



## THE AMERICAN WESTERN IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

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## Degeneration through Violence

### *Contemporary Historical Westerns and Post-human Horsemen*

In 1787, several years before he became the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson expressed the view that “the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” This quotation has since been widely used as justification for the right to bear arms in the United States (Horowitz).<sup>1</sup> While Richard Slotkin does not appear to refer to it in *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (1973), it seems a “founding” corroboration of Slotkin’s theory.<sup>2</sup> For Slotkin, American society can be explained by history retold into myth: America was established through violence, such as rebellion against England and, later, the American Civil War; and so forever afterward, whenever society’s rules become so densely woven and binding that they threaten freedom and individualism, violence can tear the social fabric and renew these fundamental American values.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Josh Horowitz, an activist against gun violence, points out a reflection in Jefferson’s letter that applies remarkably well in the current climate of opinion surrounding the political base of the former American president Donald Trump: “In the same letter, . . . Jefferson stated that the rebellion was ‘founded in ignorance. . . . The people cannot be all, and always, well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive’ ” (“Thomas Jefferson”).

2 The theme of renewal, but not necessarily *violent* renewal except through territorial expansion, also appears in the so-called frontier thesis that emerged from Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Conway 6–7).

3 In *The Frontier Club* (2013), Christine Bold implies that the myth of regeneration through violence was the “sleight of hand” of “a cultural elite violently protecting its privilege in the name of democracy” (1), democracy being presented by the elite as the fundamental American

Freedom and individualism are at stake in the myth because they were threatened, fundamentally, by “Indian war and captivity [and assimilation] narratives” that later inspired an American identity “defin[ed] by repudiation” (*Regeneration* 20, 22) of other identities—for example, Indigenous or British. Over time, the myth evolved, alongside the genres that circulated it:

If the first American mythology portrayed the colonist as a captive or destroyer of Indians, the subsequent acculturated versions of the myth showed him growing closer to the Indian and the wild land. New versions of the hero emerged, characters whose role was that of mediating between civilization and savagery, white and red. (21)

As with Jefferson’s metaphor of the “tree” of liberty, Slotkin’s theory is signified by a metaphor of nature, of “*growing* closer to the Indian and the wild land.” However, as I understand the “subsequent” version, it is a metaphor of Nature as a woman with whom the searcher or hunter symbolically and sexually merges, regenerating the American family and nation. This merger was not equal; it was about control, management—conservation in that sense. However, as Nature became Gaian, became Mother Nature or Mother Earth, the American transcendentalists were able to figure it as a restorative space—so it was, for Ralph Waldo Emerson, renewing, purifying, medicinal, and reproductive (11, 14, 27, 31), and similarly for other Americans it was nurturing, whole, true, beautiful, and bountiful (Kolodny 5).<sup>4</sup> Briefly put, one part of the value of nature in America was that it could foster cycles of regeneration, or a regression or return to innocence (Kolodny 6); however, nature was also a premise for violence and, in its forests, deserts, and valleys, dangers lurked.

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value when, in fact, self-interest is obviously another one, which can both agree and disagree with democracy.

<sup>4</sup> For an inversion of the usual landscape-woman metaphor, see Irina Chirica’s “Masculinity in the Western Genre” (2018). Chirica’s view is that the landscape of the West is “a world where no woman can follow” (56). The landscape is masculine because it dominates the people of the West, and it is associated with a freedom that was primarily masculine (57–8). I read this landscape as a construct whose potential masculinity, or its power of whatever gender, is projected by the genre onto its usually male heroes.

Vividly described by Clark Blaise in *Time Lord* (2000), these transformative ideas of nature in Jefferson were expanded by Charles Darwin and adopted throughout society. “The agents of degeneration, the dark legacy of Darwin’s hopeful evolution, were everywhere,” writes Blaise of the 1880s and the Victorian era in general. “Gypsies, shamans, medicine men, ‘half-breeds’ and ‘octoroons,’ Hindus, Catholics, Muslims, the miscegenist, the scholar who identified too strongly with his subject and ‘went native,’ becoming . . . a monster, a Kurtz [the enigmatic nemesis in Joseph Conrad’s 1902 novel *Heart of Darkness*], a madman” (118). These fears are precisely those that the myth of regeneration through violence was meant to allay. Nature was good only if it was “human nature,” not the natures of plants and other animals. And “going native” or “going Indian” meant going too close to Nature, thereby acculturating and diminishing oneself.

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the writers of the Western loved this simplification and its dynamics, which helped to produce the outlandish stereotypes of “cowboys and Indians” and the Freudian virgin/whore, characters that populated comic books, movies, and by extension teenage fantasies. Even when writers were mocking the genre’s stereotypes with postmodern Westerns such as Ishmael Reed’s *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969) or Arthur Penn’s *Little Big Man* (1970), or the Canadian examples from the previous chapter, they were re-inscribing them. And even when revisionist Westerns were opposing the genre’s racism and sexism, they often readily accepted violence as a heroic act.<sup>5</sup>

The recourse was supposed to be to revisionist history: the historical novel, the historical Western. Jane Tompkins, though not writing about historical Westerns specifically, claims in passing that “facts are what the Western is always trying to face” (27); she is probably referring to facts of life and death rather than historical facts. But, as David H. Evans explains,

there is an irony in identifying the mission of that novel [e.g., a revisionist or historical Western] as a simple overcoming

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5 A fairly recent American example, an episode of *Justified* (Holcomb, 2010) called “The Collection,” shows the marshal Raylan Givens (Timothy Olyphant) refusing to listen to racist, antisemitic slurs from Caryn Carnes (Katherine LaNasa), but he is perfectly willing to kill men without due process if he deems it “justified.”

of traditional narratives, and a demystification of the myths they propagated, to the extent that this critical story is in effect another version of the classic western plot, of the winning of the West—not . . . from wilderness and savagery but from the shady forces of illusion and fantasy. (407–8)

As I understand it, the revisionist Western was not (and is not) simply *historical* revisionism, but *mythic* revisionism, even mythic regeneration: recourse to “another version of the classic western plot.”

As New Historicism began to influence readers and writers in the 1980s and '90s, two almost completely different Canadian Westerns signalled the change in the Canadian context. The first was Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), which still seems familiar to me as the ultimate postmodern Canadian Western—or the first post-Western in Canada. One caveat for these terms, however, is Joanna Hearne's statement that the adjectives “post-Western” and “revisionist” do not perfectly describe millennial Indigenous responses to the Western, at least on film, “for rather than contemporary films ‘ghosting’ an old genre, Indigenous directors and performers participated and shaped this cinematic heritage from the beginning, working with and against the generic conventions of Hollywood” (8). Indeed, King's novel narrates early Indigenous participation through the character of Portland Looking Bear, an actor in early Westerns. To readers less familiar with intersections of Indigenous and colonial histories in media, *Green Grass, Running Water*—with its circular narrative and parodic inversions of canonical Western texts (e.g., the Bible)—will appear more postmodern (if not post-Western) than Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* (1996), which is also “revisionist” and “post-Western,” and it invokes postmodernism to teach historical lessons.<sup>6</sup> Because of the relative accessibility of its more linear or at least more conventionally framed stories (i.e., involving neatly separated time periods), *The Englishman's Boy* is probably the most influential novel in

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6 Although there is good reason to be wary of using different types of postness (e.g., post-colonialism or postmodernism) to categorize contemporary Indigenous literature, as King explains in already-quoted passages in this book, Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa) is open to it in his edited collection *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (1989) (C. Smith 12–13).

renewing general and historical interest in the Western, leading to the boom in contemporary post-Westerns here.

My interest in Vanderhaeghe's trilogy of historical Westerns, which continued after *The Englishman's Boy* with *The Last Crossing* (2002) and *A Good Man* (2011), is mainly in how they reject the myth of regeneration through violence and propose a seemingly historical alternative that I call the myth of degeneration through violence. It, too, is a myth, and a theory, but when these books first appeared, people who read them and talked with me about them told me that, finally, we could read Westerns that showed how the West really was. Although these novels were indeed more historically informed than was evident in the broad strokes of most classic Westerns, Vanderhaeghe himself has been perplexed that readers so often assume that his master's degree in history means that he is a historian.<sup>7</sup> Herb Wyile describes the history in this novel in terms of creative writing and other arts, such as dance, remembering the film *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990): "[*The Englishman's Boy*] is an elaborate choreographing of historical material, a discursive orchestration that necessarily competes with other 'productions' of history" ("Dances" 23). We have to understand that history itself is sometimes defeated or taken over by "other 'productions' " in popular culture or cultural memory. And history, which demands time and effort, is not the remedy to myth that everyone prefers. We often prefer to answer one myth with another.

Following Wyile's reference to Kevin Costner's character, *Dances with Wolves* (a white soldier given the name as he acculturates himself into Sioux society), I would add that some of the "historical material" that we need to consider is the historical materiality of other animals, perhaps especially horses. Such animals are crucial to understanding the ambivalence of the degeneration through violence that seems to fascinate Vanderhaeghe in his Westerns. When Vanderhaeghe calls attention and cultural memory to colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, as demonstrated by the Cypress Hills Massacre in *The Englishman's Boy* and the imperial Christian mission in *The Last Crossing*, he also points out how non-human animals were implicated: the stolen horses in the former, and

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<sup>7</sup> Vanderhaeghe made this statement to me and other students in his creative writing class sometime in the late 1990s.

the sacrificed horse in the latter. They can motivate humans and thereby affect history, and indeed the companion species of horses and dogs (among others) have prominent roles in diverse historical developments involving religion, war, exploration, transportation, art, therapy, et cetera.

In parallel, companion species are also made to serve myth, first as anthropomorphic figures. J. J. Clark proposes that “[b]ecause the western genre emerged at the turn of the century alongside the already-popular genres of the plantation romance and minstrel show, . . . a collaboration between these forms established the stereotype of the western horse through a re-tooling of the ubiquitous ‘devoted slave’ or ‘Uncle Tom’ stereotype” (158).<sup>8</sup> If Clark is correct, then a juxtaposition such as the horse Silver and the “Indian” Tonto in the Lone Ranger stories would imply a shared debasement from the position of sidekick: to slavery from supposed partnership or companionship, thereby serving a myth of fair dealing with the Other. But there is a second myth, that of learning from Nature (or living more naturally) and then treading more lightly on Mother Earth. In this myth, the natures of non-human animals are appropriated or honoured by zoomorphic figures such as *Dances with Wolves* or *The Last Crossing’s* Born of a Horse (a white missionary seemingly converting to Crow beliefs). In Westerns, zoomorphism can be degenerative, regenerative, or both, often depending on how a typically white author views non-human animals or Indigenous cultures or possibly Black cultures in that historical moment. Partly because such views are implicated in the acts of violence perpetrated against the Other in the Western, human or otherwise, the two morphisms are an index to attitudes toward violence that invites responses from cultural and animal studies.

Before re-approaching the horse, I will turn to a more common question about violence in the Western.

## Violence and History in the Western

Most Westerns depict the Old West as a sensationally violent place and time—not a traditional war zone but not entirely different from a site of guerrilla warfare. My favourite historical counterpoint is from the

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8 See Natalee Caple’s *In Calamity’s Wake* (2013) for a revisionist rebuttal of minstrelsy in the context of Westerns.

American scholar and teacher Helen Lewis, whom I have heard speak at conferences in New Orleans, San Diego, and Washington, DC. Lewis's research focuses on women's non-fictional accounts of settling the West. Drawing on sources such as Lillian Schlissel's *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982) and the *Covered Wagon Women* series edited by Kenneth Holmes, Schlissel, and others (1995–2000), Lewis explains, for example, that in the Old West most gunshot wounds were accidental, and that—excepting the treatment of Indigenous peoples—settling there was far less violent than it was honest, hard work: toil and boredom in the shack or in the fields, mending clothes and hammering fence posts.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, referring to Annette Kolodny, Tompkins states that “[w]hen women wrote about the West [in the nineteenth century], the stories they told did not look anything like what we know as the Western” (41–2).<sup>10</sup> They looked more like real life.

Murders that did occur, according to Clare V. McKanna Jr., tended to be under the influence of alcohol and between friends or acquaintances (461), not outlaws and lawmen, though handguns were indeed the weapon of choice. McKanna contextualizes his study by alluding to the Western: “True to the numerous film, novel, and television portrayals of the American West, gunfights did occur. However, they certainly were not heroic” (472). McKanna rationalizes his comment about heroism partly by remarking that the people involved “were lousy marksmen” (472). Notwithstanding McKanna's small sample size (three counties), he presents some evidence that the West was more violent than the East in the United States (472); he also agrees with previous research that characterized the West as having “a regional culture of violence” (479–80), one that developed partly because of easy access to pistols and alcohol without the accountability of an established society on the frontier. Attempting to resolve the apparent contradiction between McKanna's socio-historical study and women's non-fictional accounts is beyond the scope of this

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9 Helen Lewis, email message to the author, 25 April 2017. See also Polić, “Sisters” 132.

10 Norris Yates “partly” agrees with Tompkins, writing that some women did write formula Westerns, “but formula Westerns with a difference” (1), from classic Westerns and from the memoirs and historical fictions that are more often associated with women's writing. For a survey of recent women's scholarship of the American Western, see Sigrid Anderson Cordell and Carrie Johnston (2017).

chapter; there would be too many temporal and geographical microcosms to sort out, among other things. Suffice it to say that none of these historical studies approves of the myth of regeneration through violence and its associated notions of heroism.

To return to the historical Western while maintaining a connection to McKanna's observation about the role of alcohol in the violence of the West, I want to mention a precursor to Vanderhaeghe's novels, Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), in which the historical figure Pat Garrett is depicted as an alcoholic whose drinking is calculated to numb him to the acts of violence he must commit. The book includes a parallel in the story that John Chisum tells of a madman named Livingstone who wanted to breed mad dogs by inbreeding and "giving them just alcohol to drink" (63). For Ondaatje, the violence of historical figures is obviously distilled into tall tales, and their madness involves various symptoms of degeneracy—even in Billy with the "blood planets in his head" (109). A related madness appears in Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing*, which describes a brutal aspiring hero who is syphilitic—his disease a symbol of degeneration. The novel focuses partly on the syphilitic man, the mercurial Addington Gaunt, and his brother Simon, a comparatively meek English missionary on his way into the West. In conflict with Addington at times is Jerry Potts (a.k.a. Ky-yo-kosi or Bear Child), a historical figure of Kainai (Blood) and Scottish descent (Sealey), who participates in battles but arguably becomes the novel's true hero in a moment of refusing to be violent directly: by allowing the hallucinating Addington to be killed by the bear he was hunting in a bow-and-arrow mockery of Indigenous traditions.<sup>11</sup> Vanderhaeghe prefers the violence to be natural, environmental, a violence *accepted* and not *driven* by the individual person, in a gesture that mostly contravenes the dictates of the genre. Although *The Last Crossing* is not quite Gaian, he asks a *mythic* Nature to enact revenge; he does not ask his *historical* figure, Potts, to reverse the myth of regeneration.

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11 Katherine Ann Roberts calls Jerry Potts "the forgotten or unacknowledged father of the Canadian nation" (58). Potts was an instrumental mediator between the Blackfoot and the North-West Mounted Police, leading to the signing of Treaty 7 (Sealey). He also figured prominently in Norma Sluman's historical Western *Blackfoot Crossing* (1959).

I also want to put Vanderhaeghe's novels and degeneration through violence in the context of two other Canadian writers who may be described as historical novelists, Fred Stenson and perhaps especially Gil Adamson. Adamson's *The Outlander* (2007) follows a woman who murdered her husband and is running from his vengeful brothers to the foot of Turtle Mountain in the old North-West Territories, where a massive avalanche on 29 April 1903 destroyed the mining town of Frank. More figuratively, Aritha van Herk describes "grand myths [that] are crumbling" (*Stampede* 96). Although I have quoted her in earlier chapters, I have not included van Herk here, partly because her texts "are not historical westerns but texts that ironize and mock that American myth" (Roberts 85).<sup>12</sup> I have been assuming that "historical westerns" speak more loudly against the myth—history versus myth—though I also believe that louder is not more substantive; what we get in supposedly historical Westerns is myth versus myth, or, as Johannes Fehrle puts it, myth and "counter-myth" (112–13, 130–1). The Frank Slide in Adamson's *The Outlander* is in my view a revenge story, a Gaian response to the extractive industries that parallels the woman's murder of her husband.<sup>13</sup> The avalanche, as a *deus ex machina*, is certainly no machine; it is Adamson's mythology of Nature functioning to assert an eco-feminist view of a male-dominated field and its mistreatment of a feminized landscape. Stenson does something similar, though not as obviously feminist, with his recent novel *Who by Fire* (2014), which interrogates the practices of the oil and gas industry in Alberta since the 1970s. But *Who by Fire* is not a Western; arguably,

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12 Van Herk's tone in *Stampede and the Westness of West* (2016) is not always easy to interpret, because sometimes she seems to defend (not "ironize and mock") the myths about the West that are often perpetuated by the Western: "Triumphalism: okay, beat the stuffing out of me, it's a triumphalist story, with winners and losers against the mural of a big sky" (80; see also 78). Indigenous peoples—stereotypically described as "losers" and who often assert their resilience and resistance to the stereotype—are mentioned only rarely in *Stampede*; she does acknowledge Tom Three Persons (48, 59) and Louis Riel (31). *Stampede* misses an opportunity to respond to the generic trope of the Vanishing "Indian" when she lists the many "vanishings" in the West: "The vanishing west, the vanishing world, vanishing horses, vanishing sky, vanishing vanishment . . . all vanished" (53). Van Herk's poem about a horse called "Pocahontas" (21) could also have reflected on the appropriation of the name of an Indigenous person for a horse that is represented negatively.

13 In *On Active Grounds: Agency and Time in the Environmental Humanities* (2019), Mario Trono and Robert Boschman muse that "[t]he sense that . . . an avenging Gaia has found a way of dealing with us hovers at the edge of consciousness" (2).

neither is his fur-trading epic *The Trade* (2000), which is so historical and “myth-shattering” (Dinka) that it has been used in history courses; but his novels *Lightning* (2003) and *The Great Karoo* (2008) can be read through the lens of the Western. *Lightning* is the tale of the Texan cowboy Doc, his cattle-driving into Canada in the 1860s, his love for Pearly, and his struggle against the murderer Overcross. “Another mark of the authentic western,” writes Nicholas Dinka, is “some good old fashioned head-staving” (“Review”).

Stenson’s *Great Karoo* is more historical but is reminiscent of a cavalry Western in its relocation of a group of Albertan cowboys into Africa during the Second Boer War, and some of its representations of horses bring me around to the latter half of this chapter, which recontextualizes the theory of degeneration through violence alongside the human relationship with horses in the Western, a genre sometimes called “horse opera.” The horse as a convention of the genre is as significant as the cowboy, “Indian,” or gun, but “the characters who ride them don’t pay them much attention, and as far as the critics are concerned they might as well not exist” (Tompkins 90). A single chapter by Tompkins appears to be the first sustained inquiry into horses in the genre. In Hollywood, horses came to prominence alongside a growing awareness of animal rights following the abuse of horses in the making of the first *Ben-Hur* film (Niblo, 1925) (Kristmanson 15–16); perhaps the first and slightly earlier Canadian Western that shows an awareness of animal rights is Luke Allan’s 1921 novel *Blue Pete: Half Breed* (97–8). Individual horses eventually became characters in many Westerns, and in celluloid examples such as those of William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers, the horse often stole the show, appealing to a sympathetic audience that was nostalgic for the pre-modern, pre-Iron Horse as motor vehicles displaced the working animal from the lives of most Americans (Kristmanson 1–2; Tompkins 93). (In Canada, Emily Ursuliak’s 2017 book of poetry and memoir, *Throwing the Diamond Hitch*, is framed by the horse-car relationship too, as I explain in the conclusion of this book.) The felt connection between humans and horses was so strong that it could be described as identification—a stage in which our feelings seem to confuse or conflate zoomorphism and anthropomorphism. Indeed, there is no better image of nostalgic identification with the horse at the dawn of the automobile than in the final

words of Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), where horse and rider seem to fuse before "the bloodred sunset" (302): "horse and rider and horse passed on and their long shadows passed in tandem like the shadow of a single being. Passed and paled into the darkening land, the world to come" (302). This image of a "pass[ing]" implies not only the end of an era but also a death, and it thereby implicates the horse and horseman in the contemporary discourse of the post-human and of post-humanism.

## Riding Off into the Sunset

It is as if the cowboy riding off into the sunset is closure not only for his one story but for all people of the West. The image appears again and again in American Westerns on film, with prominent examples in John Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), among many others. In literature, it is perhaps less often only of men or for men; in George Bowering's *Caprice* (1987), which I considered in the previous chapter, "[i]n the early evening sun the prodigious black horse stepped to the summit of a grassy rise and stopped of his own accord, as if he wanted to take in the view. His shadow with the woman's shadow above it reached to the round edge and over into the general shadow" (211). Although Bowering genders the shadow as "the woman's," the gender or sex of the person would be indistinguishable from the shadow, just as the separation of the person and horse would not be perfectly clear. We see the same with Mary Boulton in Adamson's *The Outlander*: "Together, horse and rider melted into the long shadows" (376). The diction of "melt[ing]" illustrates the liminality, the transience, and the metaphorically post-human plasticity of the shadowy horseman (or horsewoman).<sup>14</sup> For Sean Johnston in *Listen All You Bullets* (2013), "the sun took forever to go down. The horse and the man seemed to walk forever toward its place on the horizon. As they moved the silhouette of the next town appeared, as if it was being drawn on a blank space ahead of them" (44); the horse-man silhouette has the staying power of "forever," here associated with the expansive colonial power taking over "a blank space."

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<sup>14</sup> The allusion to plastic in this metaphor reminds me of a comment in Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003): "Metaplastm means a change in a word, for example by adding, omitting, inverting, or transposing. . . . The term is from the Greek *metaplastmos*, meaning remodeling or remolding" (20). Metaphor does with reality what metaplastm does with words.

And riding off into the sunset is not only for the white man either. The horse as a symbol or metaphor is written into modernity as the natural ancestor of the train (a.k.a. the Iron Horse). Both technologies—the train and the horse-as-vehicle—were tools of colonization. As Mark Jackson explains, “[c]ultures of modernity . . . became understood [during the cultural turn in scholarship] as enrolled within cultures of colonialism; where you find modernity, there too you will find colonialism in some form” (“Introduction” 2). From a colonial academic perspective, the horse was then appropriated by Native American and First Nations peoples to such an extent that they are closely and proudly identified with each other. From the Indigenous academic perspective of Yvette Running Horse Collin, who cites various origin stories, artifacts, and glyphs in her dissertation (108–15), horses were in the Americas before first contact with Europeans, and horses were then and are now spiritual creatures who are honoured by Indigenous peoples. Rather than vanish together into a sunset, they insist on the contemporary significance of redness. After the al Qaeda terrorist attacks on American soil on 11 September 2001, my friend Delvin Kanewiyakiho (Cree) sported a t-shirt on which a red-rimmed silhouette of an Indigenous warrior on horseback was captioned “Homeland Security Since 1492.” Satirically recontextualizing colonization since Christopher Columbus alongside the American Department of Homeland Security and the classic cowboy—and our stereotypes in the West of terrorists as non-white—the image returns Indigenous people to the discourse even as it reminds us of how Indigenous philosophies tend not to separate humans and other animals and inanimate objects so strictly—for example, in the Okanagan animism of Harry Robinson’s “You Think It’s a Stump, But That’s My Grandfather” (1992/2004).

For Jackson, the widening concept of the Other that emerged through the development of post-colonial theory was coincident with, if not a precursor to, the development of theories of the post-human and post-humanism (“For New” 20). These theories further expand the Other to include non-human animals and even inanimate objects such as the stump in Robinson’s story. The prefix “post,” rather than indicating that something is finished, implies various self-reflective and self-critical positions on “ongoing colonial oppression” (21). Realistically, we need the combination of post-colonial and post-human thinking and being that might address

our ethical and environmental dilemmas, but if we were very strict about the current term “decolonization,” we would demand that (we) cowboys ride off into the *sunrise*: to the *East*, backwards along the traditional paths of colonization and exploration in North America, as I suggested through Bowering’s *Caprice* in the previous chapter. (We might also choose Cree as an official language, look to Indigenous peoples for our immigration policies, and resolve as many land claims as possible in the interests of Indigenous peoples, in an effort to set things right. Maria Campbell, speaking for the Indigenous Literary Studies Association conference in Vancouver in 2019, said that “reconciliation” is the wrong word, because it implies colonists once got along with the Indigenous peoples; “setting things right” is better—and even better in Michif or another Indigenous language.) The Western’s sunset motif offers imagery easily exploited by postmodern and post-Western writers.

## The Post-human and Post-humanism

I do not mean to imply that Westerns are typically concerned with the post-human or post-humanism, not with all their androcentrism, gold-rushing colonialism, and anti-intellectualism yoked to “common sense”—itself “the tyranny of doxa” (Braidotti 4). Rosi Braidotti admires “non-nostalgic post-human thinker[s]” (198), and these attributes are uncommon to makers of classic Westerns. But I do wonder about how the horseman or horsewoman, these crucial hybrids of the genre, encourage thought experiments about the coincidence of historical Westerns and emerging post-Westerns and post-humanism in the 1990s and 2000s. Braidotti imagines thinking as “a nomadic activity” defined partly by “[t]he politics of location, of situated knowledges” (199). The West as one such “location” may create “nomadic” knowledge thanks in part to the mobility of the horse—the first “technology” of rapid transportation for people. Even more than dogs, horses are part of what Donna Haraway calls “the body of technoscience” (5). The horse’s speed was a major advantage in battle from its domestication until the First World War; it inspired Eadweard Muybridge’s late nineteenth-century cinematic photography; it dramatized almost countless Westerns, as in the plot of “cutting off the train at the pass.” Vanderhaeghe’s *The Englishman’s Boy* exposes the abuse of galloping horses in the making of Westerns for film and television (65),

abuse that harmed the reputation of Hollywood studios which, in turn, humanized horses and promoted them as stars to prove their “humane” treatment (Kristmanson 3–4). Research into star horses in the Western offers another example, alongside those from Braidotti in *The Posthuman* (2013), of non-human animals whose lives become more valuable as commodities than the lives of many humans (8), such as Indigenous people. Capitalist adaptation is sometimes only the production of difference for the expansion of commodification (Braidotti 58)—a neoliberal precept of commodifying everything, with money the main value. Although the humanization of horses can be lauded as humane, it is also a sign of the post-human predicament in which capitalism depreciates some values and appreciates others (8) without concerning itself with an ethics beyond the self as defined in terms of self-interest. Certainly, in contrast with such an ethics, we might do well to try to think like a horse or another non-human.

Unfortunately, I am not certain that I am qualified to do so. Although my expertise is that of a critical reader of literature and other narratives who identifies partly as a writer, Braidotti seems skeptical that such expertise is enough; she believes that the “momentous” next step for critical theory is to develop “an understandable language” and “a new vocabulary” with “more conceptual creativity” (82) than we usually find in the humanities. I suspect that she would find much to consider in novels narrated by or focalized around non-human animals, such as Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* (1999) or André Alexis’s *Fifteen Dogs* (2015), but she tends to draw on philosophy, history, geography, and other disciplines cognate with literary studies. Echoing Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), in which “dogs are not about oneself” (11), Braidotti implies repeatedly that she is not impressed by the tradition of personification and anthropomorphism in such novels,<sup>15</sup> and she does not appear to have gone looking for such novels that also include examples of constructed or invented languages to equip the non-human narrators. Nor have I, in the context of the Western,<sup>16</sup> wherein Braidotti’s stated limitations on post-human thinking seem entirely valid. But I will attempt

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15 Avoiding anthropocentrism is also one of the tactics of deep ecology (Murray and Heumann, *Gunfight* 14).

16 Beyond the Western, there are many examples for human and humanoid characters, as in J. R. R. Tolkien’s writings in and around *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5) and in Anthony

to bend my imagination to the possibility of post-human thinking after showing how *The Englishman's Boy* and other historical Westerns are expressing the genre alongside humanistic concerns such as history.

## The Western's Horse in *The Englishman's Boy*

*The Englishman's Boy* is explicitly commenting on the Western. Set partly in Los Angeles in 1923, it spends time where Damon Ira Chance is setting up his film production. Hollywood and its environment are described as a land of “make-believe” (6), “a world half-wild, half-artificial” (12) that corresponds with Margaret Atwood’s “Backdrop Addresses Cowboy” (1968) from the previous chapter, and indeed, if you compare a 1923 image of pastoral Hollywoodland with a 2001 NASA satellite photograph of Los Angeles, you will see how much the sprawling city limits of Los Angeles could have seemed like a frontier compared to its later, almost total envelopment of the surrounding area. Chance hires Harry Vincent, a Canadian in Hollywood, to write an epic Western that could rival the historic (if not accurately historical) *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) as an American nationalist project. Vincent tells us: “Contrary to what you might expect, Hollywood was a ghost town after dark” (8). His screenwriting mentor Rachel Gold explains filmmakers by calling “[e]verybody an outlaw. Patent-breakers, fly-by-night independents, here today, gone tomorrow” (135). Harry also tells us that “[d]irectors of Westerns like flamboyance, it photographs well, which accounts for the way these boys [the actors playing cowboys] are duded up” (54). It explains historical details of how horses were handled and harmed in the making of Westerns (65). And in one character’s cowboy drawl it reflects sardonically on the unenviable position of Vanishing “Indians” in the Western: “Those wild Indians the army used to jail for scampering off the reservation, directly they was locked up, they shrivelled and died. Wild Indian got to run free. I’d guess you lock a wild Indian up between the covers of a book, same thing is going to befall him. He’s going to die” (145).<sup>17</sup> Not only does *The Englishman's*

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Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). I would also recommend China Miéville’s 2011 novel *Embassytown*, a science fiction that includes the constructed language of the Ariekei.

17 Shorty McAadoo, the titular Englishman’s boy who speaks these words, himself appears to be modelled visually on Clint Eastwood and similar outlaws. Although Shorty is short and Eastwood tall, each of them has what Vanderhaeghe memorably describes as “the gaunt,

*Boy* comment on the Western, but it also reflects on its own responsibility toward the depiction of Indigenous peoples in its own pages.

Vanderhaeghe's *Englishman's Boy* is historical fiction, not the historiographic fiction that Linda Hutcheon finds to be definitive of post-modern(ist) literature in Canada, but *The Englishman's Boy* seems to be self-consciously seeking a new (or old) footing for literature after post-modernism. Writing about Vanderhaeghe's influence, Vanja Polić explains:

[T]he emergence of the new Western genre in Canadian writing is visible through the replacement of certain tropes and schematic plots from the traditional Western with more complex postmodern narrative techniques such as historiographic metafiction; dialogism and polyglossia; and a greater prominence of ex-centric characters such as women, peoples of the First Nations, and atypical cowboys. ("Reworkings" 206)

Vanderhaeghe hints at the revisionist poetic licence of historiographic metafiction when the villainous Damon Ira Chance envisions an epic Western made from "the poetry of fact" (20) to honour his "obsession with history" (16), while "[h]istory . . . disappeared from sight" (6). (Damon Ira Chance's initials, D. I. C., make me wonder if Vanderhaeghe is echoing bpNichol's microaggressive fun with short-dick jokes in *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* [1970].) Although *The Englishman's Boy* is not strictly metafictional in the sense of being a book about the writing of the same book, it is a book about a writer, the main character Harry Vincent and his research. And the novel does describe Chance as a "Henry James character" (7) whose grandiloquence is "as if a Henry James character were launching an attack on James himself" (18). As a novel published so soon after King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, it appears to have learned some big lessons of postmodernism, such as the decentring of authorized, grand narratives akin to *Birth of a Nation*; the obsession with media, such as film, that acknowledges the mediated condition of any claim to truth, such

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cadaverous look of the rural poor . . . [and] anthracite eyes [that] did the talking for him. They said: Expect no quarter. Give none. . . . He didn't string more than five words together at a time" (30).

as Chance's version of history; and the self-reflection and metacognition (if not quite self-reflexivity and metafiction) of authors on their acts of creation.

The self-reflection and metacognition are evident in the temporal structure of *The Englishman's Boy*, which ironically opposes the nostalgia of the Western. The novel provides us with both Harry's story of writing the film and the backstory of Shorty McAdoo, the old cowboy and later actor who consulted on the film and was once the relatively innocent "boy" of the novel's title. But its good old days are in fact a reimagining of the boy's witnessing of, and participation in, the historical Cypress Hills Massacre in 1873, hardly an occasion to be longed for. And its present (generally the 1920s) is a noirish tale of failed work and corporate greed and murder, not the triumph of industry; Vincent describes himself occasionally as a "detective" (37, 53), and his later hopelessness with a pistol demonstrates that he is definitely not a cowboy (161–4); John Motyka calls it a "California noir-meets-Wild-West" (23) story. All this is briefly framed by Harry's memories in the 1950s. He has occasions when, like Ondaatje's Billy the Kid, he sees himself as a camera would: "I become too aware of myself. I watch my hand slide along the banister. . . . Out of the corner of my eye I catch the ladder-backed chair isolated on the cold marble floor of the ballroom, the strangeness of its position" (25)—a scene that also alludes to a memorable set in the film *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950) and its tale of another rich old "visionary" hiring a penniless new writer. Technically, all this is also framed again by an omniscient third-person narration, not Harry's close third-person narration, that focalizes around the Assiniboine men Fine Man and Broken Horn and their theft of the white men's horses that precipitated the Cypress Hills Massacre. This telescoping or nesting of stories is certainly a postmodern technique of redoubling perspectives and subjective distortions. Less obviously performative than the postmodernism of *Green Grass, Running Water* and its ebullient returns to the beginning of various stories, there is a circular structure in *The Englishman's Boy*; it ironically regenerates Shorty through the younger Harry Vincent, another dupe of men more evil, whose "bum leg" (33) is a sign of the degeneration resulting from acts of violence on people or their history.

His “bum leg” is on one hand simply a reason to redirect Vincent’s efforts from his body to his mind, or at least to his eyes. But on the other it also invites us to think of the horse on the body-mind continuum. It is a phallic symbol related to what Tompkins calls “the inevitable Freudian query: horse as penis” (16). The horses in *The Englishman’s Boy* are symbols of mobility associated with the train (a.k.a. the Iron Horse), but they are also complex symbols of this degeneration of legs (being that you usually have to shoot a lame horse), and a compensatory symbolic elevation. Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* contains the following paraphrase of the Greek myth of Poseidon: “He was the ruler of the sea, Zeus’s brother and second only to him in eminence. . . . [H]e gave the first horse to man: Lord Poseidon, from you this pride is ours, / The strong horses, the young horses, and also / The rule of the deep” (28–9). A later religious source on horses in the Western-world tradition returns in Vanderhaeghe’s short story “Man on Horseback,” from his collection *Things As They Are?* (1992):

In Christian art the horse is held to represent courage and generosity. . . . In the catacombs it was, with the fish and the cross, a common symbol. No one is absolutely certain what its meaning was, although it is assumed it represents the swift, fleeting, and transitory character of life. (51)

For Vanderhaeghe, horses are thereby existential figures that express ideas of life and death; in Adamson’s *The Outlander*, the death of horses causes in the young girl an “existential gloom” (287). These are ideas common to other religious traditions too. In *The Studhorse Man* (1969), Robert Kroetsch writes that “[a]t one time in the China of T’ai Tsung there were 40,000 horses in the Imperial stables. . . . Even to the grave they sent a man with mortuary horses . . . ; we pack a corpse off in copper and steel that it might for an extra year bewilder the dust” (155–6).<sup>18</sup> According to Tompkins, in the context of the Western, “[m]ore than any other single element in the genre, they symbolize the desire to recuperate some lost

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18 In Kroetsch’s much later novel, *The Man from the Creeks* (1998)—considered in this book’s conclusion—he associates horses and death through the mass carnage of dead horses below the cliffs of mountain passes where prospectors found their ways to the Klondike.

connection to life” (94). Perhaps because of its implied ability to transport souls, the horse appears to symbolize freedom—as when in *The Outlander* “the chill of freedom had blown through them already” (286)—but in some cases also mastery and power (e.g., in terms of horsepower) (Tompkins 99), and the riches that power can bring: “On ne peut pas surestimer la fascination qu’exerce le cheval sur les gens de toutes les classes de la société. Il symbolise la richesse, la puissance et la liberté” (“We cannot overestimate the fascination that the horse provokes in people from all classes of society. It symbolizes wealth, power, and freedom”; Blondin et al. 11). These meanings were also true for Indigenous people who depended on the horse in conflicts with colonists and with other Indigenous people. And, like the symbolism descending through Greek myth to Christianity, the horse for Indigenous people was sometimes linked to religious figures—for example, as a gift of the Great Spirit (for the Sioux) and as a creature blessed by Old Man Coyote (for the Crow).<sup>19</sup> Here, horses are inestimably, intangibly, and spiritually valuable.

Given these honorific and elevating uses of the horse, we might be surprised to see that they are also symbols of degeneration, but the degeneration can be explained when the horse is tethered to Western milestones of historical progress that involve departures from real horses to Iron Horses. When Chance describes McAdoo in *The Englishman’s Boy*, he first identifies him as both “a tin god” and “the last bull buffalo of the old West” (20). He then adjusts the buffalo metaphor by explaining that McAdoo’s story has to come from “the horse’s mouth” (22).<sup>20</sup> In fact, people are described as a lot of animal species in the novel, but horses have a self-conscious significance. Ed Grace, the boy’s one friend in the vengeful Tom Hardwick’s gang of wolfers, asks the boy if he knows what a centaur is. The boy doesn’t, so Grace explains: “A being, half man, half horse. . . . I’ve been

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19 For related information, see the entries on “Horse,” “Sioux,” and “Crows” in David J. Wishart’s *The Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* at the University of Nebraska (Lincoln): <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/>.

20 Speaking of horse’s mouths, I should note that implications of horse-human hybridity have a long history in the Western, including the Canadian Western—for example, in “The Gunsmoke Sheriff” by Luke Price in the 1940s pulps that I considered in chapter 4. Smokey Carmain is introduced as being so close to his horse that the saddle “came as natural to the rider as the thatch of gold-tinted hair on his head” (98). Later, in “Hound Dog Justice,” he tells a man, “Yuh can’t make a hawse drink ef he don’t want to, Mister” (47), alluding to himself as the horse, he of the horse’s mouth again.

knocking around this country ten years—it changes a man. But I’m not all the way there yet. I’m not Tom Hardwick. I’m betwixt and between—half civilized, half uncivilized. A centaur” (191). Grace’s evocation of the Greek myth of the “centaur” is not as odd as one might think,<sup>21</sup> because it has connections to the medieval epics and romances from which Westerns are derived; Susan Crane’s essay on “Chivalry and the Pre/Postmodern” (2011) shows remarkable continuity between medieval ideas of a knight’s relationship with his horse and ideas of the self today, and Anastasija Ropa’s 2019 survey of medieval scholarship suggests that “[o]ne idea, which has gained much currency, is grounded in posthumanism, understanding the relation of the medieval rider and the horse through their blending in order to create a new, collective identity” (1). The notion of a “collective” diminishes the individuality of the subject. Similarly, Grace’s statement illustrates one of Braidotti’s very contemporary definitions of the post-human: as “becoming-animal” (67). According to Haraway, in the context of evolving alongside other animals, “it is a mistake to see the alterations of dogs’ [or horses’] bodies and minds as biological and the changes in human bodies and lives . . . as cultural, and so not about co-evolution” (31). Vanderhaeghe’s Grace is not making that mistake because he appears to be open to “co-evolution.” And according to Braidotti, “[p]ost-anthropocentrism [basically a synonym of post-humanism] displaces the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for ‘Man’ as the measure of all things. In the ontological gap thus opened, other species come galloping in” (67). Her own horse metaphor happens to align with Grace’s statement, which also shows how meaningful the horse is to the Western: it enables not only the spatial liminalities of border crossing and a “connection” “between the human being and the earth” (Tompkins 93) but also the ontological liminalities of un/civilization, through which a person may experience “progress” or “regression,” such as an atavistic and implicitly degenerative return to a more animalistic condition of being.

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21 It also has a precedent in dime novels, specifically *Beadle’s Popular Library*, vol. 1, no. 20, 1897, headlined by “Cowboy Chris, the Desert Centaur.” According to Warren French, this “desert centaur” was different from other cowboys because he did not settle down at the end of the story (233–4). He was possibly the beginning of the cowboy understood to serve society without being a part of it, and his refusal to integrate might also reflect his hybridity with horses, which also invokes his mobility.

He might not be willing to say so because it would alert Hardwick to a potential sympathizer with the enemy, but Grace is also implying that the “uncivilized” condition is symbolically Indigenous, in line with the stereotypes of Indigenous people as primitives or, at best, “noble savages.”

By invoking the mythical creature of the centaur, Grace also unwittingly re-inscribes the mythical nature of the Western genre in which he is participating as a character in a tale told later by the (colonial) Englishman’s boy. Even more than this, he and later the boy re-inscribe Indigeneity as mythical too. The boy’s recollection of this conversation with Grace is nested indirectly; we get it in the 1873 plot framed by Vincent’s 1923 plot involving the making of Chance’s epic film. But McAdoo also tells a similar tale to Vincent in the 1923 plot, one that is nested directly and explicitly: “McAdoo turns his face back to me [Vincent]. . . . ‘I been to Canada,’ he says. His voice changes, as if he is speaking out of a cavern. A cavern of regret, or sorrow. ‘I went Indian up in Canada’ ” (151). The phrase “going Indian,” which Kroetsch uses in the title of *Gone Indian* (1973), is sometimes meant disparagingly, but Kroetsch uses it to suggest that “the quest for an essentialist notion of identity will lead to a dead end” (Edwards) and to “pos[e] questions about historical attitudes that are based on the perceptions (or social constructions) of ethnic variations” (Edwards). Vanderhaeghe’s project is similar. Both of McAdoo’s stories, from his boyhood and from his adulthood fifty years later, are about “changes” (151, 191) to the presumed civility of the white man in “Indian country.” He reflects what Daniel Coleman calls, in *White Civility* (2006), the English Canadian “obsession . . . with the problem of [white] civility” (5). The problem is, simply, how English culture normalized whiteness as the colour of privilege and has had to contend ever since with the ramifications of excluding others from such privilege. Quoting M. NourbeSe Philip, Coleman explains that there is an “ideological lineage to this belief system” (Coleman 7). Vanderhaeghe calls attention to this “lineage” by invoking it in the title *The Englishman’s Boy*. So does McAdoo himself: “Lots of them Eastern boys riding at the studios *play* at cowboys and Indians. . . . Books don’t make an Indian. It’s country makes an Indian” (151, original emphasis). For McAdoo, there are performed identities (perhaps the only ones of which Kroetsch’s postmodernism would approve) and an authentic identity (perhaps) rooted in the Canadian landscape and its original

human inhabitants, the Indigenous peoples—but this binary of performed whiteness and authentic Indigeneity perpetuates the white privilege to *adapt* (i.e., perform) while Indigeneity is *rooted* and, however stable, thereby also immobilized, quite contrary to the mobility of the horse.

Ironically, McAdoo then casts doubt on his assertion of an authentic identity by going on to explain—with a comical alternative to the horse—how he had to pretend to be insane (or degenerate) to appear harmless to the Blackfoot men who surprised him once on the range. He pretended by imitating a pig “rooting through the slop . . . [and] wiggling my hams” (155), while he was in fact looking for his pistol in the vegetation. It was hardly post-human thinking or even method acting; it was totally faking it. He concludes his story by telling Vincent that “[t]hem old-timey, genuine Indians used to go off solitary in the wilderness so’s to find their creature spirit. . . . That’s where they learned it, in the wilderness” (157). He has to explain to Vincent: “Creature spirit. . . . Spirit they shared with some creature—grizzly spirit, elk spirit, coyote spirit, crow spirit. . . . What do you make of mine?” Vincent is caught off guard, and McAdoo remarks, “You ain’t been listening, have you?” (157). McAdoo might well have enjoyed the fact that, just as he could not respond (as a boy at least) to Grace’s question about the centaur, Vincent could not make sense of the anecdote about the pig. Instead of the horse, McAdoo sardonically adopts the pig as his “creature spirit.” Although he does not and perhaps cannot articulate it, he acknowledges and seems to accept, self-deprecatingly, his colonial (Englishman’s) heritage and its symbolism of the pig as dirty, greedy, and canny. If the horse is degenerate in the context of white human civilization, the pig is even farther gone, thereby returning a degree of nobility to the horse.

For Indigenous people, horses are among other animals that are relations of humans. *The Englishman’s Boy* begins as Fine Man and Broken Horn are about to steal the horses, and one stands out: “a big blue roan . . . stained a faint blue [by the moon] . . . a Nez Percé horse from beyond the mountains which wore snow on their heads all the year round, a horse from behind the Backbone of the World” (2). The horse’s association with the Nez Percé confirms that the horse is special as a result of being part of the oldest horse-human tradition; Vanderhaeghe seems to affirm an Indigenous origin story in which “a Blackfoot, Shaved Head by name,

went west and obtained the first horses that were known to his people from the Nez Percé, who told him that they had taken them out of the water” (John Canfield Ewers qtd. in Collin 112)—possibly also the source of the memorable image of a horse emerging from beneath the liquid surface in Kroetsch’s *The Studhorse Man*. Although an Indigenous interpretation would probably be different, to me it seems that the Nez Percé are at least midwives to the horse; there is a close relationship that is almost familial. About to take “the winter horse” (2) with him, Fine Man respectfully calls him “Little Cousin” (3) and vows to be good to him and the other horses, who relax when the winter horse does.<sup>22</sup> The novel returns to this opening scene in its final pages as Fine Man applies face paint while looking at himself in a hand mirror. The flecks of quicksilver in the mirror give him a vision of what to do next: “dab [the horse’s] blue coat with white spots to make a picture of the night blizzard which four days ago had frozen the wolfers to the ground in sleep” (328). Painting frozen water onto the horse acknowledges its origin “out of the water,” and the mirror’s symbolism of self-reflection superimposed with an idea of the horse suggests that both Fine Man and Ed Grace imagine themselves to be related, as “Cousin” or “centaur,” to horses. But for Fine Man, including horses among his relations is a sign of wider, inter-species social bonds than those implied by Grace, whose language of “civilization” implies a primitive opposition.<sup>23</sup>

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22 The trope of the Indigenous relationship to horses is common in Westerns; it also appears memorably in Paul St. Pierre’s *Smith and Other Events* (1983) when a character says, “A beautiful thing to see, how an Indian can talk to a horse. He never roughs him up. He never drives the irons into him. He just takes him out, after he gets a halter on him, and he talks to him. He has got just one turn of the halter rope around a snubbin post, like my finger there, and the Indian is on one side of the snubbin post and the horse is on the other side, and he just talks to him. Sometimes he spits in his face a little bit or he puffs his breath up into the horse’s nostrils. Like this. *Puh. Puh.* That is the way he goes about it. A beautiful thing to see” (23). In contrast, the anti-heroic titular character of Paulette Jiles’s *The Jesse James Poems* (1988) is worried about talking to horses: “Because you have abandoned your daylight self with such urgency and such joy, because nobody knows your name, there is the danger of being absorbed by the language of animals” (64). One Indigenous perspective on horses is from Thomas King’s 1993 novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, where the horse connects people to home: “Charlie put a pillow over his head and began counting horses, the kind of horses he and his cousins used to ride when he lived on the reserve” (210).

23 Ethan in *The Searchers* (1956) eventually, grudgingly, accepts that his family includes not only his part-Cherokee nephew Martin but also his acculturated Comanche niece Deborah; however, he refuses to go home to play his own part in this new family.

More important, Fine Man's "picture" of a "winter storm" (328) is a *moving picture*, a metaphor of film. (I will write more later about how the image of the centaur and the image of the blizzard reappear in Vanderhaeghe's following novel, *The Last Crossing*.) This metaphor becomes more certain as metaphor (in contrast to symbol, which is more open to interpretation) when Fine Man later visits "the holy man" (328) Strong Bull, who has recently begun to draw pictures in "a trader book" (331) to record the people in his life "so the grandchildren will recognize us" (331). Strong Bull was inspired to draw, after a time of uncertainty, when Thunderbird conjured a lightning storm and brightened away the darkness of his mind, giving him "knowledge of things to come" (330). Strong Man foretells that the One Above will transfer his "dreams of horses" (331) to Fine Man, the new keeper of their knowledge. In effect, Fine Man and Strong Bull have accepted the role of pictures and moving pictures in their shared history, which to King is a dangerous scenario (as I explained in the second chapter). The acceptance of film as a medium of history is surprisingly similar to Chance's view of writing history in the light(ning) of cinema (108): "if Griffith wrote history in lightning, the time has now come to *rewrite* history in lightning" (297). It is also similar to Vincent's view that an image "fill[s] the screen the way a dream fills the mind" (24). For Vanderhaeghe, history is a dream told and retold through the technologies of popular culture, and the horse symbolizes the historical movement of technologies of the picture. The horse powers film history.

It would be appropriate to pause and reflect on how other animals have powered history in general. Other quadrupeds such as donkeys have powered plows and carts full of produce; cows and many other animals have powered humans by literally "fuelling" them as food. But this is anthropocentric history that is not post-human. To think post-humanly, we might learn from Strong Bull, because he learns from Thunderbird, a mythic bird but still seemingly understood as a bird—or, at least, not as a human. Thunderbird's power ironically leads Strong Bull to anticipate film and history on film—profoundly anthropocentric developments—and this example shows how challenging it is to imagine a truly non-human point of view, such as that of a bird. Thunderbird in *The Englishman's Boy* might also be evidence of Vanderhaeghe's colonial imagination, because he reorients Strong Bull's vision toward a colonial technology. It is

difficult enough to imagine someone else's point of view, notwithstanding a non-human point of view. (The Métis scholar and photographer Warren Cariou discussed Thunderbird's appearance in Indigenous literature about hydropower generation in his talk at the Indigenous Literary Studies Association conference in 2019, building on his earlier talks on bitumen.) And Vanderhaeghe also manages to admit to human and colonial "blindness" when thinking of non-human points of view—namely, in the unforgettable scenes with Hank's blind horse, notably a white horse that invokes and evokes various traditions and intertexts.<sup>24</sup> When the horse's blindness endangers Hardwick's quest to reclaim his stolen horses and enact revenge, Hardwick "matter-of-factly" (94) shoots and kills the blind white horse. This ill-fated horse was also attributed the ill-fated number 13, which gives Hardwick further pleasure in having eliminated it (96). The discussion of number 13 leads the Englishman's boy to think to himself "that nothing was different on the other side [of death], only darker and dimmer, and that the rider on the pale horse was again one of their party, the unlucky, the cursed thirteenth" (96). He thinks post-humanly to the extent that he imagines the afterlife of not only "the rider" but also "the pale horse."

And, of course, the pale horse and its rider have their own fatalistic numerology beyond number 13 in the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse alluded to, as I explained in the previous chapter, in Clint Eastwood's *Pale Rider* (1985). If you recall, the girl hoping for a miracle in *Pale Rider* reads from Revelations 6:8, a Biblical verse in which a pale horse appears, ridden by Death and followed by Hell. In keeping with the Bible, the unnamed preacher played by Eastwood rides a pale horse, and the title of the film, *Pale Rider*, suggests that the close relationship between horse and rider is at least metonymic if not metaphoric. Eastwood takes on the role of avenging angel—and that of a ghost (having survived several shots to the chest that no human could have survived, as he proves when he kills the man who shot him in exactly the same way). By virtue of their shared characteristics, the horse, too, is a ghost, a spirit, perhaps also Death but not

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24 There are also blind horses in Paulette Jiles's *The Jesse James Poems* (1988): "Sometime / in the night they will ride south on blind horses; the horses will have never seen / anything like this in their lives" (60). Potentially something more could be said about the subtle implication here that horses from the North are blind, which could be relevant to Jiles's dual citizenship.

Hell, because the preacher and horse ride together as one. And if in *Pale Rider* the pale horse and its metonymically associated rider are a magical reanimation of the murdered little white dog, its macabre dimension is another degeneration through violence akin to that of McAdoo's pig (above); he is a pale shadow of a beast less noble (to some) than a horse. As Death incarnate, his human body and its steed have another, and far more powerful, contesting identity. In one of my courses on the Western, Lana McCrae responded to these ideas by realizing that they also reveal the degeneration of the cowboy's connection to the mortal plane, a disconnection that bestows upon him the power to judge the soul of the next man he might kill. The apocalyptic judge in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) is a fine example of this in literature—also arguably a paragon of regeneration through violence and thus a major counterpoint to some of my arguments in this chapter—and one that bleakly contradicts any model of the judge as a neutral, critical thinker or a humanistic force.<sup>25</sup>

Vanderhaeghe, too, rarely defers to nobility and its reassuring conclusions, though his opinion on the ultimate meaning of the horse throughout its transformations seems ambivalent. Sue Sorensen recognizes Vanderhaeghe's allusions to the Four Horsemen if not to *Pale Rider*:

The pale horse in Revelation 6 carries Death, and the rider on the white horse in that chapter has been variously

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25 I have thus far not quoted or considered at any length the various American novels in the background of this book, mainly because of my scope-limiting decision to compare (usually) American films and Canadian literature, as I explained in the introduction to this book. *Blood Meridian* would be the exception to this rule, were I to break it. Michael Herr blurbs the book (on the Vintage International edition of 1992) as “[a] classic American novel of regeneration through violence,” though I am not certain that it is so simple. In the novel, the kid's experience with violence does change his identity. Shot but not fatally near the beginning, “the child [is] finally divested of all that he has been” (4). Later, the judge (seemingly the kid's eventual killer) tells his listeners that the course of “the degeneracy of mankind” (146) can be interrupted only by raising children to cope with violence; thereby, humans may “cull themselves” (146). The kid later has a chance to kill the judge, his pursuer, but he does not (298), possibly because he does in fact see the judge as a father figure (306). Instead, after a scene featuring a dancing bear, the judge dances in a parallelism to illustrate not a “degenerate” connection to other animals but that “[t]here is room on the stage for one beast and one alone. . . . Bears that dance, bears that dont [sic]” (331). Through an ambiguously impressionistic closing image of the naked judge as a skinned but still living bear whose embrace of the kid might in fact have killed him (333–4), McCarthy implies that the judge's regeneration is in the almost vampiric “culling” of his lessers—an example of social Darwinism unless, of course, we interpret the judge as the devilish nemesis that he often appears to be.

interpreted, but can be associated with the Antichrist. . . . The white horse in Revelation 19, however, is definitely associated with the Messiah. Vanderhaeghe uses these contending symbols of good and evil interchangeably, although Hank's horse's blindness adds weight to the pathetic or ominous side of the equation. (35)

Reflecting a little later on the tension between Death and the Messiah here, Sorensen adds: "Commentary on religion in *The Englishman's Boy* is difficult because Vanderhaeghe's symbolism is not only ironic but overabundant, with possible identifications doubled or redoubled" (36). So, the likely allusion in *The Englishman's Boy* not only to the Bible but also to *Pale Rider* is partly an ironic foreshadowing, because Hardwick enacts revenge as he desired in chapters 27 and 29, massacring and raping and burning others alive, whereas in *Pale Rider* the preacher's sense of justice is far less offensive.<sup>26</sup> The Assiniboine girl in *The Englishman's Boy* is not saved as Megan is saved in *Pale Rider*. And the whiteness of the murdered blind white horse is ironic too, or at least very complex, because Fine Man's painting of the blue horse is meant to give it the whiteness and the movement of falling snow. Partly because painting the horse white produces a moving picture akin to film, a highly visual medium, there seems to be an irony in the reference to the blind white horse in the same novel. But more than that, the post-human thinking in the apocalyptic pale horse in *The Englishman's Boy* is a reorientation to a filmic point of view, not another animal's point of view, which for Vanderhaeghe has less future potential. Braidotti, coincidentally, refers to "the four horsemen of the posthuman apocalypse: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science" (59). Vanderhaeghe's horse-men, fused as they are not only across species but also with the technology of film, represent at least biotechnology and information technology. In transforming the horse into a moving picture, he skips its incarnation as the Iron Horse of nineteenth-century industry and lands in twentieth-century media (echoing Kroetsch's claim that Canadian literature skipped straight

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<sup>26</sup> Eastwood's vengeful character in *High Plains Drifter* (Eastwood, 1973) is far more ghastly, a protector but also a rapist.

to postmodernism). His novel depends on Biblical allusions, but it gets some of them from *Pale Rider*, showing its dependence on popular culture beyond the pop-cultural resonance that may be attributed to the Bible. In this sense, the novel is profoundly post-human: its vision of life and death does not reanimate anything except as technological simulation, a mark of hyperreality that is both post-human and postmodern. And if being a pale rider animated by a moving picture implies a prosthetic (as if film itself were the legs that give it movement), it is a condition that is both a degeneracy and a cyborg's improvement on the mere human.

## Men Born of Horses

Until now, with this evolutionary theme in mind, I have concentrated on Vanderhaeghe's *Englishman's Boy* because of its canonical status as a historical Western that appears to have been the first Canadian Western after the postmodern trend began to dissipate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and that appears as an early exemplar in a lengthening series of post-Westerns; however, its spiritual sequel, *The Last Crossing*, goes further in thinking through regeneration or degeneration through violence and the horse-man hybridity that exemplifies the post-human in these Westerns. Because it is a lesser-known novel compared to *The Englishman's Boy*, I relay a colourful synopsis from John Burns:

The story is simple. Charles Gaunt and elder brother Addington travel into the lawless New World of 1871 searching for Charles's lost twin, Simon, last seen leaving England under the sway of a shady evangelist preaching the kind of religious claptrap so popular among the Victorians. The trip, whether rescue or inquest, is clearly doomed. Charles in England is a dreamer, a milk-fed artist in an eccentric but powerful family. Charles in America is a kipper out of water, butt of scorn and flinty humour from the posse he and Addington assemble. . . . But this is really all just a cunningly designed, immaculately stitched backdrop for the novel's central relationship between Charles and Addington Gaunt. It's a quest story transposed into the New World of the 1870s, the history and geography of the still-wild west

embodying the clash between gentle, modern Charles and Addington, ruthless servant to the Empire. Told back in England, in time-worn, implacable London, theirs would be another social novel of the Henry James variety. In the heaving West, a land redefining itself politically, socially, spiritually, it's a story with the potential to attain the level of myth. ("Review")

Partly because of this potential, and of the fact that this story is already "transposed" across countries, in this section I have a set of examples that show how the Western and Western-like texts in general—not only Canadian Westerns—are imagining the horse-man hybridity. *The Last Crossing* does so partly through the character of Custis Straw. Katherine Ann Roberts explains: "Sporting leg wounds suffered during the American Civil War . . . , haunted by his inability to save a wounded comrade . . . , Straw is a man of introspection and humility" (59); he "is thus not only the 'man who knows Indians' within the classic American western iconography, [because] he is the man who knows horses and is . . . at home on the range" (59). By the end of the novel, "he manages to scale down violence, rein in [a] drive for vengeance, and resolve conflict by 'talking quiet.' His turning away represents a significant evolution away from the generic western's triumphalism and regeneration through violence" (63). But for me, the better example in *The Last Crossing* is Simon, the English missionary whose "regeneration" is a transnational acculturation into Indigenous ways of knowing, all starting with a more "knowing" or intimate (actually, familial more than sexual) relationship with a horse.

Indeed, its opening scene of hybridity is a node in an intertextual and transnational network of Westerns and Western-like texts from both Canada and the United States. Degeneration through violence is perhaps nowhere more obvious than when, near the beginning of *The Last Crossing*, the lost missionary on the wintry plains is about to die of exposure to cold. To survive, he kills and repurposes his horse: cutting open the warm body, he creates a shelter and crawls inside to the guts, "burrow[ing] into the balmy pocket. . . . Safe in the slick, rich animal heat, out of the cruel wind. . . . An embryo, curled in the belly of the dead horse" (8–9). In addition to various transnational echoes that I hear below, there is an echo of what

Annette Kolodny calls America's "single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape" (6)—here a positive "regression" to childhood and mothering. As this metaphor plays out in Westerns and related texts, it is not always so innocent.<sup>27</sup> Simon is later renamed Born of a Horse (344–5) by the Two-Spirited person who observes his birth and then becomes his lover and spiritual re-educator outside the Christian tradition.<sup>28</sup> In the context of the missionary, the rebirth is ironic, because it leads to Simon's non-heteronormative relationship with a Two Spirit, a *bote*. It thereby also leads to his adoption and acculturation into a Crow community, which to his English family is likely another captivity narrative and another degeneration—one in contrast with his imperial brother Addington, whose degeneracy through violence is represented symbolically by the syphilis that eventually drives him to attempt to hunt a bear without benefit of his modern weaponry.

Addington becomes animalistic in *The Last Crossing*, but he lacks the animalistic nobility and Indigenous spirituality that his brother gains through the horse and Indigenous respect for horses. According to Roberts, "Addington symbolizes . . . the hypocrisy and decay beneath the veneer of Victorian moral and sexual propriety. As Wyile . . . points out, Vanderhaeghe, through his portrait of the Gaunt brothers, 'figures imperialism as a migration of the ills of Victorian society outward to the margins of empire, subverting the trope of the genteel Victorian being confronted with the lawless, depraved Wild West'" (50). Roberts explains in detail:

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27 No one asks, for example, what the horse would think of being used. J. J. Clark observes that "there is a stark difference between the actual behaviour of horses and the behavior of the stereotypical western horse of literature, film, and television. These fictional horses are presented as celibate males who . . . are readily obedient and submissive to the cowboy" (157). I, too, learned from experience that the stereotype is not true. In filming a short promotion for this book with my colleague Jamie Skidmore, I was recorded talking at the camera with a microphone on my lapel and a live horse over my shoulder. The horse ate the mic. The horse's owner (or protector) seemingly pushed her whole arm down the throat of the horse to get the mic. I'm sure the scene was funnier to me than the horse.

28 A similar plot can be found in *A Man Called Horse* (Silverstein, 1970) when an English slave of the Sioux refuses to be treated like a horse, a refusal that the "Indians" mock by renaming him "Horse" thereafter (Tompkins 105). A line in Gil Adamson's *Ridgerunner* (2020) about who could "resurrect a horse" (77) suggests that this sort of rebirth is also a sort of reincarnation.

Addington exposes the “rot” not only at the heart of Victorian imperialism but also at the heart of Theodore Roosevelt’s turn-of-the-century frontier myth. . . . Roosevelt’s peculiar racist historiography and its veneration for the hunter/aristocrat/military figure is completely turned on its head in *The Last Crossing* through the portrait of Addington. Burdened by an ignominious past—he commanded his regiment to shoot Irish civilians at Dunvargan to quell their revolt—the captain searches fleetingly in the West for a path to rebirth (regeneration through violence) but is instead slowly overtaken by an untreated case of syphilis and reduced to a crazed monster, slathering himself in mercury [that futuristic liquid metal that *Terminator 2* (Cameron, 1991) would use so memorably in another narrative about anti-imperial technological appropriation]. Vanderhaeghe’s novel contains phrases that seem to be taken almost verbatim from Roosevelt’s theory on the need for physical activity. Given what the reader knows of Addington’s character and the moral degradation this “exercise” is supposed to remedy (he suffers from venereal disease), these passages have a poignant irony: “This is what he was born to do. Live like a Mongol khan.” (50–1)

One irony is that Addington has no idea what it is to live “like a Mongol khan,” and another is that his vision of being “born” again in the West is nothing like his brother’s rebirth and Indigenous acculturation as Born of a Horse. The key difference: Simon’s rebirth has few of the imperial overtones of Addington’s much more degenerative experience of the West. Simon’s rebirth suggests that becoming horse-like, and befriending Indigenous people, is progress.

But here we should look beyond the Canadian Western, because this scene of taking shelter in an animal that has just died is probably more familiar to many of us from a *Star Wars* movie, *The Empire Strikes Back*

(Kershner, 1980),<sup>29</sup> when Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) has succumbed to the elements in a blizzard on a remote planet.<sup>30</sup> The science-fictional context is crucial, because it implies a diegesis in which civilization has progressed (complicated, of course, by all the dystopian narratives in sci-fi). To save Luke, his friend Han Solo (Harrison Ford, costumed in most scenes to evoke a space cowboy) cuts open an alien beast of burden, into which he pushes Luke to preserve his remaining warmth. “I thought they smelled bad on the outside,” Han says, but we see little of the animal’s insides; instead of an animalistic rebirth, we soon see Luke suspended with tubes and wires and recovering in a huge glassed-in tank of presumably warm water or some other healthful fluid. This example of “the post-human as becoming-machine” (Braidotti 89) is at home in science fiction but is also, as we will see below, an emerging interest of the Western; here it implies that “becoming-machine” is a survival tactic in the face of an imperial threat, as Wylie and Roberts see it—but in the context of “becoming-animal”—in *The Last Crossing*. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke is born not from a horse or other non-human animal but from a futuristic technology, one aligned more closely with his father, Darth Vader (David Prowse), than with his dead mother. The key difference between this scene and related scenes in Westerns is that the horse-like animal is a temporary saviour, while his transformation is future-friendly rather than anti-modern—as when Luke later equips himself with a bionic hand to replace the one that his father Darth Vader cut from him.<sup>31</sup> Still, Luke’s becoming like Vader is clearly a degeneracy.

In *The Revenant* (Iñárritu, 2016), the scene from *The Empire Strikes Back* reappears but in an American context that refuses *The Last Crossing*’s

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29 For readers of the Northwestern, it might also be familiar from Jack London’s “To Build a Fire” (1908), in which a man freezing to death in the Yukon contemplates killing his dog in order to use the body to stay warm.

30 The earliest example that I know of in print is Bram Stoker’s “The Squaw” (1893), where a character confidently states: “nothin’s too terrible to the explorin’ mind. Spent a night inside a dead horse while a prairie fire swept over me in Montana Territory—an’ another time slept inside a dead buffler when the Comanches was on the war path an’ I didn’t keer to leave my kyard on them” (260). He then goes thrill-seeking in an iron maiden, with predictable results. I thank Andrew Loman for calling my attention to this one.

31 An early future-friendly example, though one of dramatic irony, is in *Dodge City* (Curtiz, 1939) when Colonel Dodge, ensconced in a comfortable compartment with other elites on the train, describes progress as “Iron Men and Iron Horses—you can’t beat ‘em.”

partial integration of colonial and First Nations people. In *The Revenant*, the main character, Hugh Glass (a historical figure played by Leonardo DiCaprio), dies three times: first, when he is nearly killed by a bear;<sup>32</sup> second, when he is left for dead by his companions who partly bury him alive; and, third, when he rides his horse off a cliff (chased by “Indians”) and, stranded in a gully with an oncoming snow storm, guts the horse, strips naked, and climbs inside. (I do not recall that this scene appears in one of the movie’s source texts, Michael Punke’s 2002 novel, *The Revenant*.) His deaths echo the various haunted Westerns that I considered in the previous chapter. When Glass re-emerges, however, no Indigenous people are there to witness the scene and allow him to join them. He had already had a relationship with a Pawnee woman, and they had a child together, but she was killed by whites and, after he raised his interracial child alone, the same man who wanted to leave him for dead after the bear attack also killed his son. The American movie (though directed by Alejandro Iñárritu, who is Mexican) assumes that white-Indigenous families will not survive, whereas *The Last Crossing* assumes that they will—simply not as traditional nuclear families led by heterosexual couples, and therefore not likely to create a lineage except by further adoptions. Symbolically, the horse in *The Revenant* has less power to give life—to regenerate—than in *The Last Crossing*, attesting perhaps to the former’s stronger sense of conflict with the natural world.

For *The Last Crossing*, *The Empire Strikes Back* might well have been the inspiration for the birthing scene, but it likely has Indigenous origins, possibly in traditional storytelling, to which I have no access. However, in *Whiskey Bullets: Cowboy and Indian Heritage Poems* (2006), Garry Gottfriedson (whose work I looked at in the chapter devoted to Indigenous perspectives) introduces a figure known as Horsechild in a series of poems. He explained in an interview that “[Horsechild is part of] the imagery [that] comes from the Secwepemc land in Kamloops and around that area. . . . So it’s really about my love for the land, I’m Horsechild and it’s the land that’s calling me back to it” (Gottfriedson qtd. in Ripplinger 5). He

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32 He is later seen draped in a huge bearskin poncho, suggesting that his transformation into a horse was preceded by a transformation into a bear, the latter possibly alluding to James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), when two different characters don a bearskin in similar fashion.

identifies explicitly as Horsechild here, but it is possibly an identity that can be shared with other Indigenous people—for example, when he attributes the identity of Horsechild to the Kwakiutl painter George Littlechild (“Ode to Horsechild,” 120). It is also possible that Horsechild in *Whiskey Bullets* is an allusion to the historical figure Horse Child, also known as Joe Pimi, son of the Cree chief Big Bear. Horse Child was adopted into a Métis family when Big Bear surrendered after the 1885 Resistance, and he later gave Big Bear’s medicine bundle to the American Museum of Natural History in 1934 (Lusty 20). He lived at Poundmaker’s Reserve near North Battleford, Saskatchewan, until his death in 1952 (20). To me, Gottfriedson seems to respect and identify with Horsechild and/or the historical Horse Child, the former because of a connection to the beckoning land, the latter (if I am not over-reading or misrepresenting the history) because of his survival and adaptation on colonized land in the context of the anti-colonial resistance of Horse Child’s father, Big Bear. For Gottfriedson, being Horsechild enables or involves a beneficial return to the land, not at all a degeneracy.

Whether Vanderhaeghe found inspiration for *Born of a Horse* in Indigenous sources or *The Empire Strikes Back* or somewhere else, my own favourite source of the idea is Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, which I looked at in the previous chapter. In an outrageous and darkly comic set piece, Ondaatje implies that the relationship of horse to man is less a utility than a kinship or even symbiosis. The sheriff Pat Garrett has captured Billy and other outlaws, and is leading them to jail the long way, through the desert and without hats, as a cruel punishment that echoes Tuco’s (Eli Wallach) torture of Blondie (Clint Eastwood) in Sergio Leone’s *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966). Whereas Blondie is on foot and Tuco on horseback, Billy and his captors are riding, and Billy’s shackles are chained around the horse’s stomach to prevent his escape. Without protection from the blazing sun, Billy succumbs to heat stroke and begins hallucinating that the sun has reached down through his head to his penis, literally turning him inside out. Finally, Billy collapses—but merely slides down the side of the horse and remains chained there, hanging underneath: “And I rolled off the horse’s back like a soft shell-less egg . . . but the chain held my legs to the horse and I was dragged picking up dust . . . as I travelled in between his four trotting legs at last thank the fucking christ,

in the shade of his stomach” (81). The metaphor of Billy as an egg hanging beneath the horse’s stomach suggests that he has regressed, or degenerated, to an embryonic phase, as in some of the texts above; he now has a new mother: the horse, who herself has degenerated into a pre-mammalian, egg-laying animal. Notably, in every case so far, the transformation has been driven by necessity, and they all share a more resistant attitude to imperial power than to horsepower.

The painfully hilarious hung-from-a-horse scene in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is replayed less as regression and more as progression in the more recent movie *Gunless* (Phillips, 2010), a much more deliberately Canadian perspective on the Western genre. In the opening scene, the Montana Kid (Paul Gross) rides into town backwards, dragging a broken branch from the noose around his neck. Back(ward) in the saddle, he is a sign of looking back to the United States—but not with much nostalgia, given that he narrowly escaped a hanging by the outlaws who still pursue him.<sup>33</sup> Arriving wounded and semi-conscious at a general store in small-town Alberta, he tips forward and sideways, sliding down until he is hanging upside down under the horse, as Billy does. His hanging in the opening scene is already his second hanging, so it calls attention to the differences between how he was treated in the United States compared to Canada. In a reversal of the plot of Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), he goes forward in time, at least time measured by stereotypically Canadian ideals of social progress, and *he* becomes the anachronism: freed from bondage by a second-generation Chinese-Canadian citizen (the Korean-Canadian Melody Choi), whom he mistakes for someone more foreign than him, and welcomed into an emerging pluralistic society whose government he (again) fails to recognize through the portrait of Queen Victoria on the wall in the store. He is out of sync with the economy, government, and culture. Inside the store, after buying bullets on credit, the Montana Kid loses patience with the salesmen and shoots both a teacup—symbol of civility, though it contains prohibited whisky—and the portrait of the queen, symbol of empire.

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33 For earlier examples of this plot in American films, see Richard G. Baker (115–19). For medieval sources of the backwards ride, see Esther Cohen: “The backwards ride upon an ass . . . was . . . a common form of *charivari* [or ritual public derision]” (175).

The shooting identifies him as a savage but an independent, though he is now reborn. Through a process of disorientation and reorientation begun under the horse, he eventually becomes voluntarily interdependent as the suicidal urges of his internalized gunslinger change from actual to symbolic. He chooses a life without guns and becomes an honorary modern liberal Canadian, forward-thinking and reoriented toward community, however idealized this view of Canada is.

If *Gunless* is the most recent iteration of the rebirth scene, the earliest I know of in Canada is from comics in the 1940s, and it warrants inclusion even though I've otherwise excluded comics from this book. In the Canadian publication *Triumph Comics* (number 9, from 1941), a comic-book story called "The Capture of 'Red'" in the *Tang* series by René Kulbach involves Buddy, himself barely older than the "kid" he was when the series began, shooting and cutting open a buffalo to survive a wildfire. When Buddy truly *was* a kid in the first few issues of *Triumph Comics*, he was kidnapped by a Sioux chief who adopted him and taught him Sioux ways. Killing the buffalo and taking shelter inside is credited to the chief: "Spotted Eagle knew a lot of tricks—hope this is the right one!" (Kulbach 42). For Buddy, surviving inside a buffalo suggests that his acculturated Indigeneity (which is appropriated by Kulbach) is not a degeneration but an evolution into a fitter person. And although Buddy tries to make peace with some of the "Indians" in the *Tang* series, he also kills many of them, and Kulbach usually presents them as "savages," perpetuating the racist notion that "a good Indian" is a white man.

That the transformation of the Kids is both protective and empowering is less obvious in "The Capture of 'Red,'" *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and *Gunless* than it is in the classic film *High Noon* (Zinnemann, 1952), when the sheriff becomes the outlaw-lawman by accepting and harnessing the power of the horse. As with Billy, the sheriff (Gary Cooper) is eventually captured, in the sense of being trapped in a barn full of horses and prevented from leaving by the danger of nearby shooters. And, as with Billy in the sun, the sheriff in *High Noon* is endangered by the heat. The scene becomes a firefight in two senses when the gang sets fire to the hay in the barn. Desperate, the sheriff gathers the horses and stampedes them out of the fiery barn, hanging off the side of his mount to avoid being shot in a scene reminiscent of the escape from the forest fire in Zane Grey's *Wildfire*

(1916). Although we can discern him in the stampede, his more horizontal position and his partial indistinguishability in the eyes of his attackers are signs that he, too, is a horse-man hybrid—but not only a horseman: also a phoenix. He is reborn in the flames. Embracing an elemental power, his wild side, he is still no match for Frank Miller (Ian MacDonald) and his gang. The significance of his transformation becomes clearer when his new wife, Amy (Grace Kelly), still in the white of her wedding dress, *also* contravenes her own Quaker ethic of non-violence in a moral decision to shoot an outlaw and save her husband. Although only one of them becomes a horseman, both experience the related degeneration of ethics (their principles break down) and the regeneration of morality (they “do the right thing” for the situation at hand). Rebirth as a horseman in this American context shows the perhaps enviable adaptability of American society and morals to new situations, but, whereas *Gunless* encourages America to adapt to a (falsely) gunless life, *High Noon* suggests that the adaptation must be of non-violence to violence.

Of course, not all Canadians are pacifists, and not all Canadian Westerns are either. Nor are all horses in the Western horse-men, and some of them seem to want anything but a metaphorical fusion with people. This is because most humans cannot relate well to other animals, as one of Stenson’s characters suggests: “If you can’t imagine what it feels like to be a horse, try being human” (*Lightning* 181). In Stenson’s 2008 novel *The Great Karoo*, however, the horse that wants no connection with people is linked to them anyway—though in Stenson’s other Western, *Lightning*, “[h]orses were Lippy’s closest friends” (10); “[a] horse was not a dog, not a pet” (108).<sup>34</sup> In the North-West Mounted Police’s horsemanship training early in *The Great Karoo*, the recruits are put to the test by the historical figure Lieutenant Colonel Sam Steele, who wants every man to be toughened by being thrown from a horse. (Later, they go to South Africa to fight the Boers for the farmland that the British wanted, and they get first-hand experience with both the open country and the infamous prisoner-of-war camps managed by the British.) Stenson introduces the wildest horse as

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34 To shift the focus from horses to canines as companion species in Canadian Westerns, see the classic *The Call of the Wild* (1903) by Jack London, and compare with the quick succession of Natalee Caple’s *In Calamity’s Wake* in 2013 and Nadia Bozak’s *El Niño* in 2014.

“a monkey-coloured outlaw” (35), using not only “outlaw” but also “monkey” to imply that the horse is a kind of “missing link” in the evolution of non-human animals toward human civilization. Given their cavalry’s mission in Africa and the attitudes of characters such as Steele, calling the horse “monkey-coloured” is a potentially racist reference to Africans that belies any notion of Canada’s own better evolution from England. Calling the horse an “outlaw” simply suggests that notions of the law are relative to one’s own country. But, as usual, the real and symbolic borders are both called into question in this Western. When hapless Albert begins riding the bucking outlaw, “both stirrups were lost. At times, Albert’s only connection to the horse was a death grip on the saddle horn” (37). A moment later something changes: “Into his next combination the horse poured so much wild energy that he shot a rear hoof into and through one of the empty stirrups. Now, he was bucking on three legs, and still it was more than Albert could handle” (37). The horse, now three-legged instead of four, is taking steps—or great leaps—toward bipedalism.<sup>35</sup> No wonder that “it dawned on Albert that he was serving no useful purpose” and “let go” (37). The horse is supplanting him. He jokes, “Well, boys, . . . you know me, I can ride most anything with hair. But, when a horse puts his hoof in the stirrup and tries to get on behind, I reckon it’s time to let him go” (37). The image of a horse trying to ride himself is similar to the image of Ouroboros, the snake that eats its own tail. It is a natural symbol of cycles of life, death, and life: regeneration. Suiting the comedy of the scene, Albert’s evasion of being ridden also implies that he has avoided being screwed by the horse that “tries to get on behind,” avoiding miscegenation and leaving the horse in an incestuous or at least masturbatory relationship with himself. If only Canadian war-making and peacekeeping could always be only that offensive.

In sum, through these transnational fantasies about horse-human hybridity, we discern mainly an anti-imperialist attitude, one that can be generalized (even in the case of *High Noon*) as a resistance to threatening powers that are perceived to be immoral. Although any position on the political spectra could play host to this attitude, the protective

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35 The mention of “combination” in this scene also seems to allude to recombination, a technique in genetic manipulation.

nature (or Nature) of horse-human hybridity suggests that an idea of (co) evolution is at work, and it is liberal in its attitude to borders, or at least human-inhuman borders. The levity of many of these scenes—Stenson’s and Ondaatje’s sexual comedies, Phillips’s goofy nationalism, even Han Solo’s bad joke—suggests that we have learned to dissipate some of the tension involved in imagining human evolution as devolution. In other words, we are beginning to accept (or are accepting again) that humans will not always be human. The question is, how much bigger—and better or worse—could we become?

## Becoming Earth in the Western

The Ouroboros implied by the “monkey-coloured outlaw” horse in Stenson’s *The Great Karoo* is related to another ancient myth, that of Gaia. In *The Outlander*, by Gil Adamson, the story focuses occasionally on horses, but the narrative arc of the novel becomes far more geological than biological at the climax, and only in the dénouement does biology—specifically that of humans—reassert itself. In the novel, the widow who murdered her husband escapes two twin assassins and disappears into the woods, eventually meeting the Ridgerunner, who becomes her lover, and joining a camp of men to work with them adjacent to a mountain mine. (The Ridgerunner also becomes the titular character in the sequel in 2020, and mining towns are again a prominent setting.) The final dramas of the story involve what might happen to her baby if she is convicted of her husband’s murder. The return to the biological imperative of sex and child-rearing is a humanistic end to a story that could have been post-human and post-humanistic, especially given the mark of science fiction on its otherwise historical fiction. But it definitely bears the marks of the Western: first, it is billed by its publisher, Anansi, as “[p]art historical novel, part Gothic tale, and part literary Western” (on its website showcasing its A List series); second, I heard in an interview with Adamson that her title for *The Outlander* is drawn in part from a Sean Connery space Western, *Outland* (Hyams, 1981; confirmed by Adamson in an email interview); third, it is set on the frontier in the late nineteenth-century West (technically, the early twentieth century of 1903); and finally, it focuses on an outlaw—the widow who murdered her husband—and her pursuit by two brothers whose twinning motif is very common among

the symmetries (e.g., outlaw-lawman) of the Western. *The Outlander* interests me partly because of how it plays with genre but also because of how its environmental themes re-inscribe the relationality of genre: like everything on earth, any genre is interdependent with other genres and the system of circulation that supports them all. In a different context, Braidotti theorizes “the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others. A posthuman subject thus constituted exceeds the boundaries of both anthropocentrism and of compensatory humanism, to acquire a planetary dimension” (89). Adamson’s *Outlander* has a Gaian dimension that may be described as planetary, but it also has what Braidotti describes as “a way of humanizing the environment, that is to say, as a well-meaning form of residual anthropomorphic normativity, applied to non-human planetary agents” (86), which she calls “compensatory humanism,” a sort of compromise between radical post-humanism and its forebears.

Possibly for this reason, in Adamson’s *The Outlander*, as with so many other Westerns, horses are not understood on their own terms (to the extent that we could imagine them post-humanly and post-humanistically); neither are the horses hybrids of humans, not quite, but they are clearly metaphors of humans and their contrastingly gendered dispositions, the gendering adding a new dimension to the representations of horses in the Canadian Western. The widow, whose name is later revealed to be Mary Boulton, has an identity strongly associated with that of her husband—hence her definition, as “the widow,” in terms of marriage. Adamson writes that

Until she was married, [the widow had] never ridden anything but a “girl’s horse”—gentle animals, usually old and slothful by temperament. Once married, she was introduced to a wholly different species: massive, powerful monsters with hairy forelegs and broad backs, stupid beasts with ferocious tempers. (287)

Obviously, a horse cannot be differentiated from another horse as “a wholly different species,” so Adamson is doing something else here. She is in fact comparing the “different” horses to men in contrast with women,

specifically Boulton's husband and his physical characteristics such as "hairy forelegs," hairy legs being gendered masculine. And the personality traits that contributed to her decision to kill him, his traits of being "stupid" and "ferocious," are projected onto the horses of her marriage too. They are clearly implicated in the domesticity and gendering of Boulton's household. In contrast, in a previous comparison but from a later time in her life, Boulton looked upon the horses of the town of Frank and noticed that people's horses "followed them around like lapdogs" (262)—more shades of Eastwood's paranormal terrier-horse transformation in *Pale Rider*. (In fact, when some of the miners are telling ghost stories about the sights and sounds in the darkness of the mine shafts, one of them says, "Ghosts don't exist. It's gas and white dogs" [234].) One horse even follows an owner into his own house: "Everyone heard the soft clop of unshod hooves and the warning cracks of the floorboards. The boy . . . impelled it backwards out the door, knocking its head on the lintel" (263). The horse then goes around the house to look through the window "like a governess peering into a playhouse" (263). Tompkins explains that horses are gendered feminine, despite the Freudian connotation of the phallus (17), and that "[i]t is here, in the society of man and horse, that the problems women and language pose for the Western hero come closest to being solved" (96): horses satisfy the lack of women in the West. Similarly, Adamson's references to "a governess" and "a playhouse" obviously gender horses in relation to domestic roles traditionally assigned to women. The references imply that, after her murder of her husband, Boulton has found in the town of Frank a safer and more peaceable relationship to other men, who have accepted her as they have not accepted other femininities.<sup>36</sup>

Notwithstanding this peace at the micro level of individuals, the men of Frank are involved in a macro project that cannot be simply described as peaceful: the mining of the nearby Turtle Mountain. Bronwyn Drainie's review of *The Outlander* claims that "a novel that had the hallucinatory quality of Ondaatje or Peter Oliva's brilliant *Drowning in Darkness* [1993] turns into straightforward historical fiction" ("Review") when the Frank

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36 In a way, the safety of Frank implies that the codes of masculinity inscribed into the Western have done their work of producing a temporarily peaceful time and place. Edward Buscombe asserts the rationale of the genre: "A society without violence, a society fit for women, can only be established *through* violence" (59, original emphasis).

Slide happens, but it is also profoundly allegorical. The Gaian element of the novel serves as a conversation-starter for Braidotti's notion of "the posthuman as becoming-earth" (81). As in *Pale Rider*, the mining can be understood as the figurative rape of the land and hence a symbolic attack on Gaia, Mother Earth. In the American context generally, the classic study of the Gaian theme is Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1984). Kolodny speculates on "what is probably America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine" (4). Kolodny then explains that "those who had initially responded to the promise inherent in a feminine landscape were now faced with the consequences of that response: either they recoiled in horror from the meaning of their manipulation of a naturally generous world . . . or they succumbed to a life of easeful regression" (7). In *The Outlander*, it is the former: the miners notice that their mining is having an effect on the mountain to which they also assign a gender: "We got ground tremors now. She shakes all on her own. We don't even have to set charges much any more. She shifts a little every day, and down comes rock" (233). They also notice ominous sparks in the shafts, described by the narrator as a "bowel" (232), that one of them interprets as fairies (233). Eventually the landslide occurs with brightened imagery of light: "For a full minute, the mountain seemed to billow, then slowly collapse, floating downward, lit palely from within. It luminesced from pure friction" (294), but its inner light is also a symbol of the Gaian spirit of the mountain. Inasmuch as the landslide is the mountain's injury and death, it is also its phoenix-like rebirth (hence the "luminescent" aura) and reformation of the landscape.

Notably, Adamson is self-conscious about this symbolism, implying that it accords with colonial stereotypes about Indigenous beliefs: "Indians didn't spend too much time in Frank. The common wisdom was that they were superstitious about the mountain and believed it was alive—a view that was much ridiculed in Frank. In Frank, there was ridicule of pretty much everything" (290). She seems to be acknowledging a limit to her point of view, or at least to the masculinity "[i]n Frank" of reasonably scoffing at people who are being "superstitious," and perhaps this accounts for the way in which she describes the aftermath of the landslide:

The widow moved amid the trimmings of a nightmare forest. Blown debris was piled up everywhere. Branches and stones. Trees leaned drunkenly, many broken halfway up their tall shafts, heavy heads tilted crazily. On everything was a pale dust, giving the dark green vegetation a leprous air. Small, colourful bodies were strewn on the ground like Easter eggs, bright fallen birds, killed by the first blast of hot wind. . . . Farther on, a young lynx lay bloodied. . . . A hat was dangling from a high branch. (299–300)

The anthropomorphic language of “a nightmare” and “drunke[n]” trees and birds that appear decorated “like Easter eggs” is possibly why Braidotti tends to avoid literature in *The Posthuman*. But to me—at a time of climate crisis resulting from the same sorts of extractive industries interrogated in *The Outlander*—such descriptions are better than the irresponsible disregard of nature. They elicit sympathy and possibly, through identification, empathy (however anthropomorphic the identification is). When in *The Outlander* “[a] maddened horse dashed insanely up and down the new shoreline” (303) and over the debris of the landslide, we also feel what Tompkins discerns as a guilt and a nostalgia for a time before when we “broke” horses (103) and, I would add, degenerated them. And yet I respect Braidotti’s concern about our not being able to respect nature until we can imagine its points of view without the interference of our own. In the settler tradition, contemporary poets such as Tim Lilburn, Sue Goyette, Don McKay, Mary Dalton, and many others have done remarkable work for this imagination, but the Western is about how landscapes have human value as resource and homestead; it is part of the same epic and romance tradition of family plots in which knights save damsels in distress.

Near the end of the novel, the widow is pregnant with a child fathered by a man known mainly as the Ridgerunner, a man whose identity as such is defined in terms of his interaction with the landscape of ridges in the mountains, in contrast with the widow’s identity, defined as it is in terms of her marriage. (His real name is William Moreland, a name that still defines him in terms of land, but with a more colonial emphasis on “more,” rather than the relational activity of “running” in his nickname.) But the pregnancy is one of the signs of the widow’s Gaian relationship as a mother

who will give birth to a child of the mountain's ridges. And it resonates with incidents in the novel when the widow is penetrated by nature (rather than by Moreland), such as the arrow (143–4) and, during the landslide, a twig (297). We could even read the pregnancy in *The Outlander* as an almost-immaculate conception, a depersonalized incubation.

The birth is relevant for the surrounding landscape because the mountain has been damaged by the mining and the subsequent landslide. In a Gaian reaction against Anthropocenic terraforming, “[w]hat used to be a river was now a shallow lake, swelling upward along the fissures and runnels that wandered up the mountainside” (302). Later, the Ridgerunner discovers this “new lake” (368) near “the original riverbed that stood low and empty now, wide and slick and strewn with debris, and down its middle ran a scrawny stream, lifeless and foul-smelling” (369). The regeneration of the landscape is not complete; Gaian terraforming may not entirely clean up the pollution from the mine. For the Ridgerunner, however, the destruction is close enough: “It struck him suddenly, ridiculously, that this place would not acknowledge him, even in reflection. The human world erased in one brutal swipe” (369). The apocalyptic language of erasure and extinction here is human. It also suggests masculine or male privilege. Tompkins claims that “the Western is secular, materialist, and antifeminist” (28) (though in chapter 2 the Muscular Christianity of early Canadian Westerns calls “secular” into question, as does the transcendentalism at the start of this chapter); here in *The Outlander* Adamson is reorienting the genre toward religious, intangible, and feminist values for Nature, “swip[ing]” at a *man's* “world” more than any other. Thus, the feminism of the novel might in fact work against its post-humanism, because its ideology serves people as much as Nature. Furthermore, the implication that a symbolic Mother Earth (the widow's and the Ridgerunner's child) will outlive humans is only *symbolically* post-human, because Adamson lets the widow escape her death sentence and leaves open the possibility (in the sequel, *Ridgerunner*) that the Ridgerunner will find her and create a bigger family with her in the future.

In *The Outlander*, there is no planet B, because there is no need for one. The Frank Slide destroys Frank—and symbolically Frank's style of masculinity, indicated perhaps by “the pointless industry of the living” (313)—but the post-human message is ultimately overcome by the humanistic

family plot. I mentioned above that part of the inspiration for the title *The Outlander* was a Sean Connery space Western, *Outland*, which adapts the plot of *High Noon* (Arnold, “Unlikely”). In *Outland*, the action takes place at a mining colony on one of Jupiter’s moons, Io, but Earth itself remains a livable planet. Rather than learn our lessons about stripping bare our own planet, we have continued on other astral bodies.

### “Becoming-Machine”

The sci-fi connection that *The Outlander* presents in its title, and its potential to develop Braidotti’s conception of “the posthuman as becoming-machine” (89), is not, as far as I know, developed in Canadian literature. So I will be brief in concluding this chapter. In American film and television, however, there is the example of Michael Crichton’s *Westworld* (1973) and its adaptation into (among others) the recent HBO television series by the same name (2016–20). As futuristic as it seems to be, *Westworld* is a near-perfect representation of the regressive aspects proposed in Slotkin’s theory. Until *Westworld*, the most memorable example for me was Eastwood’s *Unforgiven* (1992), in which the cowboy who tries to retire from his tough-on-crime life of vigilante justice is inexorably drawn back to it—and thereby away from his newly liberal life (with his best friend, an African-American man, and his Indigenous wife). In *Westworld*, the androids created to simulate humans in an immersive Wild West theme park eventually avenge their abuse at the hands of humans by attempting to massacre them. Braidotti argues that “the posthuman as becoming-machine” is now “beyond metaphorization” (89) because technology has caught up to our imaginations, but this claim is far from being true. We might all now be androids to some extent, but “metaphorization” persists. In *Westworld*, the androids stand in for Indigenous people, who have almost entirely vanished in the *Westworld* narrative, including its main characters (at least in the first season), and their rebellion against humans briefly holds the promise of a new land beyond the oppressive big business and R&D of the Westworld parks. Nothing here is degenerative; in fact, in their quest for freedom and sovereignty, the androids supposedly gain the potential to upgrade themselves, in addition to repairing their bodies and their beauty. But how progressive can this vision be?

In contrast with *Westworld*, the recent X-Men film *Logan* (Mangold, 2017) goes much further in questioning the myth of regeneration through violence. Although it is not strictly a Canadian film, it has various Canadian elements, including the titular character, Logan (a.k.a. Wolverine, played by Hugh Jackman), whose origin story tracks him from northern Alberta to the United States and around the world. And although it is not strictly a Western either, *Logan* is explicitly presented as a crossover between superhero and Western genres in a scene where Charles Xavier (a.k.a. Professor X, played by Patrick Stewart) views the classic film *Shane* (Stevens, 1953). Watching with him is the young girl Laura (Dafne Keen), who memorizes Shane's final words to the boy who looks up to him: "Joey, there's no living with, with a killing. There's no going back from it. Right or wrong, it's a brand, a brand that sticks. . . . Now you run on home to your mother and tell her . . . there aren't any more guns in the valley." Shane's promise of peace resonates with Laura because *Logan's* plot unfolds in a dystopian near-future involving a governmental crackdown on mutants like her—humans born with special powers for which they have been ostracized. Set at first near Mexico, the narrative moves toward "Eden" in North Dakota before the persecuted mutants escape into Canada. Logan's particular mutation is an ability to regenerate rapidly, which grants him near-invulnerability in battle and, until recently, a perpetual youth. The theme of regeneration is juxtaposed with the theme of aging; Hugh Jackman is now aging perceptibly as an actor, and so the film rationalizes Jackman's body by explaining that his mutation is failing him, aligning him more and more with his elderly and demented mentor, Professor X. In yet another related juxtaposition, Logan learns that Laura is his daughter, whose regenerative ability is in its prime. In a metafictional twist that rationalizes heroism as celebrity, Logan complains that Laura and her nurse are following directions to "Eden" from an X-Men comic book that, though based on a true story (*his* true story), is now almost completely fantastic and false. The Christian allusions to "Eden," and the potential problem of the film's imagining Canada as not only a haven but also a promised land or another Manifest Destiny, become more obviously colonial when, at the scene of an accident on the highway and much like Fine Man in *The Englishman's Boy*, Professor X uses his telepathic ability to act as a "horse whisperer" and calm the horses who survived. (It is one of the few

examples that isn't an unfortunate weaponization of mutant abilities in the franchise, armed conflict being its narrative drive.) This connection helps to demonstrate that the X-Men franchise, as yet another example of generic overlap with the Western, displaces Indigenous people through symbols (the mutants) who replace them. At the end of *Logan*—and the end of Logan's life, his regenerative power finally having failed him—the mutant children regenerate the territorial expansion of the Western by retreating into the forest as in *Dances with Wolves*, going into the North. The film's fascinating commentary on the Western becomes less a rejection and more a transformation of the myth of regeneration through violence. The saving grace is perhaps the implication that Logan's regeneration was compromised by the degenerative sci-fi experiment that turned his primarily defensive power into an offensive one: the torturously, surgically installed adamantine bone reinforcements and retractable claws that make him more obviously post-human, a mad military scientist's idea of a wolverine-human hybrid.

The nearest example to a representation of science alongside an interrogation of the myth of regeneration through violence in Canadian literature is *The Sisters Brothers* (2011) by Patrick deWitt, which was remade into an American-French co-production (Audiard, 2018). (The only other sci-fi Western that I know from Canada is the independent film *Six Reasons Why* by the Campagna brothers in 2008, which follows enigmatic stock characters through a post-apocalyptic West where the oil has run dry and the world's remaining batteries are highly sought after.) *The Sisters Brothers* qualifies as Canadian because deWitt was born on Vancouver Island, lived for a while in Canada, and published it with Anansi in Toronto, where it won various Canadian awards. As usual in the Western, in *The Sisters Brothers* we see a contrast of pre-modernity, such as the old woman's curse, and modernity, such as the emerging technologies of toothpaste and dental analgesia. Indeed, chemistry rather than mechanical engineering is the science of *The Sisters Brothers*; the enigmatic prospector Hermann Kermit Warm is attempting to perfect the formula of a liquid chemical that can be poured into a stream to make hidden gold glow—in effect, a divining potion. The potential to find gold is why the Sisters brothers, Charlie and Eli Sisters, are hired to steal the formula, but they end up helping Warm and his accomplice Morris to test the formula,

which works beautifully. Alas, they use too much of the chemical, which begins to irritate their skin and rapidly worsens to burn them horribly. Nature, in their hands, loses its restorative powers and, polluted, enacts a revenge akin to that of *The Outlander*. Warm and Morris die, and Charlie eventually loses his hand, a personal injury that parallels, first, the briefly mentioned maimed dog (142) and, second, the environmental degradation (or degeneration) that the formula causes in the stream. When the “Indians” happen upon them and steal their gold, the Sisters brothers return in retirement to their single mother (Charlie having killed his father years prior). Charlie’s disfigurement is poetic justice for a man whose trigger finger had snuffed out so many lives in their career of assassination: degeneration through violence par excellence, and post-human too, if he has also become a mama’s boy foreshadowed by the maimed dog.

*The Sisters Brothers* also circles us around—in a final example here (though I will return to *The Sisters Brothers* in the conclusion)—to the Western’s concern with the horse. As the infamous murderer Eli Sisters, Eli has slowly developed a conscience, especially as he has observed his horse, Tub, degenerate physically with age. Eli identifies with Tub early in the novel, because he thinks of himself as fat, and Tub is not in good shape. Eli’s fatness is not degenerative, but he resolves to lose it so that he can more easily enter the social world of consensual sexual relationships—for example, with the hotel woman (66). It is a sign of his growing realization of his heavy conscience. Notably, he does not lose Tub; he decides to sell an impressive black horse and keep Tub instead (77–8, 85–6). By the end of the novel, he recognizes the cost of subordinating other animals: “What a life it is for man’s animals, what a trial of pain and endurance and senselessness” (241). When he behaves violently, he asks himself, “Why do I relish this reversal to animal?” (246). He claims to suffer “shame” and “degradation” (246) that indicate the theme of degeneration through violence more explicitly.<sup>37</sup> *The Sisters Brothers* as a novel if not a film may be

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37 In Ron Charles’s review of the novel, he remarks that, “[f]or no reason that I can understand, Canadian novels are a notoriously hard sell in the United States,” but he thinks that *The Sisters Brothers* “deserves a chance” (“Patrick deWitt”), and indeed it was made into a film, albeit not an entirely American film—something hardly possible any more anyway. Quite possibly the degeneration theme is simply too much a reversal from the classic Western to be appealing to American audiences; notably, the film version ends with the brothers going home rich, a triumphalist homecoming very different from that of the novel.

a sign that twenty-first-century Westerns and post-Westerns are following the revisionist trend of changing the myth, if not the history.

In this chapter, we have zoomed out to an interplanetary perspective from the comparatively small world of human beings and their relationships with other animals such as horses. But the implications of these relationships are extraordinary. The horse in the Western chronicles the notions of progress that accord not only with ethical and existential questions of human, inhuman, and post-human developments—but also with an obsession with what Coleman calls white civility (as in my examination of *The Englishman's Boy* above) that seems to underwrite ideas of the post-human in the Western and in related texts. Relationships with horses are thus germane to the ethics of our relationships with other people, perhaps especially the colonial-settler relationship with Indigenous peoples, whose connection to the land and respectful appropriation of the horse are inconsistently remodelled by the Western. It is a genre nostalgic for such a connection but, especially on film, willing to inflict pain and death on both horses and Indigenous people to show dominance and produce entertainment. Horses also seem to stand in for Indigenous peoples, at least occasionally, effecting another “vanishing” that calls into question the progressive credentials of post-Westerns, revisionist Westerns, and historical Westerns. Even in historical Westerns in Canada, Indigenous people tend to be significantly displaced, and narratives of violence continue to be dramatized to epic proportions that belie the sometimes much more banal history of the West—notwithstanding how reprehensibly colonial empires have treated Indigenous peoples on the lands that they have taken. In general, as the fascination with horses above suggests, historical Westerns simply show how myth has supplanted history even in the popular imagination of “history,” as I argued in chapter 2, “Tom King’s John Wayne.”

But now—as this book concludes—we turn to various twenty-first-century Westerns and post-Westerns that demonstrate how the popular imagination has been recently drawn to Westerns again, effecting a new revival of the genre. Why now? What historical and especially political contexts have remade the Western into a tool for expressing our transnational, international, and national concerns? And given the crossover fever that has persisted throughout postmodernism, where will the Western go next—*what* now?

