Linda Williams does (42), and genres tend to open up over time. Following Williams, Jaimey Fisher explains that “a particular historical moment might favor a generic mode over discrete genres and . . . the contingencies of a particular moment might turn a genre into mode to create hybrid works that met different cultural needs” (93). These are reasonable views, but I want to avoid a chicken-or-egg argument. The consensus seems to be that, regardless of which comes first, modes operate as adjectival qualifications, something less than definitive, whereas genres are more like nouns, which are more definitive; furthermore, there is interplay between them.<sup>32</sup> Realism is actually modal too.<sup>33</sup> It is, like a style writ large, an identifiable manner of expression that eventually becomes recognizable as its own thing, or—more in agreement with the previous few quotations—it is used to lend legitimacy to genres when they have started to become stereotype factories or parodies of themselves. The legitimacy is not the stuff of reality (if reality exists) but the construction of an illusion that can develop into its own category of art, such as genre, which is driven more by convention than

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32 Later in this book (in chapter 3), I will consider Rick Altman’s and Paul Monticone’s related work on what can be called “hybrid” or “crossover” genres such as the noir Western or the space Western. These examples combine genres, so that film noir “colours” a Western, becoming a philosophically and even visually darker Western—or we may call it a hybrid.

33 Beyond this further simplification, Linda Williams argues that “[m]elodrama [not realism] is the fundamental mode of popular American moving pictures. It is not a specific genre like the western or horror film” (42). She continues: “We should not be fooled, then, by the superficial realism of popular American movies, by the use of real city streets for chases, or by the introduction of more complex psychological motivations for victims and villains. If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and action, then the operative mode is melodrama” (42).

by reality or originality. (You can see that chicken-egg circularity here.) In fact, the location of realism within the conventions of genre is hinted at in terms such as “conventional realism” (Scholes, “On Realism” 269). Most mainstream contemporary literature is conventional realism, and our biases in favour of it entail the demeaning of “genre fiction,” whether Western, science fiction, fantasy, Harlequin romance, hard-boiled, et cetera. Genre fiction loses credibility mainly because the formulas of genre fiction are more obvious than in most realisms and certainly in everyday life. If I go to the bar, I can be reasonably sure that I will not witness a fistfight or shootout. The Western’s stereotypes of masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and Indigeneity do not convincingly reflect the people I know, even if we feel pressure from modelled roles. However conformist we might be, we are not quite conventions in a genre.<sup>34</sup> Realist fiction that minimizes the appearance of convention is most of the literature of the West, but not the Western. And Western films can be superficially realistic but are probably melodramatic (Williams 42); they dramatize and stylize their conventions, wearing them like hearts on their sleeves.

John Frow explains that genre “is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints [which he defines in turn as ‘shapes’ and ‘guides’] on the production and interpretation of meaning” (10). His notion of a “constraint” is helpful because it reminds us that conventions are chosen from alternatives that are not usually allowed or, if they are, then only as quirky exceptions. The first and foremost convention of the Western is the cowboy, not an astrophysicist or a ballerina—but the cowboy could

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34 In spite of my recourse to potential events in any of our own lives here—and to my admittedly inconsistent belief in my discernment of reality and my own related self-determination—another way of seeing the question of realism and the Western is to consider how its myths have begun to inform not only history but also reality. Richard Slotkin and Mary-Dailey Desmarais in *Once upon a Time ... The Western* (2017) argue that the politics of films such as Fred Zinnemann’s *High Noon* (1952) later became real-world politics: “those who have (or can claim) the knowledge to recognize and the power to conquer evil have an absolute obligation to act against it regardless of the law or the will of the people. Democracy is weak and must rely on the strong, cold man of power who holds us in contempt even as he saves us” (150). They go so far as to claim that the plot of *High Noon* is [the] foundational myth” of “the present Global War on Terror” (150). Such conclusions might seem outrageous, but they are precisely those that seem to corroborate postmodern theories of media and society such as Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983 in English); Baudrillard’s theory of the precession of simulacra is that illusions create reality: art before life. Hence, Buffalo Bill Cody “began to think of himself as the heroic figure of the Dime Novels [written about him by Ned Buntline], and he acted accordingly” (Marovitz 103).

be a related stock character such as the sheriff or Mountie, or even the outlaw. There are at least this many alternatives or variants—or mutants. In his book on distant reading, Franco Moretti thinks of distant reading in terms of genre and one of the ironically dead metaphors of genre: evolutionary theory. Genre theorists such as Altman and Steve Neale write of how genres “evolve” or “mutate.” Moretti also focuses on Darwinian “rivals” (66) and “the market” (68), conceiving of them as powers that no professor could ever influence until it was irrelevant anyway, and for these and other reasons I am not a fan of Moretti. I simply recognize similarities in some of our methodologies. In his research on nineteenth-century detective fiction, Moretti samples the fiction and goes looking for a “well-defined formal trait” (63) that might change over time or over other boundaries such as the edges of sub-genres. He chooses the clue, which is a trait or in other words a convention of detective fiction. In later work, Moretti expands his methodology beyond a single trait or convention to what he calls quantitative formalism and multivariate analysis (64), which does seem necessary for genre studies because, in a genre, there is never only one thing that is definitional.

Instead, we need to identify a set of conventions that suffice to differentiate and identify the genre in some combination most of the time. In terms of Western-specific methods, my approach is similar to that of Christopher Conway in *Heroes of the Borderlands* (2019): “to trace a network of visual cues, formulas, and archetypes that are sometimes self-referential citations tied to a genre formula and other times meaningfully linked to social, political, and national themes” (23). Not every convention needs to be in every Western. The “Indians” often have vanishingly small roles, if any, and can help to define a Western by their very absence (Tompkins 8). Women, too, are fictionalized as rare birds in Westerns or they are marginal and stereotyped (as are most men). Sometimes, the characters are beyond or before the reach of trains. The range is far more common a setting than the saloon. Only guns and cowboys seem ubiquitous—“It is doubtful that a movie without revolvers could be considered a Western” (Conway 29)—and usually horses. But if most of the conventions are present, and especially if they interact with each other, we probably have a Western, or a so-called post-Western, which usually means a contemporary Western, or a sub-genre or crossover.

Students or fans of the Western will already realize that this set applies to a relatively late iteration of the Western, later in the nineteenth century when trains and whisk(e)y trading, for examples, were realities in the West. This later iteration is right for my purposes because Canada came later to the genre, and, as a relative outsider with a more recent history of Westerns, Canada has Westerns that tend to imagine and revise the post-Civil War Westerns popularized since the 1950s by John Ford and John Wayne, and then Sergio Leone and Clint Eastwood, among others. Despite the gritty trappings of the classics of the 1950s and '60s—such as styles of acting, costumes, locations, and cinematographies that could be realistic at times—these Westerns and their iconic, unbendable heroes were unapologetically mythic. As I argue in chapter 6, in Canada we have historical Westerns that push back against myth, often realistically, but they tend to debase one myth and raise another. Ultimately, we have better options than to work much with realism as a heuristic for the Western, except as a framing device for the Western and Prairie fiction, in spite of realism's mainstream position and its dominant role in defining modern and contemporary literatures.

And in spite of its value to regionalism, realism—because of the influence of myth—has been a problem for literary representations of the West. According to Owram in *Promise of Eden*, already by 1870 a “new and extremely enthusiastic image of the West was in danger of becoming as unrealistic as the more cynical view of the first half of the century” (5). The balance has been difficult to achieve or has perhaps never been achieved or maintained—and, as centres and margins tilt against each other, other regions are implicated. Owram explains that the “image” of the Canadian West prior to 1870 was an inaccurate view of the *Northwest* that was overly influenced by northern exploration and fur trading routes so that it seemed “much harsher and more northerly” (12), even “semi-arctic” (13). Later texts such as those of Connor approached the North, via the West, to make it a little more familiar and less intimidating—not an Eden but a place that could be cultivated or excavated by hard work and a work ethic that was implicitly a manifestation of Muscular Christianity. The *new* “image,” this emerging myth of progress on a slightly more hospitable frontier, is one reason why some of the texts under consideration in this book can be described not only as Northwesterns but also

as early Canadian Westerns. Even if the North lost relative ground again as Westerns dwindled in mid-century Canada—eventually and emphatically reoriented by *Maliglutit* (Kunuk and Ungalaaq, 2016)—the North has been crucial for perceptions of the West in Canada.

## The West Turns North

On 28 December 1967, as Canada's centennial year was about to elapse, Glenn Gould aired the program "Idea of North" on CBC Radio's *Ideas*. The first of his "Solitude Trilogy," "Idea of North" was commissioned by *Ideas* (Lucht 11) and was followed by two more programs about isolated communities, one about outposts in Newfoundland and one about rural Manitoba. The first, however, gained additional prominence when it was adapted for television in 1970 by Judith Pearlman. This CBC-PBS international co-production<sup>35</sup> visually translates Gould's Canadian odyssey in some of the terms that would be very familiar to American viewers, with imagery associated with Westerns and the West: a 1962 poster for a gold rush festival at Dawson City, some footage of wagons lined up for a "land rush," and oil wells and telegraphs that remind us of the economic rationale for western expansion. For a film based on a Canadian centennial-nationalist documentary, the American connections were many—such as the focus on the train as the means to the ends of the continent.

Pearlman, however, was not appropriating Gould's documentary through these images. In fact, one of the narrators describes the North as a "frontier" that must be understood as such "in much more than a physical sense" or latitudinal sense. "North of 60" is also idealized as "the land of the possible," which is similar to the view of the West—not only in the United States but in general—as a place wide open geographically, economically, and culturally. One of the only references to the Inuit in the film is a short clip of Inuit children watching themselves on television followed soon afterward by an equivocatingly critical remark about the "white master race." The children seeing themselves on television—undoubtedly a great novelty at the time—also calls attention to the fact that Indigenous people were a televised spectacle who were in reality unknown

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35 This detail of the CBC-PBS collaboration is according to the former Glenn Gould Foundation website, which is no longer accessible.

to most viewers in the predominantly white South, an ignorance that was a historical factor in rationalizing the displacement, dispossession, and assimilation of Indigenous peoples during colonial expansion to the West by wagon and rail. Margery Fee in *Literary Land Claims* (2015) is less equivocating: “The railway itself became a symbol of the (white settler) nation while the Chinese and Irish men who laid the rails were excluded” (11), as were the First Nations and Métis who would remain for much longer an obstacle in the eyes of settlers in the West (as would some of them, plus the Inuit, in the North). In identifying the North as a frontier or margin similar to the West, Pearlman was recognizing a Canadian-American kinship, a shared ideology based on the assumption of limitless wealth deriving from resources open to the white man, whose cunning exploits and interloping travels would be interpreted as heroic. Canada’s renewed nationalism depended in part, as Gould and Pearlman suggested in 1967 and 1970, on the imagining of a new land of opportunity.

And so, not much less than a century after the last spike in the railway purported to unify Canada, the two versions of “Idea of North” suggested that the national cultures of Canada and the United States might realign the axes of their ideology, West to North. In the opening scenes of the filmed version, we see Toronto’s Union Station and the first destination of the film: Winnipeg, from which the Muskeg Express would carry the filmic eye northward along the rails to Churchill. As I explain in the next chapter, on Indigenous views of the Western, Zacharias Kunuk and Natar Ungalaaq’s 2016 film *Maliglutit* realigns John Ford’s iconic American epic *The Searchers* (1956). The ideological differences between *The Searchers* and *Maliglutit* are obvious—Chris Knight’s review in the *National Post* calls the latter a Northern—while Kunuk himself is as damning of colonialism in Canada as *Maliglutit* is of colonialism in the United States. In a different context, Sherrill E. Grace writes, “That this North so closely resembles the American [W]est is perhaps obvious only in hindsight” (12). The implication is clear. To go north, you must go west. The West turns North.

## Turned Around, and Lost Around Lines

I do not conclude that the West *transforms* into the North; I mean it *turns* that way, or, more accurately, that cultural perspectives turn and the

landscape seems to turn relative to the eye of the beholder. Although this chapter has had a fairly straight, telescoping line from world to nation to region, now I want to allow it to wind its way to the conclusion. The next sections are admittedly theoretical, even playful, but they do snap back in the end to a relevant question about region and climate that is undoubtedly (though not exclusively) Canadian. Here the chapter rides off a little madly. It explores (that mapping metaphor again) some of the implications of regions that suddenly become unmoored, or slip seismically, or disguise themselves and seem other than they “are.”

How can the West “turn” without a discombobulating disorientation? I do not imagine a compass spinning so that the disorientation is that of placelessness or circularity; I mean the loss of balance from a change in movement along a line or a vector, and this loss can feel at least momentarily like lostness. If the so-called progress of Western civilization was ever imagined as a directly western route to the New World (and perhaps ultimately to Asia), remember the quest for the Northwest Passage—really an Arctic route, northwest then southwest. The Franklin expedition in the mid-nineteenth century went looking but ended in disaster, a tragic failure of navigation through shifting ice. They were “lost” for more than a century—until found, on 27 September 2014, when a long search sponsored in part by Stephen Harper’s Conservative government discovered the sunken wreck of the HMS *Erebus* and gave the Conservatives a symbolic victory (“Lost”), both in their assertion of Arctic sovereignty and their colonial pride in nineteenth- and twentieth-century exploration. The Conservatives are not the only party with a stake in such symbolism; it was the Liberal minister (later prime minister) Lester B. Pearson who said that “‘Go North’ has replaced ‘Go West’ as the call to adventure” (qtd. in Grace 9); he was echoing the American writer and resource economy enthusiast Courtney Ryley Cooper, who, already in 1926, had published *Go North, Young Man*, himself echoing “that famous advice of Horace Greeley: ‘Go West, Young Man’ ” (vii). What is the West in Canada before its turn North? Donald G. Stephens explains that, for writers such as Ralph Connor, the Prairies of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta were “the end of the frontier rather than the place to go through before reaching the mountains and the West Coast” (3). In the imagination of the West, the West begins on the plains of Manitoba and reaches the Badlands just

east of the Rockies. In this Canadian literature, it does not appear to cross them.<sup>36</sup>

Rather, it turns, looking especially for seemingly available flatlands to develop (with so little such land west of the Rockies). Similar to Cooper as a rhetorician but eventually more pessimistic, Farley Mowat claims that foreign traders, not Canadians (and he could almost have been thinking of Cooper himself), “undertook the first ‘development’ of the North—exploiting its animal and mineral resources, the while maintaining and elaborating on the northern mythology in order to discourage competition and perhaps also to conceal what they were doing from the myopic view of the people of southern Canada” (10). This was 1976; Mowat argued that sovereignty needed to be asserted but without causing “its physical ruination” and “the ultimate dissolution of the native Northerners” (11); he feared “multi-national corporations who owe allegiance to no nation” (12) and governments committed to being smaller to interfere less with the economy preferred by such corporations. Until 2015, Harper’s quest for Arctic sovereignty reiterated that the North was the new West,<sup>37</sup> and his tenure was only one span in a recent history of associating North and West. The fictionalized Harper in Michael Healey’s play *Proud* (2015) calls the North “big” and “completely empty,” which was one of the same assumptions that drove western expansion. Although Susan Kollin argues that it is “premature to speak of a New West” (251) in the context of the American West and the Western, she and I concur that our North American society has not progressed much beyond our historical approach to the Old West, which persists today seemingly anywhere we go.

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36 In fact, the only two Westerns that come to mind that do cross the mountains and reach the West Coast are American: Annie Dillard’s post-Western novel *The Living* (1992) and Jim Jarmusch’s revisionist Western film *Dead Man* (1995).

37 Shelagh D. Grant suggests that the quest for Arctic sovereignty was delayed by the quest for Western sovereignty: “Preoccupied with settling the West, it was not until the turn of the century that Canadian officials learned that prior British claims to the Arctic Islands were considered inchoate (or incomplete) according to international law of that time and would require additional administrative measures and eventual settlement to ensure the country’s inherited title was respected” (60).

## The Rail Line and Train

Being “lost,” like the ships *Terror* and *Erebus*, is a theme of Canadian literature that is often and perhaps strangely associated with the train—one of the great symbols of modernity and of the winning of the West. In this section on “The Rail Line and Train,” I want to work through some ideas about the West’s turn to the North by thinking about representations of trains in Canadian Westerns alongside subversive imagery of the West from authors engaged with the Western.<sup>38</sup> The subversions “twist” and turn not only rail lines but also our conceptions of the West’s directionality. In *Mapping with Words* (2018), Sarah Wylie Krotz states that “[e]arly Canadian literature [e.g., of the eighteenth century] is marked by settler preoccupations with orientation and emplacement, with mobility and accommodation, with not getting lost” (152). Although these “settler preoccupations” and the resulting “geographical awakening[s]” (Krotz 159) are not always so strong in Canadian Westerns, with their fictionalized, mythopoeic landscapes that in fact encourage readers to “get lost in the story,” they can often be dramatized. The stories themselves are also, perhaps ironically, dramas of disorientation. Krotz explains:

That one map-maker’s stories can chafe against others confirms their tenuous hold on the land. The world moves in and out of focus, the literary cartographer’s lines merely spatial stories marked with others that fray the edges of the myths of emptiness, *terra nullius*, and wilderness wastes upon which colonial expansion relied. (167)

In Canadian Westerns, as with other Westerns, characters are often lost or risking lostness in blizzards, deserts, and forests. A skill or tool is needed to find the way. They need what Krotz calls, in a different context, “dreams for the future” (166). In Vanderhaeghe’s *The Englishman’s Boy* (1996), the train is precisely this symbol: “The knowledge that the new century was going to be a century governed by images, that the spirit of the age would express itself in an endless train of images, one following upon the other

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38 See also chapter 3 for a couple of paragraphs on trains in Connor’s *Corporal Cameron*.

with the speed of the steam locomotive that was the darling of the last century and symbolized all its aspirations” (106).<sup>39</sup> Trains helped to define cinema: Vanderhaeghe might have had in mind *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, 1903), often considered the first fictional narrative film, where the window in the railway-ticket office could almost be a movie screen whose “train of images” is literally a train. But Westerns are anti-modern narratives that look back nostalgically to the days before trains and their enabling of big business and big government. In *The Great Train Robbery*, the locomotive is surprisingly vulnerable to outlaws; in *High Noon* (Zinnemann, 1952), the train and the clock are twin symbols that herald not civilization but the return of the outlaws. In *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966), an approaching train has a dead man tied above the cowcatcher as a warning, and on the back is a cannon; but then Tuco (Eli Wallach) finds himself chained to his dead captor, and he escapes the corpse by laying the chain of his manacle onto the track so that the train breaks it—the train enabling his freedom but only along the straight and narrow line that he otherwise avoids. In *Dead Man* (Jarmusch, 1995), the long trip by train to the West is an incremental voyage into the past, with each stop introducing passengers with an older fashion of clothing. In the comparatively obscure and seemingly post-apocalyptic Canadian Western *Six Reasons Why* (Campagna and Campagna, 2008), the railroad is about to be extended over the Badlands to a mysterious utopia, but the arrival of the train and its business interests—having depleted the resources of the known civilization—could result in a disruption of the utopia. Although each of these films deserves consideration for representations of the train that are more complex than I have time or space to explain here, the train always has a cost: you get something, but you lose something.

Cooper declares that in the North “the inexperienced can easily become lost within a quarter of a mile of a railroad” (8)—and the train too is imagined as something lose-able. Michel Foucault imagines that the train is “the place of . . . nowhere” (25) because it can escape “geographical markers” (25), or at least enable someone to disappear rapidly into

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39 As with the sense of time expressed here, the train is also a passing symbol, if I may play with words; Michel Foucault explains that “a train is an extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something through which one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point to another, and then it is also something that goes by” (23–4).

the distance.<sup>40</sup> The theme of lostness appears in Don McKay's *Deactivated West 100* (2005)—not a Western but a poetics of the colonial imagination in the West—when the narrator in a chapter entitled “Five Ways to Lose Your Way” describes himself as “the seeker, more than that, the questor, the ardent archaeologist of missing logging locomotives” (85). Unlike a ship such as Franklin's, however, the train is not supposed to be able to drift and lose its heading. It is on tracks. But in an earlier section of *Deactivated West 100*, “Waiting for Shay,” the poet watches as a Shay locomotive “slides by on the tide” (80), an engine shipped to the West Coast for logging as “another brand of predator” (79) in the forest. Fascinating, then, that in the forest McKay's speaker discovers an abandoned “carcass of the myth of progress” (85) and declares himself “Parsifal of locomotives lost” (86), as if he had found the Holy Grail: an unerring machine that had erred.<sup>41</sup> In the contexts of “West” as both a direction and location, and of the questing that was needed to find it, McKay seems to suggest that going off the rails is quite possible.<sup>42</sup> Directions that seem fixed—arguably even the cardinal ones—can be turned.

The train is so compelling as a symbol of conquering the West that Thomas King seems, like McKay, to have felt a grim pleasure in taking it apart. In King's novel *Truth & Bright Water* (1999)—again, not a Western, but relevant in the context of King's *Green Grass, Running Water* in the next chapter—the conceptual artist, painter, and sculptor Monroe Swimmer designs an installation of buffalo made of iron—the material

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40 Even in Wayne Johnston's novel about the history of modern Newfoundland, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), being lost, or “unfound,” is related to the train. Its narrator, the historical figure Joseph Smallwood, leaves Newfoundland for New York via the railway, upon which he remarks, “This is not an island . . . but a landlocked country in the middle of an otherwise empty continent, a country hemmed in and cored by wilderness, and it is through this core that we are passing now, the unfoundland that will make us great someday” (141). After returning to Newfoundland, the fictionalized Smallwood ironically finds himself lost on the tracks when a blizzard numbs his senses, including his sense of distance—implying that only a force of nature can redraw an unerring line.

41 A similar image later appears in Brian Bartlett's *Ringling Here & There* (2014): “The old National Dream, leading to the Last Spike, has detoured into another dream: Rails to Trails, coast to coast” (114). On the bike trail, a heterotopian overlay upon abandoned railroad, Bartlett's speaker hears “a cyclist's jingling bell” that reminds him of a train's “blast,” and the memory of “the past” seems to be “searching for the lost train & the elusive rails” (114). Alliteration connects to end-rhyme to associate, through poetic and remembered sound, different historical technologies of transportation.

42 In Lee Henderson's *The Man Game* (2008), “[t]he forest lost track of itself” (314).

of the “iron road” or railroad. Monroe and the allusively named teenage narrator Tecumseh fix the buffalo in place upon the plains “with a long spike, the kind they use for laying track” (140), and Tecumseh says that his grandfather had worked on the railroad. The narrator, however, makes no indication of knowing its significance to his heritage or to buffalo (141) until later, when he wonders if the few live buffalo in his area “can remember the good old days when they had the place to themselves, before they had to worry about Indians running them off cliffs or Europeans shooting at them from the comfort of railroad cars” (249) (the latter a scene in *Dead Man*). During the decade or so of carnage in the 1870s, settlers decimated buffalo populations to deprive Indigenous peoples of a major resource and to make way for the rails. Iconic photography from the era depicts buffalo bones piled high alongside the rails near train stations (“Buffalo”), where collectors, some of them Indigenous (Barnett 6), would be paid for bones by the ton. The sheer volume was mortifying when I first saw the pictures. The bones, a formerly renewable resource from 25 to 30 million buffalo reduced to as low as 100 (M. S. Taylor 3163), provided material for fertilizer and sugar refineries (Barnett 3). In Canada especially, the skins were destined for the fur trade, “Canada’s premier industry” (Jennings 61). The colonial expansion from the East and the industrialization of the West depended in part on the active ruination of sustainable, traditional economies and lifeforms—trains over buffalo.<sup>43</sup> King therefore alludes to the famed “last spike” in the railroad when the narrator describes the end of his first day of work with the artist:

We make three trips back to the church, and it’s early evening before we’ve hammered in the last spike. Monroe sits on the tailgate of the truck and looks back the way we’ve come. You can’t see the church, and you can’t see the bridge, and you can’t see Truth or Bright Water. “Look at that,” says Monroe. “Just like the old days.” (143)

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43 The association between the railroad and the destruction of the buffalo was illustrated vividly in Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man* (1995) when the Johnny Depp character watches his fellow passengers open the windows and fire at buffalo from the train—a sequence that also implies, through the changing fashion of passengers at different stops, that going West is also going back in time.

He later says, "I didn't lose the church. . . . I just lost track of it" (230). Painting the church so that it disappears by optical illusion, recovering the buffalo symbolically from the repurposed colonial site of the church, and finding a site without a vantage point of the bridge, Monroe attempts to reverse time and rewrite history. Although his buffalo are made of iron, as were trains and railroads, he tells his helper, "Watch them in case they try to run away again" (142). Monroe is sardonically joking about losing the iron buffalo; he imagines that they have the same mobility as live buffalo—or as the "locomotives lost" in *Deactivated West 100*. Monroe wants the train to disappear, and he wants to replace it with an artwork that ironically fixes in place a species that roamed with a freedom unknown to trains.

McKay and King share a fantasy involving the erasure of cardinal directions through a lostness that would "deactivate" the colonial drive, a change that would, coincidentally, prevent the North from being treated as the West. The title of *Deactivated West 100* refers to "the road deactivated—bridges torn out, culverts removed, delivered over to neglect" (114). For McKay here, "neglect" is a positive term, because it entails a natural renewal in the absence of destructive humans. He projects his thoughts out of the forest and into a city and a future beyond human extinction when the deactivation would include "boulevards and cul-de-sacs" (115). Although various federal governments (and political parties) wanted the North opened not only to passage but also to sovereignty through economic development/disruption/destruction of natural environments, McKay and other theorists of geography—whom he names, following Harry H. Hess, "geopoets" (42–3)—might prefer it to remain as is. He might in fact prefer the government to "get lost" and thereby learn a lesson about respecting nature instead of promoting the canard (partly disproven by Germany and other countries) that ecology and economy are mutually exclusive, that we must choose one over the other. At the very end of *Deactivated West 100*, the poet mistakes a bear for a stump and narrowly avoids drawing her attention in the presence of her cubs, and he realizes through his mistake that the bear and the mountain are practically interdependent: "that place where lava cooled so fast it kept its muscle tone and passed directly into mammal, quickening, sitting up to sniff the breeze, and ambling off among the alders" (117). McKay, expert in

metaphor (his 2013 Pratt Lecture being on that topic precisely), imagines connections rather than exclusions, oneness instead of binaries—but he also recognizes that not only roads but also the idea of West must be dramatically changed. To approach the North as we did the West will be another environmental and cultural mistake unless the reorientation of our geographical axes includes our ideologies and ourselves.

Notably, one alternative might be to approach the North as we did the West but in an Indigenous way. In 2005, the Iron Ore Company of Canada, based in Quebec, sold its railroad to three Indigenous groups: the Innu nations of Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam and Matimekush-Lac John, and the Naskapi nation of Kawawachikamach (Ellingson 54). The train—Tshiuetin, meaning “the wind of the North” in Innu—goes from southern Quebec into the North, which is otherwise inaccessible (by automobile). Although talk of digging a mine and lengthening the railroad (Ellingson 55) would scar the land, at least the financial benefit to the railroad and its nearby communities would be mostly to Indigenous peoples.

McKay implies that the Western is a driving force that might push us to lose our way in our geography, and that the metaphoric “turn” (114) of the road toward deactivation depends somehow on the Western. He alludes to the genre in a passage that is oddly difficult coming from an aficionado of grammar and style. The Western in *Deactivated West 100* is mentioned in a sentence fragment that seems either to contain the incorrect pronoun—“who” instead of “that”—or to create an image that would never be seen in a Western:

And a short way beyond, the crest where Loss Creek’s valley  
falls suddenly away with that lurch made familiar  
by Westerns, always accompanied by the theme, now  
swollen from the inside by French horns, who [*sic*] have  
appeared from nowhere. (McKay 114)

He might mean “French horns” as synecdoche for “French horn players,” but of course we would rarely if ever *see* French horn players in a Western—a harmonica player (like Charles Bronson in Sergio Leone’s 1968 film *Once Upon a Time in the West*) being more likely. Maybe, however, this is McKay’s purpose. Hiking through the forest, his speaker is

disoriented by “that lurch” of the Western and the appearance “from nowhere” of a foreign (i.e., European) interloper associated with the colonization of the West. The Western is not naturally a part of the West; instead, it is an often clumsy product of the idea of West created by Europeans and their migrating descendants, who have “swollen” the population of North America. McKay’s unusual grammatical awkwardness here could be a syntactically apt expression of the now ideologically “familiar” but formerly new and disorienting conception of the West. The turn in the road, then, must be away from the Western—a cultural version of the seismic realignment imagined in the title of McKay’s *Strike/Slip* (2006)—if we are to regain balance by deactivating the West and its related, problematic ideas.

The train’s unerring sense of direction is too often conflated with historical progress, partly because, built into its industrial history, it had its own wild side, which it eventually tamed in some respects. Carlos A. Schwantes and James P. Ronda state in *The West the Railroads Made* (2008) that because of the train “the Wild West would vanish, and in its place might come a region more urban and eastern . . . than a West of fur trappers, cowboys, and Indians” (11). In *Time Lord* (2000), Clark Blaise’s book on Samuel Fleming’s role in standardizing time through the railroad industry, Blaise states: “The frequently drawn analogy of nineteenth-century railroads to the contemporary world of computer entrepreneurs and dot-com cowboys is not misapplied” (99). As Schwantes and Ronda do, Blaise evokes the Western with his reference to cowboys, icons of the genre who rode through the unfenced wilderness on actual horses, not the Iron Horses that would later demarcate lands, “fencing” them with rails. In the early days of the industry—I mean before 1883 and observance of “railroad standard time” (Blaise 103)—travelling by rail was complicated by a wilderness of competing temporal standards that differed by city and corporation. At one point, there were seventy standards in effect (101), and the various interactions between them were chaotic and bewildering.<sup>44</sup>

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44 Blaise provides an example: “[I]f you were a Philadelphia businessman in the 1870s with an appointment to keep in Buffalo, transferring in Pittsburg (as it was then spelled), you would of course have to know the departure time in Philadelphia local time (just as you would today)—*unless* the train had originated in Washington or New York, in which case it might depart according to the local time of those stations, a few minutes earlier or later than your local

Railroad standard time in 1883 and then universal time in 1884 greatly simplified travel and communications.

There was a related psychological effect, or at least the promise of such an effect. According to Svetlana Boym, “[i]n the nineteenth century, many believed that railroads would take care of displacement and that the speed of transportation would accommodate trips to and from home” (346); the train was imagined to be fast enough that a traveller or settler would always be within reach of home, and so no one would need to feel nostalgia. The promise of the train was a promise of enabling the past to keep up with the present. It was synchronicity. For the Western, however, the train was a symbol of time that was often a threat—as in *High Noon*, when it brings the bad guys to town, or in *Dead Man*, when, in a nightmare of gunfire and burning coal, it transports people through time not to the future but to a more dangerous past. In *Back to the Future III* (Zemeckis, 1990), however, the train is a more literal time machine, the only alternative to the DeLorean sports car that could enable the heroes to sort out the various timelines.

The generally straight line of a railroad, too, came to be associated with order. With order, civilization supposedly came to the West. But even Fleming was doubtful: “Fleming, looking southward in the early 1870s from his surveying encampment on the prairies, wondered to his friend George Grant if a more humane way of development than the American model of wholesale slaughter of all inconvenient human and animal life could not be found (though he was not overly optimistic)” (Blaise 127). Indeed, around 1865 the American general Winfield S. Hancock had said explicitly that when “the great railroad brings civilization . . . , the wild Indian and the buffalo will have passed away” (qtd. in Schwantes and Ronda 26). It seems to me that uniting the country by rail was less bloody in Canada than it had been earlier in the United States. The Blackfoot led by Crowchild were mainly peaceful in spite of encroaching railroad developments, whereas there was more violence south of the border; north of the border there was in effect a mounted police escort for the railroad in the final phases of its development. But “bloody” or not, genocide or at

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Philadelphia time. It was your responsibility to know the difference. Thereafter, you entered a twilight zone of competing times” (70).

least cultural genocide was at work, with the train's effect on buffalo an analogue of the colonial effect on Indigenous peoples.<sup>45</sup>

The train has a history of unbridled competition and territorial desire. The competition was not only between railroad execs but also nations, and it did not end as the train and its economic and cultural engineers "won" the West. When the end of the American transcontinental railroad (finished 1869) was in sight, the US secretary of state, William Seward, was, not coincidentally, looking to the North as the next frontier: "Seward, a leading advocate of 'Manifest Destiny,' held the notion that the United States was not merely a continental power but destined by its dynamism and the full exercise of its republican virtues to *be* the continent, as his 1867 purchase of Alaska from Russia would soon bear out" (Blaise 51). Manifest Destiny was the exceptionalist doctrine that Americans had a duty and a right to conquer the West. With relevance to this doctrine, Blaise reflects on what happened after it was symbolically effectuated by completing the railroad: "We are fond of saying that the railroad 'tamed the West,' that it civilized the world, but there is a rakish counternarrative. Railroads emboldened us. The distant whistle fed our dreams, our hunger, made us, by prevailing standards, wanton" (138). Canada and the North became an object of desire. Whether the Overland Route or the Orient Express, the train was a technology of imperialism—and, for a Canada beginning to imagine a transcontinental railway in the 1840s, the protector of British imperialism against American interests (Owram 28, 32–4). For people committed to the idea of West and the allure of the frontier, settlement was no satisfaction. Another frontier was needed—another "savage" but "empty" land that could bear the repeating of narratives of civilization and modernization. Another old land was needed to make new.

And so Cooper describes the railroad's advance into the North with remorseless nostalgia in the final words of *Go North, Young Man!*: "It was the pioneer track layer of the Hudson Bay line, laying steel as though there were no storm to hamper. A strangely animated thing, this track layer, a combination of trams and lifts and cranes and adjustable hoists" (269), a

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45 In more neutral terms, W. H. New criticizes the notion that Canadian settlement by rail was somehow "placid" (83). The railroad effectively introduced and defined police work as the policing of Indigenous peoples, an issue with which we still contend.

“monster that was devouring a frontier” (270), a “giant, spidery, voracious thing” that meant “a march of civilization and a funeral of another frontier” (271). Although Cooper’s metaphors occasionally admit to the destructiveness of the industrial technologies that invade the North—e.g., “an army of big business” (23)—his book is boosterish and Westmongering, suggesting always that new geographies to exploit remain when the West and even Northwest are exhausted: “the excitement of new money is as fervent today in Canada as it was even back in those days when the name of Cobalt became synonymous with silver, and the sour-doughs of the Klondike, their first flush gone, turned from the Western North to the Eastern North in hopes of new riches” (7).

These reorientations of power and money are also coincident with Confederation. In 1867, the United States gained Alaska, and Canada gained a union of three colonies—going only so far west, however, as Ontario (then known as Canada West). The last spike in the Canadian railroad would not be nailed until 1885 (R. Daniels 63), drawing a line both material and symbolic that helped to fortify the Canada-US border and block the American incursions into the North-West Territories that we see in some of Vanderhaeghe’s books (discussed in chapter 6). The West’s turn North has arguably continued along with refinements to Canadian territory, the focus being more recently the Far North, with Nunavut gaining its own ground in 1999. Based in Ottawa but partying, so to speak, in Calgary, the Harper government engaged in a search for the wrecks of the Franklin expedition partly to claim sovereignty over the unoccupied (again, empty) North Pole in 2014 (Weber). This claim extended a geo-cultural shift that has been happening in North America since the middle of the nineteenth century, at least in terms of the Canadian Western.

So, one of the ideas of West is that of the range, the open country, the place that the railroad can only border. And as I have tried to show here so far, the place is geographically West but has turned North. Is there a feature of northern geography that helps to explain or justify this idea of openness, of blankness, of *terra nullius*?

## The Blank Space of No Man's Land

I thought it was the snow. It is a symbol of nordicity and a related mistaken assumption sometimes made in white cultures, which is—as Daniel Coleman explains—that Canada's “rugged northern climate and untapped natural resources posed a challenge that would thicken the blood and callus the hands of any delicate British young man” (137). But in retrospect, the civility that this “challenge” was supposed to help create was highly, rampantly destructive. There is a sepia-toned monochromatic 1874 photograph reproduced in Pierre Berton's *The Last Spike* (1971) that seems to capture a field of tall grass pocked with snow but which, upon closer inspection, reveals not snow but sun-bleached buffalo bones covering the prairie from foreground to middle distance (12). Each bone is so white that the overexposure seems almost the result of a scratch on the negative letting all the light through. Each bone is in that sense a pock, not a mound but a hole, an absence (of buffalo, of Indigenous peoples) that is even brighter and emptier than the sky.

The whitest sky, however, can be filled with cloud and snow, the snow differing from cloud and rain as a solid that partially extends the solidity of earth *upward*. Snow is associated with the North (and of course a South far deeper than the American Deep South), but in addition to nordicity it also means altitude, which is why snow may appear unproblematically in American Westerns set in the mountains of the Southwest (e.g., *The Searchers*). Whether you are going north on a map or climbing against gravity, nordicity and altitude are similarly *up*. I once proposed to a Canadian literature class at McGill University that, for the United States, the North was the new frontier (as I have been explaining here), and one of my American students countered that his passport said that outer space—the epitome of upness—was now the frontier. Perhaps they are both this new frontier that upness is. Both are Olympian, as in Mount Olympus and the Olympics; the Olympian adjectives are faster, stronger, *higher*. Upness in the North and in the snow is Olympian because this real place is the conceptual space of bold quests (being that “[s]pace is a practised place,” as I already quoted from Michel de Certeau), such as racing against the Russians for outer space and the moon, or seeking the Northwest Passage along the polar ice.

Although snow (like almost any signifier in the Western) is often slippery and drifting<sup>46</sup> and associated with the North, it re-inscribes the frontier myth of the West through its evocations of desire and ambition, uncharted territory and open country, and a narrative freedom and originality that problematically counter the *ab-originality* of the West. Simultaneously, snow couples the hospitality of this “free” space with a manifest hostility of the wilderness—a Derridian “hostipitality,” a paradox of the warm welcome and the powerfully cold shoulder. Students often ask me what makes Canadian literature different from other literature, a question that assumes there are national differences. Often there are, but Frank Davey is compelling when he argues, in *Surviving the Paraphrase* (1976 as essay, 1983 as book), that the same themes can be found in many places around the world. (I will return to Davey more than once, especially in chapter 5.) Broad swaths of geography can help to explain shared themes. Regional approaches isolate the North, the prairie, the island, and other geographies that can be found in more than one place but are not the same as all other places.

Snow is not so common in the Western, or so perpetual even in the Northwest, that it should be considered a feature of landscape rather than weather. Tim Ingold writes that “[t]he question comes down to this: is the sky a part of the landscape or is it not?” (127). Ingold points out that medieval farming was “done close-up, in an immediate, muscular and visceral engagement with wood, grass and soil—the very opposite of the distanced, contemplative and panoramic optic that the word ‘landscape’ conjures up in many minds today” (126). He later writes of going with his class to the seaside on a stormy day to demonstrate a counterpoint to “landscape phenomenology” (129): as much as we might feel connected to the weather, we can do little to change it immediately and certainly (global warming being a long process whose necessary correction might never be fully realized), unlike the land, which can be terraformed. A snowstorm or snowfall is a phenomenon of weather that, like a dust storm, comes uncontrollably out of the sky and is thereafter only temporarily a feature of the landscape that can be manipulated—swept away, shovelled up, tracked through.

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46 Here I am conflating, with slipperiness and the drift, post-structuralist ideas from Jacques Derrida and D. H. Miller.

Similarly, one night in Connor's *Black Rock* (1898), one of the early Canadian Westerns, snow is not part of the landscape but an effect on it: "the dazzling snow lay like a garment over all the open spaces in soft waving folds, and crowned every stump with a quaintly shaped night-cap" (140), and above the "garment" the sky is "like the roof of a great cathedral" (140). The welcoming landscape here is the perceived result of Connor's religious colonialism, where the welcome is partly because of the assumption of "open spaces" whose blankness is highlighted by the snow. That the landscape is consumable is evident in the narrator's appreciative gaze: "I stood silent, drinking in at every sense the night with its wealth of loveliness" (140)—the allusion to "drinking" also an ironic comment on the total prohibition sought in the Northwest by Connor (here both the author and narrator) and Craig, the missionary.

It is also not only part of the weather's effect on landscape but also on the mindscape. The exterior becomes interior in H. A. Cody's *The Frontiersman* (1910) when snow prompts the hero's self-discovery, even religious epiphany:

It was early dawn as the two plodded their way through the deep snow. The furious storm of the night had ceased, and a hush reigned over the land, as if in honour of the birth of the Great Prince of Peace. All around lay the virgin snow, unsullied as yet by its contact with earth, and untrodden save by the two night watchers. "How like my life," thought Keith. "Last night, the storm howling and raging; this morning the stillness of God. Ah, I see it clearly."

"Hey? what d'ye see?" asked the prospector, suddenly stopping and looking at his companion.

Keith laughed. "Nothing outwardly," he replied. "I must have been dreaming and forgot myself." (97–8)

Although Keith associates the snow with his life, the prospector has a different idea. The prospector tells Keith that he sees on the snow "a new trail bein' blazed out fer ye by the hand of the Almighty," and that "it'll make all the difference in the world when the shinin' light of a true woman lightens yer path" (98). The prospector associates the snow with

“the Almighty” and “a true woman,” and this woman obviously relates to the “virgin” quality that Keith perceives when he looks at the white landscape. The men’s anthropomorphisms imply their belief in the innocence and goodness of Keith’s ministry, his colonialism. The glaring and sublime reflection on snow prompts self-reflection. For Cody, as an early imaginer of the West through the lens of the Western, the snow has a religious significance akin to Manifest Destiny.

In the moments of emerging out of shelter into the snow, it can seem like the blankness of an unmarked page or an unpainted canvas. Ingold asks, “is the sky . . . the epitome of emptiness?” (127) No, he implies as an answer, but the myth of the West encourages us to imagine a transfer of sky to earth when snow falls: the sky’s emptiness comes down to earth, reducing variations in hue and tone, smoothing surfaces so that the heterogeneity of landscape appears temporarily more homogenous and, in a Baudrillardian precession of simulacra long preceding the hyperreal, reminds us of the page or canvas that can convey the picture of anything we imagine. Ingold rightly cautions us that “there is something oxymoronic about compounds [such as “lightscape” or “soundscape”] that couple the currents of sensory awareness with a regime, implicit in the modernist equation of *scape* with the *scopic*, which reduces such currents to vectors of projection in the conversion of objects into images” (134).<sup>47</sup> In other words, he cautions us against seeing the landscape as an image—or, in the case of the unpainted canvas, as an image-to-be. The equation of image with landscape is precisely the error that Thomas King criticizes when Monroe Swimmer, in *Truth & Bright Water*, vandalizes classic landscape paintings by painting the First Nations back into them. The irony is that the colonial impression of emptiness is so easily disturbed in the snow by tracks, but, just as easily, blowing snow can erase the signs of animal life and human occupation.

Because I am interested in visual images here, I want to remark on how, in various American Westerns on film, snow is a symbol of danger, mystery, blankness, and barrenness—and even of a lack of mothers

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47 In Ingold’s writing about *scape* and *scope*, there are echoes of Arjun Appadurai’s metaphors of the *scape*—for example, mediascape and ideoscape, which he uses in *Modernity at Large* (1996) to conceptualize movements between cultures.

who can produce surviving children. In the 1956 film *The Searchers*, snow signals a change of seasons as Ethan (John Wayne) follows the trail of his kidnapped niece, seemingly with no hope of finding her and thereby renewing the fecundity of spring for his family. In *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (Altman, 1971), John McCabe (Warren Beatty) finds that his experience of the American Northwest results in his dying unheroically in a snowbank after being shot in the back. In *Buck and the Preacher* (Poitier, 1972), there is no snow, but there is the threat of what will happen if the Black families travelling northward cannot recover the money that was stolen from them before winter. In *Jeremiah Johnson* (Pollack, 1972), the snow in the Rocky Mountains is metonymically associated with the mountain man rechristened Bear Claw (Will Geer), an old white man with a preference for wearing white or light-coloured furs. He tells his protégé Jeremiah Johnson (Robert Redford) that a woman's breast is the hardest rock in the world and that he prefers to live alone, as Johnson does. Johnson's forced marriage to a Flathead woman named Swan (Delle Bolton) ends in her death at the hands of vengeful Crow men, suggesting that, in the eyes of the filmmakers and their "Indians," the whiteness of a swan is only beautiful until it is coloured by miscegenation; in parallel, Bear Claw's racialization as "Indian" through his animal name is allowable because as a hermit and bachelor (his maleness notwithstanding) he is no threat to racial purity. In *Pale Rider* (Eastwood, 1985), the preacher (Clint Eastwood)—also like a hermit or bachelor—is similarly associated through metonym with the snowy mountain that is often his personal backdrop, and its whiteness implies his ghostliness. *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990) suggests as much when the Sioux led by Kicking Bird (Graham Greene) vanish into the snowy forest at the end of the film, the snow implying (falsely) the winter of their culture. At the beginning of *The Hateful Eight* (Tarantino, 2015), a horse-drawn carriage drives through the snow past a crucifix, and the semblance of the reversed direction of the carriage in a cut between scenes breaks the 180-degree rule and implies that the purity of Jesus Christ is about to be stained red in one of Quentin Tarantino's signature bloodbaths. In *The Revenant* (Inárritu, 2015), the snow forces Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio) to shelter himself, naked, in the dead body of his still-warm horse—his re-emergence being a symbolic rebirth that calls

attention to the lack of real and living mothers in the story.<sup>48</sup> (I consider the born-from-a-horse scene with several other examples in chapter 6.) In these American films, snow is associated with death, perhaps the death of a style of masculinity—such as the strong, silent type—associated with a supposedly vanishing Indigeneity.

But I have seen far less snow in the Canadian Westerns that I have watched. I don't recall it in the film adaptation of *All Hat* (Farlinger, 2007), or the television adaptation of *The Englishman's Boy* (Smith, 2008) (though the novel it was based on does have snow), *Six Reasons Why* (Campagna and Campagna, 2008), or *Gunless* (Phillips, 2010). Even in *Gunless*, which is so self-consciously and parodically Canadian, the Montana Kid rides up from Montana kicking up dust. The landscapes are the southern Alberta Badlands and grasslands in summer, and in *Gunless* it is dry enough that Jane's (Sienna Guillory) preoccupation is finishing the pump to activate her well and draw water. Whereas, on film, the American Western has a diversity of Western landscapes that include altitudes and northern locales that rationalize the use of snow, the Canadian Western has landscapes that tend to be in the American West or South or could stand in for them. Its proof of concept is in the fact that so many American Westerns have scenes filmed in Canada, such as *Saskatchewan* (Walsh, 1954), *Little Big Man* (Penn, 1970), *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992), *Last of the Dogmen* (Murphy, 1995), *Open Range* (Costner, 2003), *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Dominik, 2007).<sup>49</sup> Admittedly, contrasting a small sample size of Canadian films without snow is not statistically significant, but it is almost as if the makers of Canadian Westerns on film want to distance themselves from weather or landscapes that might appear too Canadian

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48 The only mothers in *The Revenant* are a bear and some Native American women, especially the Pawnee woman (unnamed in the film) who was in love with Glass and gave birth to their son. She, however, is killed by colonists. When Glass surprises the bear and her cubs, he barely survives the ensuing attack, but in the struggle he kills the mother, leaving the cubs to feed the trappers without parental guidance. Presumably David McGimpsey would quip that this is about normal in Canada: "Life in Canada is just bear attack / after bear attack. It always happens" (29). Indeed, there are bear attacks in Canadian Westerns such as H. A. Cody's *Rod of the Lone Patrol* and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing* (2002)—the point here being that the bear can simply sleep through winter, and that the bear and snow are parallel threats that the settler is not perfectly equipped to survive without help.

49 See, too, the British-Canadian co-production *Welcome to Blood City* (Sasdy, 1977).

(and might alienate those American viewers who do not know the history of Northerns featuring Canada made in the United States). Or they want to cordon off the North to protect it from the West's turn to the North as a generic Americanization; or Prairie fiction with its greater realism has enough snow already.<sup>50</sup> Of course, some of the early Canadian Westerns in literature that were more self-consciously exploring the Northwest have snow, as in various examples from Connor and Cody. And Zacharias Kunuk and Natar Ungalaaq's recent *Maliglutit* is set on a very wintry Baffin Island, but the snow has far less Canadian-American relevance than the Inuit reality of snowpack and sea ice at many or most times of all seasons (thus far, in the brief history of anthropogenic climate change and crisis).

We have seen that both American and Canadian writers have turned the idea of West northward so that Canada becomes the new frontier. Snow and climate are not defining factors, though it is possible that in the American Western it suggests a greater desire to imagine and turn toward new frontiers than we see in Canada. From the perspective of the Western, in Canada and in the United States, there is no feature of northern geography that justifies the notion of *terra nullius*; it is a construction of myths and texts. Still, the Western is oriented toward it: American Westerns look west and north; Canadian Westerns look west and south, except when they are more obviously Northerns. Although the straight line of the train is sometimes seen as a (time)line of progress—a civilizing development that brought law and geographic containment to savages and the wilderness—it is also a symbol of modernity whose “roads” and “ways” imposed a built structure on natural geography and whose “last spike” concluded the virtual extermination of the buffalo and of related Indigenous traditions and economies. While Blaise articulates a history of ideas in which the train demands time to be understood as relative rather than constant, King and McKay imply that the West needs to be “deactivated” by breaking the line of the train and the strong sense of direction that underlies western expansion. Such expansion is not only “western” but also “Western,” in the sense of a direction aligned inseparably with the idea of West that Westerns illustrate and epitomize. And yet in the

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50 I thank Morgen Mills for these latter two speculations about why Canadian Westerns on film have so little snow.

Western the train is also a source of apprehension, because modernity and the relativity of time and space involve easy compressions that come with speed, and the ease with which one technology can be superseded by another and abandoned in the wilderness. But, whether snowy or not, this *terra nullius* is the blank space, a nothing, that can be moved to anywhere colonists imagine, part of the transnational imagination.

