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# The American Western in Canadian Literature

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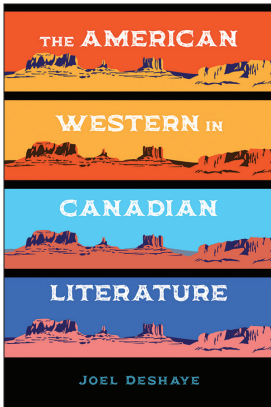
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## THE AMERICAN WESTERN IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

by Joel Deshayé

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## From Law to Outlaw

### *The Second World War, Westerns, and the '40s Pulps*

Clint Eastwood once said that he was “one of the people who took the hero further away from the white hat” and that you could identify him “only because everybody else was crappier than he was” (qtd. in McNaron 152), but the villainous hero—whom I called the outlaw-lawman in the preceding chapter to emphasize the symmetry—long predates Eastwood’s 1960s roles. To be fair, Eastwood probably had in mind “the white hat” of a film such as *High Noon* (Zinnemann, 1952), in which Gary Cooper plays one of the most upstanding lawmen imaginable, a man perfectly suited to the occasionally puritanical moralism of the 1950s (and his new Quaker wife). Even one decade earlier, however, the questionable hero can be found in the Westerns of the 1940s that preoccupy this chapter; he (usually he) can even be found in some of the Westerns of the 1910s of the preceding chapter, such as Ralph Connor’s and H. A. Cody’s, one of which—*The Long Patrol: A Tale of the Mounted Police* (1912)—involves a Mountie who shoots not only first but also at the back of a retreating interloper (130). Cast the lasso far enough into the past and the outlaw-lawman appears in the skin of the medieval Robin Hood, whose thievery was meant to right imbalances and restore justice. Even farther, he appears in Lucifer himself—a devil who was once an angel. The binary in these contexts is generally Christian, which is one reason why Thomas King in *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) deconstructs the fallen angel and recontextualizes him as First Woman, who falls from the sky, lands in the ocean, and is

involved in bringing up the land and creating Turtle Island, more widely known as North America.

In chapter 2, the so-called Indian was duly complicated, not only by King but also by Jordan Abel in *Injun* (2016), Garry Gottfriedson in *Whiskey Bullets* (2006), *Maliglutit* (2016), Zacharias Kunuk and Natar Ungalaaq's epic rewriting of John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), and—as an outsider to this Indigenous group—the multi-authored *Gabriel Dumont's Wild West Show* (2017/2021). Starting with First Nations perspectives and figures was to respect their primacy on Turtle Island and to set the remainder of this book in their context, rather than the inverse, as much as I can, given that the genre does so much to push them out. In the chapter before this one, for instance, I was critical of some of Cody's and Connor's examples of the Muscular Christian lawman, whose idea that they could do good in the West was based in part on a flawed premise of the vacancy of Indigenous lands.

Regardless of the political orientations, we have seen, in the work of the authors just mentioned, rather literary literature. Of all the subject matter in this book, the stories in this chapter are the most popular and the least literary, the least portentous, insofar as those adjectives are meaningful in a study of the Western. Western films such as *The Searchers* and *High Noon* are classic because they are major accomplishments of drama, character study, and cinematography, and are aesthetically parallel to the later literary Westerns of Cormac McCarthy in the United States or those of Guy Vanderhaeghe in Canada. The '40s pulps under consideration in this chapter are analogous, instead, to B movies, made in such numbers that the conventions were crystallized or, in a more appropriate metaphor, distilled into hooch. This chapter focuses on the 1940s and the Americanizing pulp fiction that made it clear that the lawman and outlaw are figures that are not only set side by side but also on top of one another—not only a duo, but also superimposed.

Insofar as Canada and the United States are a related duo, Canada obviously the sidekick, or the sleeper crushed under the elephant (as the saying goes here in Canada, anyway), the superimposition also flips in curious ways. In the Western, regionalism trumps nationalism and in fact *becomes* nationalism, with the West often expressing its resentment of the East and its traditions of nationalism, whether Washington, DC, or

Ottawa. I know from experience that people in Saskatchewan and North Dakota often feel more affinity for each other than for their imagined communities in distant capital cities. Reading Canadian Westerns, however, emphasizes a North-South tension instead of an East-West tension. For the record, I think of it as the tension between partners, not (necessarily) between competitors, though I have had second thoughts since the Trump administration's hard-line approach to renegotiating and renaming the North American Free Trade Agreement. And Canada has sometimes been strict about trade with the United States too, as it was when Westerns were involved.

I have two purposes now: first, to historicize the Canadian outlaw-lawman alongside wartime law, specifically the *War Exchange Conservation Act* that made it illegal to sell American Westerns in Canada, and the alleged cultural colonialism of American mass culture around the 1940s; and second, to read an American character of seemingly Canadian origin, the itinerant and intermittent sheriff Smokey Carmain, through his serialized appearances in the issues of *Dynamic Western*, available at Library and Archives Canada (LAC)—issues that I helped to rediscover, not yet catalogued, one fateful December. I am reading Westerns here, but, in the crossover spirit of the previous chapter, I am also a little of the detective, rummaging around and looking for clues about who wrote these pulps and what they were thinking.

## Wartime Canadian Law and Western Transnationality

Clive Bloom, in *Cult Fiction* (1996), one of the few books to attempt a theory of pulp fiction, claims that “pulp is not to be defended, nor is it to be made more available for serious study at the academy—pulp never went to school and hates the academy. Academic respect kills pulp with kindness. Pulp does not wish to be part of the canon except to plunder and pastiche it” (133–4). How ironic, then, that in a sense I was “plunder[ing]” the archives, partly for academic purposes, partly to wonder about the Western's relationship to national canons, when I went looking for *Dynamic Western* and other pulps. I had had the impression from an out-of-date LAC website, *Tales from the Vault!*, that there was more to the archives than had been made available up to then, such as only one issue of *Dynamic Western*, and my repeated inquiries led to a more thorough search by one of the

archivists, who found ten more issues and arranged their cataloguing. There is still not much: only, for instance, two partially represented years of *Dynamic Western* magazine (1941 and 1942), and parts of others such as *Bill Wayne's Western* magazine. Both of these magazines were part of Alec Valentine's publishing empire in Toronto in the 1940s (M. Smith 286), and a few hundred issues from his various genres of pulp magazines are now in Ottawa at LAC. (Slightly beyond the purlieu of the literary field, there are Canadian Western comics from the same era, many of them accounted for in the Grand Comics Database, such as Bell Features's *Triumph Comics* series prior to 1946, when they started reprinting American comics; LAC also has some of these. Having to limit the scope somehow, I have not included comics in this book, though I have written about them elsewhere.) When Valentine was publishing, there was no LAC, and "the three best collections of print Canadiana were [in the United States] at the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and Harvard University" (MacSkimming 24, 25). LAC got a building only in 1967. Its collection of pulp fiction is rare, small, and fragile—rare and small partly because these Westerns were published in Canada by publishers that did not last long, and partly because of their physical condition. The magazines are fading and yellowed, the paper brittle and torn, the stapled bindings (aptly called saddle-stitching) rusting. The March 1942 issue of *Dynamic Western* is missing too many pages to be read effectively and too damaged to be copied safely. None of these issues will sustain repeated hands-on viewings—the great historical peril of not making things to last.

And yet they tell a story that we should not forget, one germane to Canadian-American relations and the transnationality of the outlaw-lawman. As told, the story of the Canadianization of the outlaw-lawman is incomplete and thus open to question. If I were to speculate wildly, I would venture that the now-unknown writers in *Dynamic Western* magazine could have included Americans posing as Canadians and side-stepping Canadian law at a time when it was illegal to sell American Westerns in Canada. More likely, they were Canadians slavishly imitating an American genre, possibly not only for Canadians to enjoy. Some evidence suggests that Canadian publishers in the 1940s sold pulp fiction, probably including made-in-Canada Westerns, back to the United States (M. Smith 267). This evidence complicates the power dynamic and demands us to

accept that the transnationality of the Western in the 1940s was not merely northward—a trail of exports out from the United States.

The Canadian law governing such trade was the *War Exchange Conservation Act*, and it was supposed to help indirectly with two moral obligations. The first was the war effort, as a result of keeping disposable income in Canada, where economic activity would add to state coffers. The concern was not unreasonable; Graham Broad estimates that, while disposable income increased by almost 50 per cent during the war, 90 per cent of that was spent on the movies, almost all of which would have been American (13, 169). The second obligation was perhaps the bigger concern for politicians in Canada: the protection of youth from the corruptive influences that circulated in the most cheaply available media—that is, magazines, effectively the Internet porn of the 1940s. According to the statute, the *War Exchange Conservation Act* banned American pulps that represented “detective, sex, western, alleged true or confession stories” (qtd. in Strange and Loo, “Hewers” 12). Although these identified threats were part of the language that echoed in future legislation such as the *Foreign Exchange Conservation Act* of 1947 and the Fulton bill of 1949 (explained further below), the *War Exchange Conservation Act* partly backfired. Note that “[i]n 1948 English-language publishers [in Canada] had issued a mere fourteen books of fiction and thirty-five works of poetry and drama” (MacSkimming 24), a sign that the industry in general needed investment, even without the wartime challenges. The act kept money in Canada, but, in Western terms, it “spurred the growth” (Strange and Loo, “Hewers” 11) of the Canadian pulp fiction industry, effectively nationalizing the worst that America had to offer, which was by today’s standards very mild indeed. It proved Canada perfectly capable of writing and publishing its own smut, its own sordid tales of criminals and detectives, loose women (and men), and trigger-happy gunslingers—quite possibly the worst that *Canada* had to offer (as *art*, if we can accept that we did considerably worse in reality).

These sorts of characters come from genres that are different from each other but still related, often the same characters in different contexts. Keith Walden, Michael Dawson, and Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo agree that “the Mountie pulps” (Strange and Loo, “Hewers” 12) had heroes who were morally simpler or at least clearer than those typical of American

Westerns, though the preceding chapter also demonstrated some exceptions to this rule. These “Mountie pulps” might be considered “Northerns” but are some of the texts that I want us to think of as Canadian Westerns, to acknowledge their many shared conventions of the Western genre, such as their typically late nineteenth-century settings, anti-modernism, open country, “cowboys and Indians,” violence often involving guns, and moral simplicity—the space- and time-sensitive chronotopes of Bakhtinian theory (Druick 300)—as I showed in the preceding chapter. Continuing into this chapter, Smokey Carmain is another, because his *Dynamic Western* vehicle is supposed to be Canadian but his settings are the American Southwest, and as sheriff he is not much like the upstanding Mountie in Canadian myths. The fact that this magazine was made in Canada demonstrates that some Canadians wanted American-style Westerns; Canadian publishers saw an opportunity to replace American product with “American” product.

The latter case is how Toronto’s Alec Valentine started his business in the pulps (M. Smith 261): “Rather than designing his magazines in a manner that would emphasize their status as new publications produced in Canada, Valentine imitated his American counterparts at the visual and tactile level in order to benefit from their already established popularity” (268). Thus, stories in *Dynamic Western* usually happen in the American Southwest or occasionally the West, and, for most readers of *Dynamic Western*, its Canadian provenance would have been almost unnoticeable in the small print of the front matter. Bart Beaty states that American comic-book publishers had created Canadian editions that simply reprinted American comics in Canada (101)—early versions of the “branch plants” in Toronto that Al Purdy and other Canadian writers and figures called attention to and deplored in the 1970s—but this does not appear to be the case with *Dynamic Western*.<sup>1</sup> (See, instead, *10 Story Western*, which the narrator of Robert Kroetsch’s 1966 novel *Words of My Roaring* mentions as some of his reading material.) Nevertheless, the complex and questionable national identity of *Dynamic Western* is yet another reason to

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1 Besides Beaty, some of the other especially notable scholars of Canadian comics of this era are John Bell and Ivan Kocmarek. For more on Purdy’s nationalist views of the United States, see his book *The New Romans: Candid Canadian Opinions of the US* (1968).



sweep away some of the generic border between Northerns and Westerns and to think of them as versions of the same thing. Although Strange and Loo explain, for obvious reasons, that comics, crime magazines, and pulp fiction can be separate genres with different characteristics (“Hewers” 20), they also describe the “morally dark places, particularly the remote north and the far west,” of the true-crime genre, and they link these genres explicitly: “ ‘Northerns’ and westerns amplified detectives’ capacity to restore order by depicting the added burden of their civilizing mission” (17, 28). I have already hinted that this Western-detective linkage was an element of characterization for Smokey Carmain in *Dynamic Western*, and the introduction to this book also demonstrated that, in much the same way as national borders can be permeable, genres of national significance can blend together too.

Crossing the border is one of the tactics of the outlaw. To escape the law, you sometimes have to get out of town, go past the county line, vamoose from your own country. With the ’40s pulps, the “Americanization” of the Canadian market, or this “Canadianization” of the Western, was driven by outlaws in publishing. While we might be accustomed to thinking that the genre creates the market, as when ad agencies effectively tell us what to want, in this Canadian situation the outlaws in publishing might have been creating the genre: “The conventions which develop in these most formulaic Westerns . . . are more insistent and derive not from the influence of literary genre, but from the pressures of the market-place” (Bold, “Voice” 45). Even if these “outlaws” were not, in fact, Americans faking their names for *Dynamic Western* and *Bill Wayne’s Western*, they had at the very least found their way around the prevailing moral codes—the de facto laws—that would be further codified in the 1950s: upstanding respect, honour, neighbourly watchfulness, conformity, the order of the picket fence. The potential for simply rebranding American content was a threat to both Canadian solidarity and Canadian individualism, in both cases a resistance to prevailing notions of a spreading American orthodoxy.

And so it is ironic that, in the pulps, the individualism of the author was one of the sacrifices to the market, because they were paid to churn out stories that conformed to identifiable genres and that thereby reified

the genres through repetition (Bold, "Voice" 30). Christine Bold historicizes the example of one American publisher,

Street and Smith, who entered the field in 1889 and stayed in it until after World War II, [and] streamlined their production to the smallest detail. In the [late nineteenth-century] dime novel days, they laid down specifications of character, scene and plot; they forced writers to re-write installments; and they shuttled them from one series to another in mid-story. By the time of the pulp magazines, which superseded dime novels around the end of the First World War, the conventions of commercial Western fiction were so entrenched that their production needed only perfunctory surveillance. ("Voice" 31)

Bold's research also shows that some prominent writers of dime novels and pulp fiction were remarkably self-reflexive in implying that there was a "marketplace function" (37) to their stories; she argues, however, that over time these authors lost their self-reflexivity—and ultimately their voice—to the genre (44–5).

I would add that another result of this "function" (in Foucauldian terms, an "author function," or in Barthesian terms, the death of the author) is in the names of some authors of the pulps, and indeed Bold alludes to "the anonymous publishing voice" ("Voice" 47) of pulp fiction. In a concession to their publishers and, I suspect, to Canadian law, the possibly American writers "in" Canada published in Toronto pseudonymously. Although Michelle Denise Smith claims that many of Valentine's magazines were produced in Toronto and that his busiest writers lived there (273), I have not, to date, found a Canadian biographical record of the most frequent contributor to *Dynamic Western* in LAC's eleven issues: Luke Price, creator of Smokey Carmain. (If the Bakhtinian method of interpreting genre is to locate its utterances culturally, materially, and historically, we are partly stymied here: we know the time and place of the utterance, but not who said it.) Several of the other writers sharing space in the magazine with Luke Price had unlikely names, such as Miles Canyon, Wiley Horton, and Terence Dawson. These, at least, suggest

pseudonymity. Without ascribing or implying a national identity to pseudonymous writers, Strange and Loo state that pseudonyms were common across the pulpy genres (“Hewers” 30n); Thomas P. Kelly had at least thirty of them (M. Smith 283) and contributed to some of the Western magazines under the name of Zed Kelly (284). Furthermore, the use of pseudonyms partly enabled the transnationality of the Western, creating a new and untraceable set of “Canadian” writers whose very rootlessness enacts a trope of the colonial (or potentially diasporic) outlaw-lawman: escaping, wandering, movin’ on.

Pseudonymity was also an escape from critics who could denigrate the quality of pulp fiction by recourse to standards such as grammar and spelling. (In *Dynamic Western*, the spellings are American, not British or Canadian.) *Dynamic Western* has many editorial errors, as do other pulps and comics of the day that I have read, but Smith finds an almost artfully egregious example in crime fiction: “In terms of textual content, the handful of manuscripts in the archive indicate that the stories were printed without many editorial changes. In getting these stories ready for printing, there was much room for error, and little time for corrections. In the text of a true crime story called ‘Edmonton’s Maniacal Killer and the Innocent Girl,’ for example, a murder witness is identified in the story as ‘Private A.J. Lajoie,’ but the caption beneath his adjoining photograph reads ‘Primate A.J. Lajoie’ ” (M. Smith 274). Bloom offers an explanation that helps us to understand the history:

These “invisible” writers and their forgotten publishers produced an imaginative space at once banal and luxuriant, naïve and yet oddly complex. Somewhere between the written culture of the nineteenth century and the visual culture of the late twentieth, these writers act as an historical link which is also and at the same time an aesthetic link in its appeal to readers sophisticated in the media of film and television and perhaps only merely competent in the realm of the written. (24)

Any critic of literary taste must accept that, by the late 1940s, readers, including the critics, were highly influenced by televisual writing in film and

even television (regular American broadcasting having started in 1939). Film on its own had already been affecting the language, structure, pacing, and points of view of modern writing. It is no wonder that a conservative segment of society would react against the pulps. Michael Warner argues that “good style often turns out to be not just grammatical or aesthetic but political” (129). Probably like all texts, the “political” dimension of *Dynamic Western* is made sometimes gleefully apparent, and sometimes complicated enough to demand a critic’s expertise, a deft exploration of nooks and crannies, if not a critical hammer. But politicians took to the hammer.

## Postwar Anti-Americanism and Canadian Sensitivity

After the end of the Second World War, the *War Exchange Conservation Act* was repealed, but new anti-Western—and residually anti-American—legislation replaced it. The sorts of complaints that Canadian nationalists such as Purdy registered against the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century had many justifications, not all of them realistic, such as the sense of having been robbed of “Canada’s Century” when the Second World War demonstrated American superpower quite differently from Canada’s primarily diplomatic influence on the world stage, following its contributions to the First World War at Vimy and other pivotal sites. Writ large, the complaints responded to cultural colonialism—the huge influence of American market-oriented cultures on Canadian cultures trying to preserve difference from America. Many of the regulations and state interventions emerging from the Massey Commission and its 1951 report, expanding to Canadian-content quotas in some of the mass media in the 1970s, can be traced to anxieties of the 1940s. In the public imagination at least, American influence had real-life consequences:

It was November 13, 1948, and two young boys, age 11 and 13, stole a rifle. They set up camp by the side of a road in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, at Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway. With what could be described as a youthful disregard for consequences, they started trying to flag down cars and fired shots into the air; they later told police they were “playing highwayman.” When a couple of cars failed to stop,

they fired directly into a vehicle in which James M. Watson, age 62, was a passenger. He was fatally wounded, and died three days later. . . . Among other facts, it was established that the two boys were avid comic-book fans, each reading dozens of crime comics a week. The correlation between crime and violence in the media and real-life crime and violence is still a matter of debate today, but at the time the debate was foreshortened and a connection was made between the boys' reading habits and their criminal activities. (Driscoll, "Corrupting")

In the aftermath of a media sensation in British Columbia, E. Davie Fulton, a Conservative member of Parliament, introduced a bill that passed and thereby outlawed crime comics and pulps. It was an incomplete gesture. In their article on "Maple Leaf Pulps" (2004), Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo claim that there was a "selective morality" at work: Canadians such as Fulton wanted stories that showed that "crime did not pay," but they accepted racist and sexist stereotypes ("Maple Leaf Pulps"). For Strange and Loo, it was a "tellingly Canadian" and "conservative morality" ("Maple Leaf Pulps"). In their earlier article, they joked that a conservative and anti-American Canadian government should have been willing to subsidize the magazines rather than ban them (Strange and Loo, "Hewers" 14). Although as of 1997 "fewer than a dozen charges have been brought to the courts" (Beaty 85), the Fulton bill (1949) remains in effect today in the Criminal Code, part v, section 163 (Driscoll, "Corrupting"), outlining "offences tending to corrupt morals," and including "crime comics" alongside child pornography. The legal definition of "crime comic" specifies magazines, other periodicals, or books that depict real or fictitious crimes and accordingly included Westerns, which routinely involve theft, kidnapping, assault, murder, and massacre. Beaty argues that "anti-comic book sentiment" (85) existed in the United States (91) but in Canada (and Britain) was partly anti-Americanism: "notions of Canadian literary production and consumption have historically been tied to a paternalistic conception of Canadian readers as children who require the moral guidance of the state in order to withstand the predatory suasion of American

cultural industries” (85).<sup>2</sup> As the Dawson Creek manslaughter case suggests, Canadian sensitivity is associated with children’s impressionable minds even by Canadians themselves (or probably mostly by Canadians themselves). The concern was with a set of genres—crime, true crime, Western—that already had American connotations and thus served to conjoin morals and one resistant idea of Canadianness: Canada as child of Britain who could eventually develop a high culture, a literature, that would be “counterhegemonic” (Beaty 102).

When the restrictions on trade were lifted at the end of the 1940s, coincidentally the pulp industry in Canada started to slump. The Fulton bill and competition from the reintroduced American pulp industry were only part of the reason, because the disappearance of the pulps was in fact “a continent-wide phenomenon, a product of changing products, changing tastes and changing markets” (Strange and Loo, “Hewers” 28). The new product that Strange and Loo emphasize was the paperback novel and its drugstore availability. The technology of paperback was necessary for literature of the “low culture” to compete with another new product: television. By this I mean that paperback was an innovation for the written word that generated excitement for it even as viewers were excited by the prospect of television in their living rooms or, as Irving Layton once said to Leonard Cohen, in their bedrooms (Deshaye, “Irving” 33). And without paperback, literature of the “high culture” would never have reached the masses through the many new publishers that emerged in the 1960s and ’70s in response to federal funding for the arts, during a time of multiplying and expanding universities. Soon, this now more affordable literature was required reading in university courses. We now designate it “Canadian literature,” but we also call it “CanLit” and, consciously or not, we acknowledge it as a brand and an inseparable element of popular culture here—in spite of the recent and reductive discourse of its “raging dumpster fire.”<sup>3</sup>

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2 Incidentally, *true-crime* magazines were less worrisome than the supposedly more fictional crime magazines, because they were marketed to adults more than children, as Strange and Loo explain (“Hewers” 18).

3 The phrase was popularized partly by Alicia Elliott in her article “CanLit Is a Raging Dumpster Fire” (2017).

In my previous book and other research, I have written about the inseparability of so-called high and low cultures in the development of Canadian literature, primarily through the examples of poets in mass-cultural media such as popular music, radio, and television, but also through examples of attractive public personas and manufactured controversy that could sell poetry across fields of cultural consumption. On the topic of controversy and the Western, television in particular is fascinating here at the historical junction of the 1940s and '50s. Shows such as *The Lone Ranger*, which debuted in 1949, could draw some readers away from their comics and the Western genre, but the show could also enable crossover marketing not only between genres but also between media. I have an image of a 1948 *Lone Ranger* cover (the November issue) on which the Lone Ranger bursts into a room full of criminals with a boy at his side, a boy stepping through the frame of a door that could be the frame of the television screen. As with Cody's *Rod of the Lone Patrol* (1916) and other books from the previous chapter, the image calls out to a public of boys—and to their parents looking for wholesome content for them. I imagine parents asking each other, “What can we allow the kids to do that isn't homework?” I can imagine the kids saying, “But Mom, the cowboy is a good guy!” In his book on pulp fiction, Bloom accordingly writes: “Speaking a secret language of desires unfulfilled, pulp is truly a type of embarrassing perversity negotiated between producers and consumer—a guarantee of order and yet anarchically sub-cultural” (150). One form of this “order” is the respectability promised by the Lone Ranger in his white hat. Elsewhere Bloom claims that “[p]ulp is the illicit dressed up as the respectable, but it is not disguised, nor does it hide its true nature from the consumer. Thus it becomes a type of coded play” (133). The boy's negotiation with parents over television and comics is a similar “coded play,” a testing of limits and of parental patience leading to the inevitable judgment that a popular genre isn't “good.”

As William Boddy explains it, “[w]ith the precipitous end of the [rigged] prime-time quiz show [in the latter half of the 1950s], Hollywood-produced episodic series, including a flood of TV Westerns . . . quickly filled the empty schedule slots” (125). But the Western on TV didn't last long either, partly because “[t]he war replaced the frontier as the subject everyone wanted to read about” (MacSkimming 29), and partly because

of the same juvenile-delinquency concerns in the United States that had preoccupied Fulton and allied politicians in Canada. Boddy relates that the “director of the US Bureau of Prisons . . . reported that TV Westerns were some of the most popular programmes among incarcerated juvenile delinquents” (132), but he also explains that

although some observers pointed to [Senator Thomas Dodd and his subcommittee’s] TV violence hearings as a major factor in the near-disappearance of the TV Western, the effects of the congressional hearings were probably marginal in relation to wider shifts in prime-time programming. The adverse publicity from the Dodd hearings was certainly unwelcome to the industry, and there is some evidence to suggest that the networks adjusted their selection of summer reruns and the specific handling of dramatic violence. More importantly, the decline in the number of prime-time Westerns in the early 1960s reflected an earlier shift within the action-adventure genre from Westerns to contemporary crime series, and the fate of the Western was also linked to the more general shift to prime-time medical dramas, animated series, and, most significantly, situation comedies. (133)

I have written elsewhere about “an earlier shift within the action-adventure genre from Westerns to contemporary crime series” (“Do I Feel Lucky?”). Upon reflection, I think that one of the lessons about genre to learn from the shifts between comics, pulps, literature, television, and film is that any shift can be a bait and switch, a repackaging of offensive material that forces critics to rethink, regroup, and revise while someone else is making a dollar.

Ultimately, these cultural-material circumstances are another dimension to the legal history that worked against Westerns and other pulps in the 1940s and ’50s, resulting partly in the rise and fall of genres. As one would “fall,” it would in fact sometimes transform, crossing over into another genre in much the same way that an outlaw crosses borders. In the Canadian situation, the Western itself functioned as an outlaw, working



perhaps against Canadian law but definitely against shared Canadian and American morals of the time, morals that increasingly demanded a conformity to national values while pulp writers negotiated their own creativity through the notoriously restrictive and repetitive conventions of pulp, a pinnacle (or abyss) of genre. The conventions were not and are not merely aesthetic, and nothing aesthetic is ever mere; they were political and motivated responses in law and in the involved cultures, high and low.

To get away from it all, *Dynamic Western*'s Smokey Carmain is always on the move, installing himself temporarily as the sheriff of a frontier town before gettin' while the gettin's good—that is, before the public realizes how much of a scoundrel he can be. And before he's bored with all the justice and order he grudgingly creates. He is, in a sense, the essence of genre: a character driven to compulsive repetitions that define the expectations for all his readers, who—just as he and they both settle into their roles—see him break all his good habits as soon as possible.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, Smokey Carmain, so bad he's good:

“Smokey, huh? That's a heck of a moniker [*sic*]. How do you come by it?”

“Reckon it's 'cause I like the smell of it,” he drawled.

“The smell of what—smoke?”

“Gun-smoke, I reckon.” (Price, “Smokey Carmain” 56)

## Back to the Future: Prototypical Postmodernism

“[T]here ain't nothing I like better than the smell of gunsmoke” (Price, “Gunsmoke” 103). These in fact are the first words to explain Smokey Carmain's moniker in the extant series penned by Luke Price for *Dynamic Western* in the early 1940s. Soon afterward, when Smokey is asked by Tessie Tailor how he got his name, he says, “Reckon it's 'cause I like the smell of it.” She asks again, “The smell of what—smoke?” He concludes: “Gun-smoke” (105). He tells the same story of his name again—and a story it is, with character, suspense, plot, and climax all implied—in the next available issue of *Dynamic Western*, in “Smokey Carmain Shoots It Out!” The near-verbatim explanation demonstrates on the one hand the repetitive nature of episodic literature and of genre, and on the other the affinity for storytelling that even a laconic cowboy has, when it suits him. And the

story grows taller with the telling: in “Valley of Vengeance,” a man who knows Smokey’s reputation describes him as “[t]he guy who has to breathe gunsmoke to keep livin’ ” (63); in “Smokey Defies an Army,” he is “the smoke-eating sheriff” (27). The fantastic supernaturalism of this dragon of the American Southwest even becomes religiosity in “Six-Gun Thunder”: “Men who had known him before he became sheriff had christened him ‘Smokey’ because of the aura of gun smoke that had surrounded him then” (56). He is “christened,” not merely named; he has an “aura,” a halo and a cowboy hat. What’s in a name? Certainly, when it’s so reflective, naming is quintessentially and indulgently self-reflexive, a hallmark of postmodernism.

One might argue, as John Frow does in *Genre* (2006), that any genre and any text has “metageneric” (8) and “metacommunicat[ive]” (17) potential. By extension, these “meta” qualities may be associated with postmodernism, but postmodernism is—to simplify—not merely a genre of content but more importantly a mode or a style (cf. Frow 64–5), one of performative excess (among other things). In Smokey’s naming, there is also an outrageous affection for something other than the person so christened, and in Smokey’s case more generally there is an obsessive compulsion to announce his violence. Like Judith Butler’s maxim that gender seems natural only because we perform it so repeatedly, Smokey’s name calls attention to the performance of violence that only seems essential to him. It does not merely verge on parody. As I will explain with help from Linda Hutcheon’s maxims that postmodernism is defined by parody (“Politics” 180) and that parody is “repetition with difference” (*Theory* 101), Smokey Carmain is an outlaw-lawman whose naming and repetitions suggest that his genre is at a historical moment when a nascent postmodern mode is inclining it to parody. The repetitions are not merely modal (i.e., the way that Smokey laughs at himself). As seen above, the repetitions become part of the content of the genre, increasing their significance and furthering his characterization with each example.

This claim has several implications, including the consequence of having to historicize Canadian postmodernism differently by aligning it with a period, the 1940s, that is over a decade earlier than the start of Hutcheon’s own timeline of postmodernism in *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988), which is bookended by Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* (1966)

and various later works by Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetsch, and others in the 1980s. Ultimately, I find that Smokey's modal inclinations must stop before postmodernism, at least if we understand postmodernism as "oppositional" and "contestatory" (Stacey xiii, xvii), as critics such as Frank Davey and Robert David Stacey do. The stories in *Dynamic Western* are, in form and most of their contents, simple imitations of American models and their (up until then) agreement on the natural superiority of American ideals. These authors do not oppose or contest—except, as I showed earlier in this chapter, they *were* deflecting their own authority by using pseudonyms, and they *were* dodging Canadian law and the increasingly puritanical social mores of the 1940s. Because of this international and cultural-material context, which is necessary to understand genre, I am compelled to examine just how far we can go with Smokey Carmain and the '40s pulps on a road to postmodernism, accomplishing at the very least a premature introduction to the next chapter.

Echoing Frow's comments on mode, Frank Davey asserts that postmodernism "is not a period, not an aesthetic, but an understanding of how meaning is constructed" ("Canadian" 10), and I agree—except that we can discern trends in such "understanding" that are historically specific, for example in the 1960s and '70s, when Davey and his peers were coming of age and coming to attention as postmodernist writers.<sup>4</sup> In a talk at the conference that generated Robert David Stacey's *Re: Reading the Postmodern* (2010), a talk produced by shuffling fragments, Davey provocatively wondered whether theories of postmodernism that are not in their form postmodern—Hutcheon's first and foremost—should be "qualified, or disqualified" ("Canadian" 9) as theories.<sup>5</sup> He also claimed that "Canadian understandings" were "harmed" especially by Fredric Jameson's "confusion" of postmodernism with postmodernity (Smokey Carmain being, indeed, more a result of postmodernity than postmodernism), and our alleged refusal (which I am refuting) to read "theory that is more than a

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4 Another definition, one that agrees with Davey's, is that postmodernism is "a strategy of representation that foregrounds representational systems and their ability to make epistemological and ontological claims" (C. Smith 9).

5 Davey's method of presentation at the conference is reminiscent of the "frames" and "slippages" in the chapter called "The Critic as Innovator: A Paracritical Strip in X Frames" in Ihab Hassan's *The Postmodern Turn* (1987).

few years old" (Davey, "Canadian" 11, 12). In Hutcheon's contribution to *Re: Reading the Postmodern*, she tacitly agrees with Davey, observing that living in postmodernity, or being able to look at it retrospectively, will not necessarily produce an understanding of postmodernism ("Glories" 40). In spite of Davey's claims, however, he does situate postmodernism historically and spatially, especially in the Canadian West of the 1960s and '70s that he shared with Kroetsch and everyone who made the *Tish* magazine happen; various critics suggest in fact that Canadian postmodernism is Kroetschean and therefore "Western" to some extent (Stacey xiv), rather than even more cosmopolitan or global than modernism. Davey also mockingly predicts our future (now present) interest in delimiting postmodernism further ("Canadian" 15, 18, 30, 32). Although Hutcheon still argues that postmodernism evolves through parody ("Glories" 50), Davey tries to show, by rearranging his text, that it is multiple and discontinuous and not amenable to the uni-linearity of historical evolution, regardless of his own historicisms. In fact, by satirically mocking the periodizing dimension of historicism, and by quoting himself and contradicting himself in the partial disjunction between style and content, he, too, implies that historically situated parody cannot be ignored in the study of postmodernism.

I am interested in this debate, and in Hutcheon's and Davey's concerns about America's centrality, through Jameson, in the discourses of postmodernism. In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson offers a suggestion about how postmodernism may be historicized. He first considers the Nietzschean view of an ahistorical or non-historical world in which "period concepts finally correspond to no realities whatsoever" (282), but he ultimately dismisses this view. Jameson explains:

Historicity is, in fact, neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the future . . . : it can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective. (284)

Davey, Hutcheon, and Jameson all started writing about postmodernism at a time when their period could be described as postmodern, and so Jameson's concern over "a perception of the present as history" was then especially relevant and vexing. He continues: "what is at stake is essentially a process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as a 'present') and grasp it as a kind of thing—not merely a 'present' but a present that can be dated and called the eighties or the fifties" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 284). His primary example is Philip K. Dick's *Time Out of Joint* (1959), a science fiction that explicitly compares the 1950s to the imagined 1990s. It helps that *Time Out of Joint* projects the "present" into the future so that readers can imagine their present as "dated." The Western is not the same, because it tends to look backward from a not-yet reified, always modern or contemporary present, usually to the late nineteenth century. Imagine Price in the 1940s writing his stories set forty or fifty years earlier. First, he's writing about the past. Second, however, in most of his stories, Smokey Carmain tells the same story about how he got his name, and this seriality implies a perpetual present. Think of it as a time loop if you prefer. Or consider a more literal exception, the sci-fi Western film *Back to the Future III* (Zemeckis, 1990), in which the inventor Doc Brown travels from 1885, far beyond 1985, to a point in time when his time-travelling locomotive can be rebuilt to fly. The *Back to the Future* trilogy is fascinating partly because each sequel parodies at least one earlier film in the trilogy. And *Dynamic Western's* stories featuring Smokey Carmain have a crucial similarity: in almost always repeating and embellishing his christening, they parody the first story about how he got his name, and they imply a series—a future—in which the legend will grow: smoke, fire, dragon, god. Based on the structural insistence on formalism in his essay in *Re: Reading the Postmodern*, Davey might well respond by saying that my examples here are, at best, postmodern ideas in conventional narratives—thus not postmodern in his way. But he also accepts the plurality of "postmodernisms," and I think that the dependence of parody on earlier texts, its seriality, is in itself a structural or formal feature that creates meaning and qualifies it as a postmodernism.

That it *might* be Canadian is delightful, because outside of Canada and apart from Canadianists, few onlookers would describe Canada as

sly, postmodern, or sophisticated, except when trying on “American” clothes, being American in disguise, a dialogism that Mikhail Bakhtin would appreciate. More seriously, however, it suggests that *the Western*, almost always recognized first as an American genre, *can indeed teach us about historicism*, about a future-oriented society whose love of its history often seems to circle around to the future. Ronald Reagan, “the cowboy president,” said, “Let’s Make America Great Again!” Donald Trump said, “Make America Great Again!” Trump’s slogan is not parody, unless we interpret it as unintentional parody. Hutcheon explains in one of her first works on the subject that “postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) use and abuse, install and then subvert convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past” (“Politics” 180). Trump has a “use” for Reagan but no sense of “abuse” of Reagan’s Democratic origins or his career’s “paradoxes”: actor in many Westerns, first Democrat, then Republican. When Reagan says, “Let’s,” he is at least recognizing that an American narrative is not singular and altogether united, and that there might be more than one way to arrive somewhere (wherever it is) “again.” For me, interpreting Trump, the destination is clear: Reagan. Although I have seen a photograph of Trump shaking hands with Reagan, and a photograph of Trump giving a speech in front of what appears to be a wax figure of John Wayne with a Monument Valley backdrop, Trump himself has reportedly denied that he had Reagan in mind, and if this is true (which is not likely) his slogan may be interpreted instead as an instance of the nostalgic ideology of the Western functioning as the political unconscious. Although Trump does not often seem self-conscious, he seems terrifically postmodern as a condition if not intention: subversive, destabilizing, relativistic, unpredictable, ahistorical. Perhaps this difference—condition not intention, which comes from Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1979)—is at the heart of my inquiry into *Dynamic Western* and *Smokey Carmain*. From condition came intention (probably).<sup>6</sup> Thus, postmodern Canadian Westerns approach the

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6 Admittedly, the inverse is possible. A conspiracy theorist might argue that late capitalists intended to create a postmodern condition that would reduce societies to lawless

American past very differently: *as do postmodern American Westerns*—for example, Michael Crichton’s film *Westworld* (1973) and its television spin-offs (more postmodern ideas in conventional narratives—postmodernism as such). As the next chapter shows, various postmodern Canadian Westerns are at home on Hutcheon’s timeline and are definitely engaged in “critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past”—think Margaret Atwood’s “Backdrop Addresses Cowboy” (1968), Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), bpNichol’s *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (1970), Frank Davey’s *The Louis Riel Organ and Piano Co.* (1985), George Bowering’s *Caprice* (1987), Paulette Jiles’s *The Jesse James Poems* (1988), and (from chapter 2) Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993).<sup>7</sup> Like Crichton’s *Westworld*, all of these Canadian Westerns represent the American past as a construct, a false front, a grand narrative, a metahistorical narrative. Every Canadian Western suggests that there is more than one way into American mythology. The pulp fiction in this chapter does too, though it handles textuality differently, without appealing to fragments, re-enactments, historical documents, or other textual backdrops, which are the main reasons why Luke Price’s stories in *Dynamic Western* would not be individually identifiable as parodies or as postmodern texts. They need to be read cultural-materialistically and serially, maybe even sequentially, to be recognized as parodies.

The historical positioning of the Western in relation to Canadian postmodernism is especially fascinating, because nationalities have different and inconsistent temporal connotations, such as the notion that Canada as a nation is younger than the United States (arguably untrue) or Britain (obviously true), or, less officially, that the Canadian character is stodgily old fashioned and rather British or European compared to the American character, which is youthful (arguably true) and unfettered by Old World history (obviously untrue).<sup>8</sup> If postmodernism is not only a movement and a set of styles but also a *character*, which is reasonable to

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enterprises governed only by “free markets.”

7 In terms of “rereading” or at least “re-viewing,” Nichol’s title might be an allusion to *The True Story of Jesse James* (Ray, 1954).

8 Damien-Claude Bélanger explores these nuances more fully in his essay, “L’antiaméricanisme et l’antimodernisme dans le discours de la droite intellectuelle du Canada, 1891–1945” (2008).

suggest of something so often described as “self-conscious” (as Hutcheon and Jameson both do), then it seems to me the sort of inventor who is a time traveller, maybe Doc Brown or the cinematic, rewind Billy the Kid of Ondaatje’s book (as Dennis Cooley thinks of him), someone at home in different periods.

Postmodern Westerns of any nationality are curious because the Western itself is usually thought to be “anti-modern”—for example, resistant to changes related to the communications revolution after the invention of the telegraph by Samuel F. B. Morse in 1844. “Anti-modern” is not exactly the opposite of “postmodern.” The opposite would be “pre-modern,” if prefixes were definitive, but the opposite of “postmodern” might more accurately be “conventional,” which is itself another way to understand genre. But postmodernism and genre are not opposed. More accurately, postmodernism’s engagement with “the art of the past” is often with that art’s generic conventions. Genre is conventional; it is always stuck in the past until a time traveller leaps out with it. The time traveller changes the context of the genre, and so the genre transforms. John G. Cawelti explains that there are four types of “generic transformation,” and the first is parody (though he calls it burlesque), in which exaggeration and contrivance remind us of how far from reality the genre has strayed (“*Chinatown*” 504). In the case of the Western, thusly reminded of our distance from reality and a historical moment when the characters and plots of Westerns could plausibly be said to exist, we can allow it to modernize. Carolyn Williams in her work on Gilbert and Sullivan argues that parody is “a powerfully *modernizing*” (9) mode of representation, because it always updates its precursors; and so, aligning with the implications from Hutcheon, genre itself can be understood as perpetually modern, perhaps postmodern. (This claim about retrospection echoes that of Lee Clark Mitchell on the always-already-postness of the Western, which I quoted in the introduction to this book.) We can even dispense with the syllogism. Genre, like parody, is usually updating a precursor, so in that sense it is usually remaking itself as current or recurrent. Some genres have in their conventional plots the Western’s historical theme of modernization and its nostalgia for the pre-telegraphic eras of pre-modernity (e.g., as in steampunk or various medievalisms), but the Western is almost certainly more popular and thereby especially apt as an explainer of genre



in its relationship to parody (which relies on an audience's recognition of intertexts) and the "modernizing" effects of postmodernism.

In fact, Hutcheon's association between postmodernism and parody in *A Theory of Parody* (1985) seems entirely relatable to the Canadian Westerns published serially in the 1940s. Ironically, although Hutcheon cites Lyotard's view, in *The Postmodern Condition*, that postmodernism questions its culture's grand narratives, she focuses almost exclusively on high-cultural examples, such as Euripides, George Gordon Byron (i.e., Lord Byron), T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, René Magritte, and Umberto Eco, though she does mention relatively popular directors such as Brian De Palma and publications such as *Punch* and *Playboy*. The shortage of popular or low-cultural examples is a limitation of her early study, one that she corrects in *Re: Reading the Postmodern* with the inclusion of examples such as children's literature and graphic novels, but it otherwise offers much to this chapter. Hutcheon explains that postmodernism is "implicitly contesting . . . such concepts as aesthetic originality and textual closure" ("Politics" 180). Toronto's *Dynamic Western* clearly makes no attempt at "aesthetic originality"; on the contrary, it is unquestionably derivative of American models, and its pseudonyms suggest that few authors within its pages cared much for recognition as "originals" in the context of the pulps. *Dynamic Western's* seriality undermines its potential for "textual closure" (as does the incompleteness of the archive), and its seriality—its repetitive-ness—is a sign that it is parody, repetition with difference. A structural dimension such as seriality can be parodic because, for Hutcheon, parody needs a "codified form" (*Theory* 18) but need not be a mockery (5), as long as it is ironic (6, 104); it generally demonstrates "ironic inversion" (6), such as men playing women's roles and vice versa. Hutcheon seems to imply, then, that a mere cliché can be parody if it has a complexity that readers can distinguish in it, even if the author was not intending the complexity. Such an implication would seem logical to a postmodern reader, someone schooled on postmodern writing. While I doubt that Price and others in *Dynamic Western* were truly ahead of their time, or avant-garde, and while I find only a few gender-bending inversions in stories of Smokey Carmain, his roles are definitely "playing with multiple conventions," not always "with critical distance" (Hutcheon, *Theory* 7) but certainly with conventions of more than one genre, especially detective fiction. (Like a

detective, he likes to explain mysteries, such as the one about his name.) A genre need not ridicule its provenance in other genres to be parodic. It simply needs enough variety in each iteration, and generic crossovers often present the variety on a silver platter—"intergenerational, intercultural, and intergeneric" (Sircar 11)—or at least a buffet table.

So we learn, then, that parody is both ironic and structural, in alignment with some theories of postmodernism. Furthermore, Smokey Carmain's self-parody (or at least his sardonic self-consciousness) and his ironic relationship to social mores gain a postmodern dimension that aligns with the "oppositional" and "contestatory" history of the nigh-outlawed Westerns of the '40s pulps. And in another meaningful sense, the prototypical postmodernism of Smokey Carmain invites us to change how we read: not chronologically but synchronically, reaching across iterations for patterns that reveal themselves only with every iteration at our fingertips at the same time.

## A Gunstock Character: Smokey Carmain

Given enough time and money, a scholar's ideal method of studying genre—even the prolific genres—would be to read as much of it as possible and create a massively comparative project. Compromising in this chapter, I also have the convenience of the archive's very limited holdings: only nine readable issues (ten in total) of *Dynamic Western* and a few issues of related magazines (at the time of my visits, at least). I could read across authors in *Dynamic Western* to understand the genre; authorship, in theory, is not essential to the genre, but repetition is—and Luke Price's Smokey Carmain appears in nine of these ten issues. Partly because I am attempting to track icons of the genre, I chose Smokey as the outlaw to pair with the lawman of the previous chapter, the Muscular Christian Mountie.

Who is Smokey? He is, for starters, an American from the Southwest, in a series set throughout the Southwest and the Midwest in the United States, with only a rare mention of Canada. He is, in a sense, always new, because he never stays home at Hornspoon to deal with trouble there, mainly because he has already brought peace to the county. He is always "a stranger" ("Smokey Defies" 28), always a drifter reintroduced (eventually with his reputation preceding him). He has excuse after excuse to go to other counties outside of his jurisdiction and to step in where other

sheriffs have faltered. His father was Irish, and his fatherly uncle a wanderer (“Smokey Signs Up” 15). These wanderings and reintroductions enable parody in Hutcheon’s sense of it. Seemingly a man of the first decade of the 1900s, a turn-of-the-century man, as Price implies by setting the series just after “the nineties” (“Smokey Carmain” 56), Smokey is not as nationally branded as some Western figures set during and immediately after the Civil War. In terms of his identity, we see his physique and appearance more than anything—often literally in the illustrations accompanying the stories. In the illustrations, he is iconically the American cowboy: clean-shaven, handsome but wiry, dressed in denim and a cowboy hat—a classic Stetson (“Blight” 15). In “Smokey Defies an Army,” he is “like a tall figure of bronze” (28). The blue, sometimes grey (“Blight” 5; “Smokey Stirs Up” 52), of his eyes is often mentioned. He has “firm lips” and “strong, white teeth” (“Smokey Stirs Up” 52), a “lean chin” (“Blight” 6) but “a capable pair of shoulders” (“Gunsmoke” 98) that are sometimes also called “powerful” (“Smokey Signs Up” 10). In one of the later stories, he is “a huge man” (“Blight” 24). Some of these details appear in a longer description in one of his early stories, when he is appraised by the bartender Baldy Stern:

he saw a tall, withy-bodied fellow, evidently in his early twenties with a thatch of reddish-gold hair over steel-blue eyes, and a pair of capable shoulders. The glint of humor in those eyes was offset by a firm mouth and square, aggressive [*sic*] jaw. . . . His slow drawl put the brand of the southwest on him. (“Smokey Carmain” 55)

That his “drawl” is “slow” is a sign that he is the action-oriented and laconic cowboy. He “never prided himself upon being the meek as Moses type” (“Blight” 8), and he prefers that his actions bely his meekness. “[A] man’s got a right to keep his thoughts private” (“Gunsmoke” 100), says Smokey just after he punches out a man who had been trying to draw him into repartee and then a gunfight. Later, asked by the doctor how he was stabbed in the arm, he says, “It ain’t important enough to wast [*sic*] palaver on” (105). He appears to be serious about the old joke: “It’s hard to put a foot in a closed mouth” (Stone 12). When he does engage in conversation with men, his smugly confident sense of humour and his daring machismo

suggest that he is like the Virginian in Owen Wister's novel of the same name, or like John Wayne in his developing roles through the late 1930s into the 1940s. Clint Eastwood, in all of his roles in Italian Westerns, and in later films such as *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976), follows these models closely, speaking not only rarely but also softly.

Metaphorically, Smokey is not entirely human. Many of Price's characters are metaphors of non-human animals, especially snakes that figure in for the villains. In "Hound Dog Justice," Smokey pours out some bad but expensive beer and tells a man, "Yuh can't make a hawse drink ef he don't want to, Mister" (47), alluding to himself as the horse—an extension of a long, medieval tradition of imagining knights as hybrid figures: half man, half horse (which I will explain in more detail at opportune moments in chapters 5 and 6). Later, he also implies that he's a dog or wolf because he "lopes" ("Hound Dog" 52). In more than one story, he is described as "a leashed dynamo" ("Valley of Vengeance" 63; "Smokey Signs Up for Trouble" 10), like either a dog or a horse. The horse-man metaphor is common in Westerns. In *Dynamic Western*, Smokey's horse Pancho is a big black stallion that he "wouldn't have taken a fortune for" ("Smokey Defies" 30). He loans Pancho to Helen in "Six-Gun Thunder" but gives his own body to no woman, controlling his urges and promising to settle down when he has savings and land of his own. When Pancho is stolen in "Smokey Defies an Army," he finds him and kills the man who stole the horse, asserting control over his horse as a parallel, I think, to the control over his own body epitomized in his expert marksmanship. Another parallel appears in "Smokey Signs Up for Trouble," when Smokey's *guns* are the dogs that he controls: "the Carmains' guns had *leaped* up, black *muzzles* exploding lead and smoke. The heavy *snarling* of sixguns beat the air" (17, emphasis added).

With these almost trickster-like transformations into the horse and dog, he is wily enough to be a smokescreen, and there is little detail of his background in any of the stories, other than what I have mentioned. Relatedly, in "Smokey Signs Up for Trouble," Smokey says, "I got no folks living" (11), attesting to his lack of family and his mysterious, unknown history. Pretending to be a rancher as a means of pursuing the villain in "Hound Dog Justice," Smokey chooses an X as his brand, "the unknown quantity" (50). In the same way that he is open to interpretation, he is "a

man used to wide, open spaces” (“Six-Gun” 71). The “unknown” or uncertain aspect of his identity becomes a plot device in “Valley of Vengeance” when an impostor arrives. The real Smokey confronts the “phoney” and says, “I’m Carmain. . . . I don’t like imitators” (65). But the fact that the impostor can be a bad guy and pretend to be a good guy suggests that Smokey does not have an essence that can be copied—an “aura,” yes, but nothing more substantial beyond his body, including his horse. (Nevertheless, the remainder of this chapter does characterize him more specifically. It’s just that the characterization is not apparent in any one issue of *Dynamic Western* and has to be condensed from many stories.)

As horse or dog, Smokey is sexualized; both animals have strongly sexual and gendered connotations in the metaphors and idioms that we use in comparing them to humans (e.g., being hung like a horse, or having sex doggy style). The sexuality of the cowboy or outlaw-lawman is not only animal, however. A generic trait of any cowboy is the masculinity often grossly symbolized by his gun—but Smokey, in spite of being named after a phallic discharge, has *not only* “no folks living” and no family, *but also* a mostly virginal experience in *Dynamic Western*. All the little deaths sublimate sexuality. In his very first story in *Dynamic Western*, “The Gunsmoke Sheriff,” he (as a twenty-something) begins to develop a relationship with a girl “about nineteen or twenty, a golden blonde with deep blue eyes and strawberry lips,” a “firm figure,” and tanned “bare legs” (102) under her skirt. She is Betty Stryker, who has been orphaned and is trying to manage her family’s ranch with the help of her younger brother, Bud. Smokey gives them a “silver dollar” to buy sweets and, he says to her, “a ribbon fur your purty hair” (104), flirting as well as he can. When Smokey defeats her enemy, his friend Ned Smart—later self-described, in “Hound Dog Justice,” as “Smart by name and smart by nature. A smart guy, and a smart shooter” (49)—says to him, “Seems tuh me that accordin’ tuh land law, with this hombre dead, the Triple X [the bad guy’s ranch] passes into the hands o’ the town. Don’ see no reason why the town can’t make yuh a weddin’ present of it” (110). (This “land law,” notably, ignores Indigenous claims to the land, as I describe below.) Smokey and Betty kiss, and as Ned leaves “he stopped at the desk and blew out the lamp Betty had used to create the ghostly effect but neither Smokey nor Betty knew or cared whether it was dark or light” (110). This experience is the only sex in the series.

Two stories later, Smokey and Ned are motivated by a posted reward, and Smokey wants his half to get a stake (land) that will make him equal partner in an eventual marriage to Betty, but she is otherwise ignored in this story and the previous one. Betty then seems to disappear. In “Valley of Vengeance,” it is Nettie Raines who offers Smokey a partnership, if not a marriage, and Smokey declines: “too much prosperity makes Ned and me nervous” (76). He appears to be making excuses to avoid his own wedding; George Bowering has written in *Caprice* that “[r]omances had proposals of marriage at the end of them, and dime novels of the west had the threat of the hint of marriage at the end of them” (212). Later again, in “Six-Gun Justice,” Helen Lenox and Jim Lawson decide to marry as soon as he’s out of the hospital, but Smokey declines to be their best man while “patting his black horse’s neck affectionately” (76). If the horse is gendered masculine because the outlaw-lawman can also hyphenate as horse-man, then it is as if his horse is a manly companion, a homosocial figure. He does promise, however, to “be here for the first christening” (76) of the Helen-Jim baby. He does the same for the christening of the Cherry-Stan baby in “Blight on Valhalla,” but in this story he even chooses the name of the child, the same name as that of a murderous train robber who converts to the good side. He is not against family, and naming, but he wants to avoid the sexual occasions, whether or not he is waiting for Betty, whom he never marries in the extant archived magazines. He has an “indifference to romance, [but] was always interested in Beauty in distress” (“Smokey Signs Up” 11)—Beauty the ideal, not Betty the woman. In “Smokey Signs Up for Trouble,” the “Beauty” is yet another woman, Grace Foster, fiancée of her father’s foreman. Reference to this “damsel in distress” evokes the Freudian virgin/whore dichotomy that Westerns tend to assert along with the patriarchy, and with the Electra complex implied when a woman loves her father’s protégé.

This characterization seems perfectly attuned to a likely audience of teenage boys, especially because Smokey is only in his early twenties. The same type of cowboy played by a not-so-young-anymore John Wayne or Clint Eastwood is less expected, maybe, but writers have dealt with this problem by killing off the family in the backstory or producing some other reason (e.g., shell shock after the Civil War, or, in some of the whisperings about the famous Shane, repressed homosexuality) for the cowboy’s

loneliness. Smokey's youth not only makes him a relatable character (even if he is quite flat) to boys, but it also confirms the logic of his missing backstory.

We do get a clue to where he came from—and his political alignment—in “Valley of Vengeance” when Smokey tells Nettie that he had worked in an oil company in Oklahoma (68). (See also this book's conclusion, on Westerns and the extractive industries.) We can infer that big business did not suit him, which is why he prefers to be an itinerant sheriff. Although we associate big business with conservatism today, Smokey's political alignment is clearly conservative in the sense that he believes in taking the law into his own hands even when he, as sheriff, is not the law, as when he is out of his jurisdiction; however, he does believe in government, in what he calls “statute-law” compared to “gun-law” (“Smokey Defies” 28). And he does seem to believe that the law is meant to protect the little guy from the unfairness produced by big numbers. In “Smokey Defies an Army,” the conflict that he needs to resolve is between big-time ranchers, small-time cowmen, and “nesters” (i.e., family farmers).

More specifically, the conflict is between big business and entrepreneurs, and he sides with the latter against the ranchers and the “Army.” Smokey says to himself, “Gun-law backed up by mortgages, notes, compound interest and political power can be mighty unhealthy for any community” (“Smokey Defies” 28); he had a similar view of the rich W. C. Hollow and his Hollow City in “Smokey Carmain Shoots It Out!” He says he “likes money” (“Smokey Signs Up” 10), but not that of the establishment. Big business in “Smokey Stirs Up Rebellion” is an octopus (56), its tentacles like the snakes that typically describe the outlaws in Smokey's stories. In the same story, rather than rely on the law, he foments “rebellion” that even becomes the creation of a union—the “Cortlett County Cattle Association” (“Smokey Stirs Up” 70)—to represent small ranches and their mutual interests. In “Smokey Defies an Army,” he says to the nesters, “I'll help you if you can't manage alone” (32), a direct articulation of his *modus operandi*. This plot would later be echoed in Jack Schaefer's novel *Shane* (1946/1949), which became one of the most indelible of cinematic Westerns in 1953. Less elegant and decent than that novel's title character, Smokey nevertheless shares his basic sense of duty to smaller

social units (individuals or families) over bigger ones (usually businesses but sometimes mayors and other representatives of government).

He also has a more selfish sense of honour and reputation than Shane. He *does* have some honour; in “Blight on Valhalla,” Smokey “can’t bear to let even a crook roast alive” (19). When he later shoots a corrupt deputy at his office, he apologizes to Cherry Hollister: “I don’t like to kill even a crook in the presence of ladies” (25). (“Bosh!” she responds, claiming to have seen shooting and in fact to have killed a man who was trying to hurt her father.) About to be hanged by Brant Corning and his waddies in “The Gunsmoke Sheriff,” Smokey reflects on himself:

Dying didn’t bother him. A man had to go sooner or later, and whether you were buzzard meat or worm fodder made little difference. It was what was going to be left behind. Betty Stryker and Bud without their seven precious steers. Ned Smart and Doc Hills and Walt Tailor thinking ill of him.  
(107)

Although “what was going to be left behind” here are people and their difficulties, his sympathy is divided, and he demonstrates a subtle self-pity on account of his reputation, the concern that someone might be “thinking ill of him.” Of course, he rectifies the situation and saves his reputation; he is not hanged, and, as always, he gets the upper hand by drawing faster, shooting more accurately, and punching harder than any other man. By the fourth story in the series, his reputation was preceding him such that he becomes “the great Smokey” (“Valley” 63), “right prominent all through the West” (“Blight” 12), just as the story of his name was growing to mythical proportions—an anti-heroic dragon, not J. R. R. Tolkien’s Smaug (from the 1937 novel *The Hobbit*) but Smokey.

His infamy or celebrity is likely a factor in how quickly he is accepted as a legitimate figure of the law, even when he is outside his own county and jurisdiction. In “Six-Gun Thunder,” Smokey tells Flack Dolan, “I’m giving orders outa my own county” (55); in “Blight on Valhalla,” Smokey disclaims, “I have no official position whatever” (9). It is a pattern in these stories. In most of them, when he encounters a new town and a new enemy



to overcome, he is elected or acclaimed into the role of sheriff by people in the here and now, not by distant electors or politicians.

Smokey does not always, however, have this legitimacy, and—though he often reveals a surprisingly Mountie-like desire for order (a theme of the previous chapter)—he is almost always willing to step outside the law or to break codes of decent behaviour:

If Rat Biggle had really carried out his threat and killed [Smokey's friend, the sheriff Jim] Lawson, Carmain was resolved to avenge his death, law or no law. ("Six-Gun" 56)

And:

He wished that some magic carpet could suddenly transport him and the entire set-up to his own county where he, backed up by legal authority, could demand their surrender. Then, reminding himself that such wishing was a waste of time, he tensed, clapping his hands to his revolvers. (58)

Later in "Six-Gun Justice," outnumbered but with the advantage of cover, Smokey resorts to shooting men who can't shoot back: "He had shot men in the course of his duty. Had killed more than one who defied his authority. But he recoiled from this kind of affair" (59). But not always! He claims to prefer it "clean" but also appears to relish "dirty fighting" ("Smokey Stirs Up" 64). Offended by Jefferson Trump in "Smokey Defies an Army," Smokey "might have broken his own rule right then and there. His six-gun was half out of the leather before he reminded himself that shooting a man in the back would be a bad start-off for a sheriff" (28). His legitimate claim to representing the law is on occasion questionable, and he often teeters on the edge—though, in fairness, he often shoots other men in the gun (symbolism par excellence) to disarm them, or occasionally other parts of their bodies—for example, the hip ("Hound Dog") or more often the arm, almost always a metonym of the gun (a sidearm), or in proximity to the groin. As James Warner Bellah wrote of a different but related figure in another 1940s Western, though in the middlebrow *Saturday Evening Post*, Smokey "hewed so close to the line" ("Mission" 31).

The opening paragraph of “Smokey Carmain Shoots It Out!” includes this introduction:

Smokey Carmain seemed born for trouble. It often came his way in bunches. But when it didn't, he went out to find it halfway. Whenever a place got too civilized, Smokey pulled out of it and headed for a further frontier which was as yet uninvaded by law and order. (52)

He is *almost* as much outlaw as lawman—an outlaw-lawman, that figure of symmetry again. Twice in “Smokey Signs Up for Trouble,” characters observe the similarity between the name of Lightnin’ “Cormon,” one of the outlaws, and “Carmain” (11, 12). Smokey dismisses it as coincidence, but, later in a gunfight with Cormon, he “knew those vivid blue eyes. This was not Lightnin’ Cormon, but his uncle—Jack Carmain—that man who had been his boyhood idol!” (14). Jack was, in fact, Smokey’s father figure, because we learn in “Smokey Signs Up for Trouble” that the eponymous hero was an orphan raised by his uncle, another reason why marrying someone and starting a family is an unfamiliar concept to him. He is too close to the dark side.

## Detective Smokey Carmain

Symmetry is about being half of one thing face to face with half of another, but it is not too much an extension to suggest that it applies less equally to Smokey’s crossovers between genres too. The balance is tilted far to the side of the Western, but Price’s contributions to *Dynamic Western* sometimes tilt toward noirish detective fiction, another of the crime fiction genres that were and are common to pulp fiction. The most recent crossovers of this type with which I am familiar are, first, Quentin Tarantino’s most genre-bending Western, *The Hateful Eight* (2015), in which the Major, played by Samuel L. Jackson, is both a type of sheriff and a detective who assembles the suspects and tells the story of the crime as a conclusion to the film, à la Hercule Poirot by Agatha Christie (a character who pre-dates Smokey by twenty years); second, on television, HBO’s *Westworld* (2016–20), in which the futuristic creators of a Western-themed virtual reality are also busy trying to solve the mystery of how characters—which

*they* have invented—are rewriting their scripts, their various genres (e.g., Western, detective, sci-fi). Most of Price’s stories about Smokey have a crime to be solved, often a crime enveloped in mystery, and he engages in detection, subterfuge, disguise, and other gestures toward the other genre. They are often the tenor, so to speak, of metaphorical transformations of the vehicle, which is always the Western first and foremost.

So, for example, in “Blight on Valhalla,” Smokey is asked to pretend to be a homesteader for the purposes of reconnaissance and ultimately of solving the mystery of why homesteaders are unwilling to “stick” (6) to the area. In “Smokey Carmain Shoots It Out!” he goes to a “town meetin’” (76) and certainly plays Christie’s Poirot, about to explain the crimes after he puts a recovered gun down in front of Hollow as a key piece of evidence. Everyone implicated in the story—everyone who is still alive, that is—is present to hear Smokey’s explanation. Squire Lainson, acting as chair of the meeting at Smokey’s request, calls the meeting “a court of a sort” (77), increasing the symbolic suggestion that Smokey is now acting as a detective or lawyer—an explainer, a storyteller—rather than sheriff. This change from action hero to talker is one of the ironic inversions in Price’s stories that provide evidence for Hutcheon’s theory of parody. It’s ironic simply because it’s the opposite of the expected: words, not deeds. In this story, although gunfire erupts briefly after Smokey has made his case, he is not the one who has to shoot to resolve the conflict. His function has changed, though he reverts to action hero in later stories. The inversion in “Smokey Carmain Shoots It Out!” is also self-reflexive, as one might expect from postmodern fiction compared to popular fiction: there seems to be authorial awareness in the irony of the title, which is counterfactual to the resolution of the plot: he doesn’t shoot it out; he talks it through.

Furthermore, in bending toward the figure of the detective or lawyer, and thus explainer and storyteller, these Westerns gain a dimension of self-reflexivity that amplifies the already obvious repetitions and homages that are a manifestation of self-reflection, if not self-reflexivity. They become stories about storytelling, much as we can infer from the “smoke signals” about Smokey’s moniker that he is functioning as a teller of his own tale, a crafty crafter of his own persona, his own framing device.

## Smokey and Indigeneity

My reference to “smoke signals” is no accident here, because many of the cowboys or outlaw-lawmen in Westerns have been hybrid figures, racial crossovers, both colonial and Indigenous. Consider John Wayne’s Hondo, “part Indian,” in the eponymous 1953 film, as a paragon or at least paradigm of this type of figure. Smokey, however, has almost no such connection to Indigeneity. His separation and his prejudices are evident and obvious. In “Smokey Carmain Shoots It Out!,” his nemesis—the mayor, judge, businessman—named Hollow is described like so (and quite well too):

Inches above six feet, broad-shouldered, craggy-faced, Hollow presented a series of flat contradictions in appearance, in taste, and in personality. His skin was bronzed, his black hair worn long in the fashion of the plainsmen of the old days. But his hands, small for one of his huge bulk, were smooth as a woman’s, and manicured to a nicety. His face was shaved cleanly, and his well tailored brown coat and trousers were pressed neatly. A flaring red tie, done in a loose bow, Morocco boots, beaded belt and holster gave him an Indian aspect which his build and erect carriage seemed to bear out, and which was accentuated by an ornate necklace of alternated bear’s claws and elk’s teeth which hung in a double loop about his pillarlike neck. But the outstanding feature of the man were [*sic*] his eyes, and they were not the eyes of an Aborigine. Instead they were pale and of an indeterminate hue. (58)

Hollow, here, is the hybrid figure, and Smokey loses no time in offending him with a racial slur. Furthermore, instead of thinking that Hollow is partly like himself (white), he thinks that he is mostly different (non-white) because of Hollow’s trappings of Indigeneity, which are not even all that convincing, partly because they also appear to be Orientalist (which makes sense if you consider the fundamental geographical error in using “Indian” to describe the Indigenous peoples of North America rather than

certain South Asians). When Hollow asks him when he's leaving, which is the first thing he says to Smokey, Smokey ignores him and drinks to the health of Baldy while prefiguring anxieties about blood quanta: "Here's to you, old timer, and to any other white man on this range—if there is any" (58). In other words, he derisively dismisses Hollow as an "Indian," and he toasts the "white man" in general. He is a straightforward example of a white-supremacist ideologue, and yet he insists on purity in a series whose crossovers suggest a willing mongrelism.

Yes, this is curious: Why gladly hybridize genre and character but not race or racialization? These stories were appearing in the early 1940s, when the horrors of Nazi eugenics and genocide were probably not yet familiar to most readers outside Europe, but even in the 1950s Westerns were still prominently racist and even, at times, genocidal. John Wayne in a mid-fifties masterpiece such as *The Searchers* (if it can be qualified as such on the merits of aesthetics alone, its ethics being more complicated) still wants to eradicate miscegenation. But only a few years earlier, Wayne in *Hondo* (1953) provides a less canonical but more perfect comparison that deserves a brief digression—partly because I already considered *Hondo* in the context of Indigenous literature in chapter 2. Based on a story by Louis L'Amour, *Hondo* stars Wayne as Hondo Lane, a "part Indian" gunman who had lived with the Apache for five years but also worked riding dispatch for the cavalry—a man with few absolute allegiances except to principles of self-reliance and radically free will: "A long time ago I made me a rule. I let people do what they wanna do." He does, however, stop people from trying to kill him. Without hating either the Apache or the agents of colonialism who would kill and dispossess them, he ultimately sides with the cavalry in protecting the widowed Angie Lowe (Geraldine Page) and her boy, for whom he has become a symbolic husband and father. Like Smokey, Hondo has an only symbolic family, implying that the sort of mixing that must happen to make a family (e.g., socializing and sexual intercourse) is forbidden to him partly because of the risk of miscegenation.

The boy in *Hondo*, significantly, gets a symbolic brother but not a father among the Apache. When the Apache come to remind Angie that they told her to leave and she retorts that she was waiting for her husband, one of the chief's men clutches her. Her boy reacts by firing her pistol at him,

missing. Brought to the Apache chief Vittorio (Michael Pate), he declares that he is not afraid of them. Vittorio says that Johnny is “brave like Apache boy,” seizes his hand, and cuts their thumbs, intermingling their blood to make them family. He declares that she is now the mother of an Apache and may stay on their land to care for the boy. Later, Vittorio presents his men as prospective new husbands for Angie, but she is committed to the memory of her husband and her hope for a relationship with Hondo. The ideological rationale of these scenes is to show that the possibility of continuing the family line depends on refusing miscegenation and raising a family among the future winners of the Indian Wars. Chauvinistic and racist, the film associates racial purity with superiority and survival, and we get the impression that Hondo’s Indigenous “part” is very small indeed—perhaps, in fact, a lie that he uses to delude himself so that he can accept his own sexual history with an Indigenous woman. Like Smokey, Hondo can be “part” something else, but only symbolically. The example of Hondo also informs a theory of why Smokey, contrary to form, doesn’t kill Hollow: “part” of him recognizes his own cowboy-detective hybridity in Hollow’s miscegenized racialization.

In Smokey’s stories, this racist and colonial narrative sometimes triggers a commentary on the gun. Near the end of the series, in “Smokey Signs Up for Trouble,” Grace Foster tells Smokey, “I often wish guns had never been invented.” He responds with a big grin: “If they hadn’t a-been, I guess this country would still belong to the Injuns, Miss Grace. But since there is guns, and bad men use ’em, we’ll have to meet the devil with fire” (11). His enjoyment of the colonial narrative here implies that “good men” took the land from “the Injuns,” and that “bad men” were now threatening the same land now owned by settlers. The irony is lost on him. In the final story in the archive, Smokey tells Laurie Wyndon, “Guns and blood have always been used in this country to win anything (“Smokey Stirs Up” 60). If “country” means “land,” then he is wrong, because guns came with the armies and settlers. But he means the nation-state, or, perhaps more accurately, land dedicated by settlers to a particular business: ranching. He admits that he is “[a] stranger to this district, yes” (60) while asserting, “But still it’s my country. The part of the country I was born and raised in. I love every foot of this cattle country, and I don’t like seein’ a bunch of stuffed Stetsons from back yonder in the East take over this range and

run it with hired guns and threats and bribes” (60–1). Here, Smokey erroneously implies that he is native—“born and raised”—and that the land is properly his to protect from newcomers from the East. Again, the irony is lost on him. As a hero, Smokey falls short of today’s ethics of representation in relation to race, especially racialization of the “Indian,” but his view of guns remains popular on the right and at the centre of North American politics. (Some of the nostalgia for the present in the Western comes from its untrue reminder to gun owners that guns are a way of life, “always.” When Smokey convinces twenty men to burn the ranch of the kingpin who had control of the law, “he reminded himself grimly” of “those times” [“Smokey Stirs Up” 66] when six-gun justice is seemingly necessary—*just like today*, we are meant to think.)

Price himself appears to be no better at understanding Hollow’s Indigeneity, implying that he is “Indian,” and in fact Price follows the Western tradition—in the genre and often writ large in the Western world—of imagining any Indigenous person as the Vanishing “Indian” (a trope that I considered more fully in chapter 2). Witness “Six-Gun Thunder”:

Three days after his arrival, Smokey visited Crazy Horse Hill. Evidently the name had come from an incident of pioneer days that had since been forgotten. He found the former mission building little more than a decayed heap of rubble and rotting timbers surrounded by ancient graves. The general desolation and unbroken silence got on his nerves. (63)

Smokey’s irritation, or his unease, is uncanny: a return of the repressed, in this case the history of Native Americans such as Crazy Horse, whose name’s English translation is another forgetting, another mistake; his Lakota name, *Tħašúnke Witkó*, translates better as “His Horses Have Spirit” (Diamond). Price invokes history here only insofar as it serves the stereotype of the Vanishing “Indian.” Curiously, however, it is also a mistaken assumption of what could be called the Vanishing Christian, “the former mission building little more than a decayed heap,” which could be a historical reality in a given instance but which does not align with

the success of Christianity in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (“success” in the sense of replacing Indigenous religions and forerunning other major religions). The Vanishing “Indian” absolves guilt, or turns guilt into the less specific unease, a minor complaint of the “nerves.” Meanwhile, the Vanishing Christian gives the outlaw-lawman a licence to be less meek and forgiving, even if Smokey does feel pangs of guilt when shooting at men who can’t shoot back, or at wanting to shoot them *in* the back. When Smokey is reunited with his fatherly uncle, Lightnin’ Cormon, the uncle doesn’t survive their gunfight against the outlaws that had been Cormon’s allies: “It had been right and just that this Lightnin’ should die, [Smokey] reminded himself. Yet his heart was heavy”; he then declares that his uncle “died fightin’ sidewinders, and rates Christian iburial [*sic*]” (“Smokey Signs Up” 17). However dragon-like Smokey is, he believes himself to be against the snakes and on Jesus Christ’s side.

Crazy Horse’s “name,” “forgotten,” brings us full circle in this chapter, back to Smokey’s self-fashioning as the smoke-loving dragon, a symbol in Christianity of the devil. This, too, might be an ironic inversion that confirms the parody in Price’s stories. The parody is evident in his naming, obviously, but also in the twist on Christianity that bedevils a neutral reading of the stories. Unlike the Indigenous peoples stereotyped across the long history and even the recent history of the Western, a history that the Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond documents in *Reel Injun* (2009), Smokey has the privilege of naming himself as he sees fit. He calls himself, in effect, a smoke-maker. And in 1942, the great smoke-maker was the war machine, one with the genocidal potential of the Holocaust that could have unconsciously paralleled a death wish against Indigenous peoples whose unwillingness to vanish also sustained the wish, and Smokey’s dawning awareness of his postmodern condition had not yet helped him effect a critique.

However regressively enjoyable the reading of Price’s stories can be—a boyish thrill—I want to emphasize my dislike of the character as a figure that replicates the most problematic tropes of the Western. I cannot be certain that Price knew he was creating a devil, a monster, in Smokey Carmain. So much suggests the opposite. But Smokey is certainly typical of heroes in the Western; he “combines the town’s morals with the



outlaw's skills" (Altman, "Semantic" 11). Historically, eventually, "the town" turned against him again, and he began, not exactly to vanish, but to lose prominence to a host of cultural competitors. Ian Driscoll writes that "[t]he monthly thrills of a magazine like *Dynamic Western* or *Bill Wayne's Western Magazine* were no match for westerns at local cinemas or the 'Lone Ranger' series, which had just begun airing on television" ("Decline"). And the Lone Ranger and Smokey Carmain were both the type of character that revisionist Westerns would address when postmodern literature became a more obvious structural or formal experiment and, beginning in the 1970s in the United States and Canada, stood up in the West.

